

***The Cosmic Christ***  
**A Sermon on John 1:1-14**  
**Christmas Day**  
**December 25, 2016**

**Introduction**

We have been waiting for the coming of Christ for the four weeks of Advent. Now it is upon us. The authors of the New Testament describe the coming of Christ in at least five different ways.

Matthew and Luke describe the birth of Jesus. We heard Luke's story last night. Angels come to shepherds in the night sky to announce the birth of their Lord and Savior. We hear Matthew's story on Epiphany Sunday. The wise men follow a star to Jerusalem and ask King Herod for directions to the new-born king.

Mark and John do not have birth stories. They seem to be unaware of a virgin birth. They both use the words "in the beginning"; they deliberately evoke the creation story in Genesis. Mark describes the beginning of Jesus' ministry as a disciple of John the Baptist. John describes Jesus' role in the creation of the cosmos

Our worship service was canceled because of the weather last week. I was planning to preach the first seven verses of Romans. It is Paul's account of the coming of Christ. Paul also shows no awareness of a virgin birth story. Paul says that the Messiah Jesus was born from David's seed, according to flesh, and was appointed a son of God by his resurrection from the dead.

These are the principal authors of the New Testament. They each use their imagination to describe the significance of the coming of Christ. They encourage us to use our imagination in reflecting on the coming Christ into our lives.

**First Move: The Poetry of the Prologue**

Today we will focus on John's story. It is called the Prologue. It summarizes the themes of his gospel.

The Prologue is poetry. I would like to read the first five verses to you in Greek so that you can get a sense of the beauty of the poetry in its original language.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, – In the beginning was the Logos. The Logos is usually translated as the Word, but the Greek word has other meanings that can't be captured by one word. So in my translation I used the Greek word Logos instead of translating it.

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν – and the Logos was at the side of God.

καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος – and God was the Logos.

οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν – In the beginning this one was at the side of God.

πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο – all things came about through it. The Greek uses the neuter pronoun instead of the masculine.

καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. – and apart from it not one thing came about.

ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ – what has come about through it was life.

καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων; – and the life was the light of men.

καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, – and the light shines in the darkness.

καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν. –and the darkness did not bring it down.

John uses poetry because that is the language that the imagination uses to describe the essence of something. To look past the appearance and describe what is transcendent about something. Poetry is filled with images because symbols and images are the most natural way for us to describe what is beyond our senses. We can't describe what it looks like, so we compare it to something that we know.

God is a mystery to us. And God's role in creating the cosmos is shrouded in mystery. John uses the image of the Logos to express God's creative work. The Logos is at the side of God during creation. The primary meaning of Logos in Greek is *word*. It is the noun form of the Greek verb, λέγω, which means *to say*. God creates the world with the spoken word in Genesis. God says, "Let there be light, and there was light." Logos is more than just a Word; it is a word that creates things. Logos has more meanings in Greek than just Word. Stoicism was an ancient school of Greek philosophy. The Stoics interpreted the Logos as Divine Order, the structure that God gives the universe. Matthew Fox, one of my favorite theologians, translates the Logos as Creative Energy.

The Logos is not separate from God. It is part of God. Think of it as a foreshadowing of the Trinity. There is only one God but we experience God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Logos is the same way. It is the Creative Energy that God uses. God fills each of us with that Creative Energy. Creative Energy is the source of goodness in all people. It comes from God. When we tap into our creative energies, we experience the sacred. We begin living as God intended us to live. Not in rote conformity to the conventions of society. Then we are living like a trained dog, who does whatever tricks his master commands for a doggie treat.

John uses poetic language to express his belief that Jesus' relationship with God stands outside space and time. Jesus is the very embodiment of the creative spirit of God.

All things come about through the Logos. Apart from it not one thing comes about. There is no spark of creativity without the Logos. The Logos is the light of all people. The light shines within us and the darkness does not bring it down.

