

SERMON

Scripture John 1:1-14 (NIV)

"Evermore and Evermore"

La Verne Church of the Brethren

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Tom Hostetler

Both Genesis, the first book of the bible, and the Gospel of John, in the New Testament, begin with the same words: "In the beginning..." What beginning? That primordial beginning that marks the birth of the universe, when time and space began and Life burst forth. Everything we are, have ever been or hope to be is rooted in that moment of genesis.

In her book *"Radical Amazement"* Judy Cannato writes: "The universe came into being in a flaming cosmic explosion that gave birth to space and time. By measuring such phenomenon as cosmic microwave background radiation, scientists have determined that the birth of the universe as we know it began about 13.7 billion years ago. All the energy that has ever existed – and therefore all the matter that has ever existed – was formed in this single spectacular cosmic event.

"Ours was a fiery birth," she writes, "an unfurling of vast, raw potentiality which quickly began to take shape and form. The dense fireball that erupted in less than a trillionth of a trillionth of a second was a billion trillion time hotter than our sun. In the first millionth of a second, the fundamental principles of the entire physical universe emerged, including the laws of gravity and electromagnetism. By the first second the universe consisted of fundamental particles of energy. The collision of photons formed protons, neutrons and electrons, the basic components of atoms. Energy was already being converted to mass. By the time three minutes had passed, when the universe had cooled to one billion degrees, protons and neutrons had come together to form hydrogen and helium, elements which would eventually fuel the first generation of stars."

She goes on to say, "The timing of all this birthing is nothing short of miraculous. If the unfolding had been a trillionth of a trillionth of trillionth of one percent faster, the cosmic material would have been flung too far apart for anything significant to happen. If, however, the unfolding had been one trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of one percent slower, the universe would have collapsed in upon itself."

What a beginning! What a miracle that we are here. And think of this: since all the matter that now exists was formed in that initial bursting forth of life, we are, each of us, formed out of the primordial dust that became stars. You are 13.7 billion years old! The universe is within us.

This does not contradict the biblical narrative. Our faith tradition has always said that there was a beginning – a moment in which time began, in which a mighty and holy power hovered, brooded over, and birthed all there is. We have been taught that all creation has come about through the movement of the mystery we call God.

In the beginning...

And God said, "Let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good."

Scientists believe that 10 – 20 seconds after the Big Bang – almost instantaneously – the first protons emerged, and the universe was bathed in light. Light manifests itself in matter that forms stars and galaxies, earth and the mountains and streams, human beings and all of creationkind. Light is the metaphysical link between the timeless eternity that preceded our universe and the world of time, space and matter within which we live.

The writer of the Gospel writes of this light, and says, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.*

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

I once heard a Pentecostal preacher put it all succinctly:
"The universe points us to God;
God points us to Jesus;
Jesus points us toward each other."

I like that.

The universe points us to God: The light of self-awareness and consciousness of God emerged as our human species developed (only 150 thousand years ago), and received the radiant grace that had always been present, and celebrated and struggled with and wrote about this connection with the Divine Other.

A critical movement in that understanding of God came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This first-century Palestinian Jew changed everything for us. He is the Incarnation – “God in the meat.” Why is it important that we remember that Jesus was fully human? Because, as Cannato explains, “Jesus embodies the next major evolutionary step in human consciousness.” God points us to Jesus.

This is how she puts it: “Through Jesus and his interaction with the Holy One, light breaks through into life in a way never before experienced. Jesus is able to absorb the gracious radiance of God in a fashion that transforms those in his midst who are ready to receive the breakthrough event.”

Jesus points us to each other.

As we engage the Holy Mystery, we incorporate this Light into *our* being, and we ourselves radiate in a way that nourishes those around us with the breath of the Spirit. We become compassion and service, wisdom and grace, an inclusive love that flows out of the experience of living in and doing the work of Jesus.

And the circle is complete.

Our care for one another points to Jesus.
The love and sacrifice of Jesus points to God.
The life of God points us to the universe.

Christ entered the world to free us and transform the world from chaos and darkness into a domain of God’s loving light. Jesus is God’s loving embodiment in the world.

But the earliest Christians understood that the incarnation wasn’t just about what God did once upon a time in Jesus. Because Jesus reveals who God really is, the incarnation tells us something about what God is always

doing. It is also about the incarnation of God today. While there's only one incarnate Son of God, God is always embodied in the world. If God's central way of reaching the world was to incarnate in Jesus, then our way of reaching the world should likewise be incarnational.

The truth is, this is foundational to Brethren life and thought. We have always had this incarnational theology, although we didn't call it that. We just called it "continuing the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, together."

The church is still called to proclaim God's light to the world, wherever the darkness results in the suffering of the poor; the oppression of the innocent. As long as millions of children go to bed hungry or homeless or afraid each night, there are tables to be turned, if we mean what we sing in this year's Christmas carols.

Wouldn't it be something if Christmas incarnation led the church to begin the new year with a new vision for our world, one of generosity and abundance? We all long for a time when suffering will end and everyone will have enough, when nations and families will live in peace, governments will operate without corruption, and the earth will be restored and healed of the damage that has been done. The early Christians had the nerve and the imagination in that moment to claim that future for themselves and their world.

Wouldn't it be something if we could see God showing up, if we could recognize the Incarnation of Christ where we live, work, and go to school? Would it make a difference?

This season beckons us
To remember that incarnation takes place anew each day,
And that Christ comes in the form of those whom we meet on our path.
It is a sacrament, a mystery, a miracle.

The Incarnation, this embodied presence of God, bids us not only to remember God's descent into a dirty stable in Bethlehem, but to keep ourselves awake to the reality of God's descending upon the thresholds of our own lives. The Incarnation continues to sound the consequence of this mystery: Keep yourselves clothed in readiness, for Christ is near. Amen.