

The turn of the calendar year and its annual flurry of year-in-review articles and video montages renewed my interest in the year that was...1968.

It's been a biblical generation since that watershed year, so full of social and political significance in this country, and surely now we can see it so much more clearly than we did then, and so much more clearly than we can "look back" at historic 2008, which I hope to be alive forty years from now to consider with a far better view.

Our perspective, like wine, needs time to deepen and to improve.

Perhaps that is why the four gospels we have were not written until at least a generation after the life of Jesus; like Paul Masson, the Holy Spirit will sell no gospel before its time.

Of our four gospels, the one that took the longest to ferment is the gospel of John.

In John's gospel, written possibly a century after the birth of Jesus, the story has had time to ripen and age into meaning.

On this final Sunday and eleventh day of Christmas, as we make the turn into Epiphany and into a new year of grace, we turn from Luke to John to help us deepen our vision of Christmas from story to meaning.

Gone are the characters and the plot line; I've never heard of a Sunday School turning John 1 into a children's pageant.

Instead, we have a lyrical, philosophical hymn, more praise than prose, more *Silent Night* than sermon.

With the improved perspective of time, John sees the birth of Jesus not just in Bethlehem, but in the universe.

The context widens from Roman political maneuvering to the beginning of being, the very start of time and life.

John expands our view from the imminent pregnancy of Mary to the imminent pregnancy of creation.

And when the time came for all the world to be delivered, God gave birth to existence by speaking it.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
All things came into being through [the Word].*

In Greek, The word for The Word is a lot more than just our word for word.

The Word, the *Logos*, was in Greek thought the Mind behind the world, the Power, the Wisdom, the Energy, the Eternal and Complete Force which created and sustained all things in their cosmic balance and rhythm.

Luke Skywalker would translate *Logos* as the Force; an inspired Christian missionary in Asia translated it as the Tao.

Couple this understanding with the Hebrew Bible's witness that God spoke all things peacefully and powerfully into being with a Word...the same Word that burned the lips of prophets and moved empires and history and hearts...and you begin to see that when John says Word, he means something more than everything.

And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us.

The story of Christmas is powerful; the meaning of Christmas is breathtaking.

The animating power behind All That Is became one of us; God almighty put on skin and sandals.

John is so convinced and so astonished of this that his story bursts immediately into song, and throughout his gospel Jesus will shine like the eyes of a child on Christmas morning, shine like the light of the world, because that, John tells us with the same twinkle in his well-aged eye, is exactly what Jesus is.

He is the light of the world, the way and the truth and the life, the door and the good shepherd and the living water and the vine and the bread of life and the resurrection and the life.

He is the Logos, the Word, the power, and now, he is the guy standing in front of you.

Everything that God has to offer is rolled up into a person walking the same earth and seeing the same sky we do, pitching a tent on our little corner of creation.

Human flesh is the highly improbable, inhospitable host to God.

There is no way John or I or anyone can capture in a gospel or a sermon or a lifetime what this means, either for God or for us, but with one little phrase John turns a key and unlocks eternity for us: *He gave power to become children of God.*

When the Word became flesh, not only did He make flesh sacred, as one holy apple sweetens the whole bunch.

Not only did His footsteps make the earth sacred, hallowing our world merely by His presence in it.

When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, He gave us power to become children of God.

This is a powerful statement from a man writing in a context where your future was determined by your father, your identity and possibility defined by your parents.

With few exceptions, children of slaves were slaves; children of priests were priests.

Who you were and who you could marry and where you could go in life was chosen for you by your parents.

Now, when the Word becomes flesh, you have the power to become children *of God*.

That's more than talent, more than status or position or power or prestige.

That's identity, and endless possibility.

As early Christians taught, God became one with humanity that humanity might become one with God.

Christmas means that we can walk into the living room of heaven and be greeted by name with the voice and the knowing embrace of God...because God has met us, known us, loved us, adopted us, embraced us by coming to earth and entering human flesh to find us.

I learned in a Christmas letter this week that a friend of mine is preparing to go to South Korea to adopt her first child; her story, and the stories of those in this congregation who have traversed great difficulty and distance to welcome children into their lives, are microcosms of the massive, cosmic story of Christmas.

At great expense God comes all the way here to adopt us, living in our own country, speaking our language, singing our music, wearing our skin, and promising to

carry us someday to a new and more magnificent place far away that God calls home.

Until then, however, this campground here is where God chooses to pitch tent.
The earth beneath our feet is suddenly sacred.

The person standing before us or sitting next to us is suddenly the beloved child of God, wearing the same flesh that God has chosen to wear.

The world and its people are now infused with a holiness and a pricelessness we cannot begin to fathom or describe.

How should we treat one another, and treat our earth, now that Christmas has happened, now that All That Is has graced us with its glorious fullness here?

The possibilities for sacredness are endless:
if God can dwell in a human body,
if the Word can pitch a tent on earthen soil,
and if we can become children of God,

who or what is beyond the reach of the relentlessly spreading early morning sunshine that is the light of life?

We have this treasure in clay jars, Paul writes, so don't let the simplicity of the pottery fool you into missing the mystery once born in a barn.

Simple bread becomes the body of Christ;
wine sold before its time becomes the well-aged cup of salvation.

Pedestrian humanity becomes the wineskin of the divine.
Your unimpressive neighbor becomes a child of God.

Your world becomes the home of the holy.
You become the one the creator of the universe calls "my beloved child."

The light of life glistens like a sunny winter morning as far as the eye can see.
May it shine in your eyes as well, and enlighten them to see and sparkle with wonder at the treasure of Christmas hidden in the clutter of clay jars around you.