John uses the image of the Logos as light. The light is the source of all goodness. We symbolize that light in worship with candles. We light the Christ candle during the Christmas season. The image of light is filled with a surplus of meaning. When we go home from worship, we remember that Jesus is the light long after we have forgotten the sermon. We carry the images with us.

The poetry of the first five verses expresses the cosmic significance of Christ for John.

## **Second Move: Images in the Prologue**

The rest of the Prologue moves from the heavenly perspective to life here on earth. Jesus brings together the eternal and the temporal.

God sends John the Baptist to testify to the light. John testifies so that we might believe that Jesus is the light and that Jesus comes from God. The Greek verb, πιστεύω also carries a surplus of meaning. The most common translation is believe, but it also means to trust or to have faith. In the Gospel of John, having faith means to stake your life on something. That is the ultimate reality that we trust in and that shapes the way we think and act. The Logos is the ultimate reality behind the cosmos and fills us with light. God does not expect us to be Jesus. God calls us testify to the light, just as John didn't. Let the light be reflected in our words and deeds.

The Prologue is John's Christmas story. It celebrates the Light coming into the world.

The world is a translation of the Greek word, κόσμος. Its root meaning is order. It can be used to refer to creation, when it means the natural order. John uses it in the sense of the social order, the inhabited world, civilization. Now we use cosmos to mean the universe, an ordered system of galaxies and solar systems.

The Logos comes into the Cosmos to give light to every person, but not every person receives the light. This is the tragedy of human existence. We are born with the capacity to receive light and let it govern our existence, but we turn away from the light and are ruled by false gods like nationalism and consumerism. They prey upon our passions and selfish instincts instead of bringing out the best in us. Advertisers and political parties feed the false gods.

The Light was in the Cosmos, and the Cosmos came about through him, and the Cosmos did not understand him. The Creative Energy of God helped create the

social order. People come together in community to enrich their lives. History has shown that it is difficult for communities to be virtuous.

Reinhold Niebuhr was one of the leading theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His most insightful book is *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. He wrote it in 1932 and it reads as fresh today as when he wrote it. His thesis is that it is easier for an individual person to be virtuous than for social groups to be virtuous. Individual people are capable of compassion and reason, though they usually guided by self-interest. Selfishness is a stronger instinct than compassion. It is even more difficult for groups to be virtuous. Self-interest is an overwhelming power in groups. Niebuhr concludes that groups can't always be drawn to social justice by appealing to compassion and reason. Power must be used to respond to power.

“He went to [what was] his own, and his own people did not accept him.” The Bible is a chronicle of people rejecting the prophets.

Then we have a summary of the Gospel of John. “But as many as accepted him, he gave power to become children of God, to those who trust in his essence.” John is more sectarian than the other Gospels. It tends to divide the world into us and them. The people within the faith community are children of God. The people outside can be brought in and become children of God, but if they remain outside, they are children of the devil. That is a flaw in John's theology; I believe he is turning away from the light when he disparages people outside the group.

Today's text concludes with one of the most magnificent verses in the New Testament. “And the Logos became flesh and pitched a tent among us.” This is the most succinct statement of the Incarnation in the New Testament. The Creative Energy of God is fully realized in Jesus. When Jesus lived among us, he was a true reflection of God. One of the struggles that believers have is that we worship an invisible God who is shrouded in mystery. It is often difficult for us to discern God's will. We believe that we are doing what is right, but we are often deceived by our passions and our self-interest. God graciously offered us the gift of his own son to bring us closer to God. Son is another image.

John concludes with poetic language. “We beheld its glory, a glory unique from (the side of) (the) father, full of grace and truth.” To behold is a religious act. It is to look at something with awe. Awe is a primal religious emotion. We look on Jesus with awe that he can act in complete harmony with God's will at all times, even when he is tempted. Even when he suffers on the cross.

Jesus embodies the glory of God, full of grace and truth.

