

Christmas Day, 2017  
The Rev. Dr. Anne Miner-Pearson  
John 1:1-14  
**Light in Our Darkest Place**

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Surely, there is no more traditionally packed month than December! Even before Christmas Day itself arrives, most of us had a list of events and tasks we do each year - and often do in the same way - how and when we get the tree, perhaps baking cookies with a friend or in a cookie swap, particular items on the menus, whether we open gifts on Christmas Eve or wait for the morning. I know in my family there's even a special ritual surrounding the unwrapping - a point of difference between my husband and me. His tradition is everyone opens at the same time. Mine is to open one-by-one around the circle - much too dramatic and tedious for him!

And I have only mentioned family traditions. The church has developed traditions as well. Over the generations, Christmas Eve has become the telling of the Nativity story from Luke's gospel. For many, the words must come from the King James translation. Church services are scheduled when darkness draws us in with the last one approaching midnight. Often the one earlier in the day is given to children who perform the Christmas Story, one of the strongest traditions. Ask adults their fondest memories of growing up in the church and you'll hear about being in the pageant - even if they now consider themselves "spiritual but not religious".

Yet, here we are on Christmas morning. Darkness is replaced with the rising sun, albeit low on the southern horizon and slow to cast its rays. There is no pageant and children to gather us near and draw us into the mystery and delight of Jesus' birth.

No angels. No sheep. No manger.

No, in the tradition of the church, John's gospel is a optional reading on Christmas Day. John begins Jesus' life not in small town and manger, but beyond in the cosmic. For John, the coming of God in human form was in the beginning and a partner with God as Creator. The incarnation of God arrived on earth, not with the brightness of a heavenly chorus, but bearing in Jesus part of the source of light itself, more powerful than any darkness. As Christmas Day dawns, Luke's humble story of Mary's first-born baby widens and deepens into a proclamation of Christ as the Word who was with God, and was God, from the beginning of all beginnings. For John, Jesus' birth has cosmic beginnings even if that holy origin was not recognized. "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him."

Out of his faith, John wrote those words connecting the earthly Jesus with the cosmic Christ. So in his prologue, John pushes beyond Jesus' life with Luke's virgin mother and Matthew's

faithful Joseph. John reaches back into cosmic time when there was only darkness and a void. John's spirit imagines God's energy of Love, outpouring first in Christ and next in creation. Then, in the fullness of time stretching from the Alpha to the Omega, God's love in matter and spirit comes to dwell in Jesus. For John, it takes this cosmic beginning to contain the central truth of oneness in, through and with God. Remember, it is John's Jesus who speak of the continuous flow of love between God and creation, between God and Jesus. Most of Jesus' words on the night before his death tells of his union with the disciples. In this fourth gospel, Jesus' power and presence as Christ holds all creatures and creation together as one, making all children of God.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." While this view of Jesus is part of the tradition, it is only recently that discoveries have revealed the deep scientific truth beneath this faith statement. Current theories of how creation came into being posit the elements of all matter burst forth as a fiery flash into a dark void. Those material elements at the beginning are still present today.

In the words of a science communicator, "In this way was made all the iron we now find in our blood, all the phosphorus and calcium that strengthens our bones, all the sodium and potassium that drives signals along our nerves. Atoms so formed are thrown off into space by aged stars in their death throes. Natural forces recycle them into new stars, into planets and plants and people. We are all made of stardust."

Aren't those words a poetic and spiritual echo of John's belief of the incarnation? In a profound way John could not then know, God's coming in a human body as Jesus was also God coming to dwell in each human body. "We are all made of stardust." Just as the body of Jesus was one with all creation, so are we. Just as Mary's body carried and birthed Christ into the world, so can we. The brightness of the Word, the Light and the Love of Jesus has the power to overcome all darkness for it shines in each of us. On this Christmas Day, we celebrate the mystery and gift of Jesus' birth and the gift of his presence in us.

But unlike the other gifts we receive in this season, God's dwelling in us can be a difficult gift to accept. After all, we're adults now, no longer the innocence child who delighted in the wonder and mystery of Christmas. In our busy lives, we feel separate from the holy. In our shame and guilt, we think our failures can't really be forgiven. Our egos tell us we aren't good enough and perfect enough. Yet, because each of us is created in the image and likeness of God, we have the brightness of God within us, in a soul place, in the darkness and silence deep within, the eternal child in each of us.

Seventy-four years ago, one mother passed that truth on to her young son. In his words, he remembers: It was Christmas time and we sat close together during worship in the sanctuary. I was playing with her rosary beads and the church was very crowded and a little baby started to

cry somewhere in the church and I can remember whispering in my mother's ear, "Is that the baby Jesus crying?" and I remember her leaning down and whispering in my ear, "Yes, it is." And I believed her. And today at 74 years old I still do believe her. Not in the naive way that a small child would believe it, but knowing that in Christ it's revealed to us that every child is worth all that God is worth and the truth is, for all the complexities and things of which that simplicity has been buried under, these so many things, there is in our heart this childlike purity, this childlike, really the God-given Godly nature of who we simply are because God loves us and so for us Christmas then is us being awakening to this birthing of God in the simplicity of our hearts, in the depths of our life, in the complexities of whatever the day might bring."

Merry Christmas.