

The Arrival of the King

Preached on the Fourth Sunday in Advent
Trinity Anglican Church, WRJ
Dec. 20, 2020

On this last Sunday in Advent we are rapidly approaching the Nativity of our Lord, where we celebrate the fact that God actually took on our humanity in order to save us. It is still difficult to believe after 2000 years, foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. Our reading today from the Gospel of John is an attempt to take on this grand paradox and try to present it to a largely Greek audience. The prologue, which becomes right before our Gospel reading, makes the case to a Greek mind that the God behind the cosmos, the Reason that pervades it, has actually chosen to become one of us, in all our finitude and vulnerability. Before coming to the words of John the Baptist, let us look at why he considered himself such an unworthy servant of this God.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Here we come to the sentence for the sake of which John wrote his gospel. He has thought and talked about the word of God, that powerful, creative, dynamic word which was the agent of creation, that guiding, directing, controlling word which puts order into the universe and mind into man. These were ideas which were known and familiar to both Jew and Greek. Now he says the most startling and incredible thing that he could have said. He says quite simply: "This word which created the world, this reason which controls the order of the world, has become a person and with our own eyes we saw him." John declares that the word actually came to earth in the form of a man and was seen by human eyes. He says: "If you want to see what this creating word, this controlling reason, is like, look at Jesus of Nazareth."

This is where John parted with all thought which had gone before him. This was the entirely new thing which John brought to the Greek world for which he was writing. Augustine afterwards said that in his pre-Christian days he had read and studied the great pagan philosophers and had read many things, but he had never read that the word became flesh.

To a Greek this was the impossible thing. The one thing that no Greek would ever have dreamed of was that God could take a body. To the Greek the body was an evil, a prison-house in which the soul was shackled, a tomb in which the spirit was confined. Plutarch, the wise old Greek, did not even believe that God could control the happenings of this world directly; he had to do it by deputies and intermediaries, for, as Plutarch saw it, it was nothing less than blasphemy to involve God in the affairs of the world. The great Roman Stoic Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, despised the body in comparison with the spirit. "The composition of the whole body is under corruption."

Here was the shatteringly new thing: that God could and would become a human person, that God could enter into this life that we live, that eternity could appear in time, that somehow the Creator could appear in creation in such a way that men's eyes could actually see him.

It may well be that we are often so eager to conserve the fact that Jesus was fully God that we tend to forget the fact that he was fully man. Yet here we have the full manhood of Jesus gloriously proclaimed. In Jesus, we see the creating word of God, the controlling reason of God, taking manhood upon himself. In Jesus, we see God living life as he would have lived it if he had been a man. Supposing we said nothing else about Jesus we could still say that he shows us how God would live this life that we have to live.

Jesus was also full of grace. The fact that God came to earth to live and to die for men is not something which humanity deserved; it is an act of pure love on the part of God. The word grace emphasizes at one and the same time the helpless poverty of man and the limitless kindness of God. In Jesus, we see the winsomeness and beauty of God. People had thought of God in terms of might and majesty and power and judgment. They had thought of the power of God which could crush all opposition and defeat all rebellion; but in Jesus, men are confronted with the sheer loveliness of God.

Jesus was also full of truth. This word is one of the dominant notes of the Fourth Gospel. We meet it again and again. Jesus is the embodiment of the truth. He said: "I am the truth" ([John 14:6](#)). To see truth we must look at Jesus. Very few people can grasp abstract ideas; most people think in pictures. We could think and argue for ever and we would very likely be no nearer arriving at a definition of beauty. But if we can point to a kind person or a majestic landscape and say "that is beauty", the thing becomes clear. Ever since men began to think about God they have been trying to define just who and what He is—and their puny minds get no nearer a definition. But we can cease our thinking and look at Jesus Christ and say: "That is what God is like." Jesus did not come to talk to men about God; he came to show men what God is like, so that the simplest mind might know Him as intimately as the mind of the greatest philosopher.

Furthermore, the life of Jesus Christ was a manifestation of glory. When he performed the miracle of the water and the wine at Cana of Galilee, John says that he manifested forth his glory ([John 2:11](#)). It is the glory of God that Martha will see in the raising of Lazarus ([John 11:4](#)). The glory that was in Jesus, that clung about Him, that shone through Him, that acted in Him, is the glory of God. Yet that glory was uniquely his own. Near the end of His earthly life He prays that God will glorify Him with the glory that He had before the world began ([John 17:5](#)). He shines with no borrowed radiance; his glory is His and His by right.

When Jesus came to this earth men saw this glory expressed through love. They saw that God's glory and God's love were one and the same thing. The glory of God is not that of a despotic eastern tyrant; rather, it is the splendor of love before which we fall not in abject terror, but in wonder, love and praise.

This is the One whose shoe's latchet John the Baptist said he was not worthy to unloose. Is it any wonder that he said this? His job was to prepare the way for the Lord Who would ultimately reconcile humanity to the Father through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. How humbled John the Baptist must have been to be the herald of this singular event, this pivotal moment in human history.

As we mark the ending of Advent and the beginning of Christmastide, we must realize that we are not just remembering a nice story of the coming of our Savior. Indeed, we should not be focusing on what *has* happened so much as what is *going* to happen. We most surely grasp what God is doing with us now by looking at what He intends to do with us in the future. The *real* promise of Advent is not that "Christmas is coming." Rather, the promise of Advent are the words the archangel spoke to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The One to be born of her will be a king unlike any king before or after, and "of His Kingdom there shall be no end." (Lk 1: 33)

This Kingdom is the one into which we have all been baptized, but it is a Kingdom not of this world. It will not contain our sins and foibles, our contradictions and compromises, our fear and anxiety. These will all be burned up in His consuming fire. We do not really understand how this can be and perhaps we never will. But we do know that the God utterly beyond our comprehension will dwell among us, enfold us in His love, and all will be well.

Advent points us to what we've still yet to see: the collapse of every false kingdom, hollow power, and vain ambition that humans run after. We will *fully* enter the Kingdom of God and fulfill the promise of Advent only when every other kingdom we hanker after is revealed as an imposter. We will see that this is so only in the light of Christ. John the Baptist saw it, and so do those who truly follow the way of our Lord Jesus. May we be found among those good and faithful servants who are not distracted by the world's promises and charms, nor captivated by its temptations, but rather are joyfully prepared for the arrival of the true King.

In the Name...