### **Third Move: A Space-Age Spirituality**

The last time I preached on this text five years ago, I called my sermon *Space Cowboy*. Mary remembers it and told me this week that I needed to be careful not to preach over people's heads. She said that people were having a hard time following it. I had told her that it was hard to make eye contact with people during the sermon. After the sermon, Perrin Ellis and Carol Hedrick said, "What was that?"

I used the image of Earthrise. It is a photograph of the Earth that was taken on Christmas Eve 1968 by an astronaut on the Apollo 8 mission, the first manned space flight to orbit the moon. Earthrise is a color photograph of what Earth looks like from the moon. It shows the Earth appearing over the horizon. It is a blue and white sphere in the sky. The heavens are dark behind it. It is stunningly beautiful. It stirred the popular imagination. Every boy wanted to be an astronaut. My brother put a poster of it on the wall in our bedroom when we were kids.

Earthrise changed the way we think about our place in the universe. The Bible talks about heaven and earth as if they are two separate places. God is in the heavens, up in the sky, watching over us. We are down below, here on the earth. Earthrise shows us that the earth is *in* the heavens. We can no longer believe that the earth and the heavens are divided. They are a unity. The heavens are within us and around us. If God is in the heavens, then God lives within us and around us.

We need a new mythology to support a space-age spirituality. The old mythology personified Jesus as the Logos, the pre-existing Word of God, who was at God's side during creation. The orthodox church taught that Jesus was a Superman in the sky, a Space Cowboy. Like the Lone Ranger, a mysterious hero in a mask who used silver bullets and protected people from outlaws. God sent Jesus down from heaven to rescue a fallen humanity. Jesus came to earth with the supernatural powers of a god. Joseph Campbell, an expert on myths and world religions, said that spirituality with the Christ of tradition is more like worship than meditation. Authentic spirituality is about opening ourselves up to the sacred all around us, reaching beyond our animal instincts and material needs to touch life in the Spirit.

Matthew Fox can help us. He is a theologian that appeared on the *Living the Questions* videos that we watched in our Adult Discussion Group on Wednesday nights. He is the old guy with white hair who talks over everybody's head. Matthew Fox says that the center of our spirituality should be the Cosmic Christ. Use the modern understanding of Cosmos. Christ is not just the light of the social order, he is the light of the universe. The spirit of Christ runs through each and every part of the created order.

Fox says that we should abandon our pursuit of the historical Jesus and quest instead for the Cosmic Christ. Liberal Christianity has abandoned the mystical tradition in Christianity and become absorbed with reason. Liberal scholars rely upon the social sciences, history, psychology and sociology, and ignore spirituality. They speak to our brain and not our hearts. There is no depth, no feeling of awe and wonder.

We need both reason and spirituality. Reason analyzes the words and deeds of Jesus and explains the historical matrix. Liberal Christianity is very good at ethics. Do this. Don't do this. Where it is lacking is a soul. It has an under-developed sense of connection with the sacred. Jesus had it. Jesus often goes alone to a quiet place to pray. To be silent and soak in God's presence. Matthew Fox calls it un-self-consciousness. Letting your thoughts go and opening yourself up to something that is bigger than yourself. Going into the depths of yourself to find God.

Jesus didn't speak in propositions. He talked in images that jarred our perception of reality. He tried to collapse the distance between us and God and help us see the sacred in the ordinary things of life, like a poor widow dropping her last two coins into the offering plate.

Authentic spirituality helps us see the big picture. It helps us see the connection between things. Earthrise gives us an image of Earth as a beautiful, blue-green sphere. You can't see any nations from outer space. Oceans and rivers connect different lands—they don't divide them. God has given us a beautiful place to live.

## **Conclusion**

Authentic spirituality does not pretend to know too much about God. It leaves room for mystery and imagination. It relies instead on symbols and images. Symbols like the Logos, the Cosmos, and the light.

John built an authentic spirituality for the first century. Much of it still enriches us today. We can't just adopt John's spirituality. We need to draw on the creative energy within us to bring reason and faith together. That is the best Christmas present we could ask for.