

The First Sunday after Christmas, Years ABC, 2007
St. James, Islamorada

“No one has ever seen God,” wrote John the Evangelist. “It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” And the mystery of that “making God known,” is the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of Christmas.

Each year, on this Sunday in the Episcopal tradition, we read the prologue to John’s Gospel. It is, arguably, the greatest theological statement ever made about God walking among us as our brother in humanity. John’s Gospel tells us no birth tales. The nativity stories are the province of Matthew and Luke. John’s prologue reaches much deeper than the birth narratives and is far more profound. John goes beyond the superficial to tell us what it means for God to become man. It is in John that we can grasp the mysterious majesty of the Incarnation far better than we ever could with Matthew and Luke. Faith is always a journey in divine mystery, because the things of God always surpass human understanding. It is with philosophy and theology that you best grasp the meaning in divine mystery, and John uses philosophy and theology to tell us how God became man. It is with John that we can best understand just how it is that God became one of us, a fellow human being in this world.

John tells us that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” That Word of God, theologians call the *Logos*. The *Logos* is the very essence of God. It is the power of God, the will of God, the substance of God, the authority of God, even the very soul of God. Do not confuse the “Word” of God with the Bible. The Bible tells us about God, it reflects the faith community’s experiences with God and it is through those experiences, written in the Bible, that much about God is revealed. But, the Bible is a record of holy events and no more. The written “Word of God” is paper and ink; it is not the Incarnate Word. It is not Jesus. It tells us about “The Holy.” It is not, itself, holy. When the Evangelist John talks about the “Word of God,” he is talking about something entirely different. John’s usage is that of Genesis, the biblical account of Creation. Genesis tells us that God is the author, the creator of all that exists. The ancient Jew understood that God’s “Word,” that is his uttered, “spoken” Word was the means by which God created. It is also by his spoken “Word” that God sustains creation. When John tells us that all things came into being through the Word, he is talking about the way that God created by saying, “Let it be!” God created by his will, made manifest through his “Word.” Creation expresses the perfect will of God the Father.

John tells us that, in Jesus, the Word of God became flesh, that is, God, himself, took on human form. John said, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” We recognize that, in Jesus, God makes himself perfectly known. To know Jesus is to know the Father. To live in and through Jesus is to live in perfect harmony with God. To walk with Jesus is to walk with God, himself, along the path of life that leads to everlasting life.

The story of Christmas is the story of God’s coming to us. It is the story of love so profound that God, in that love, humbled himself to become one of us, that we might become one with him. This is what the Incarnation means. The Incarnation makes it possible for us to be truly close to God.

Every year, on this First Sunday after Christmas, the Episcopal Church reads John's prologue, because the Episcopal Church places great emphasis on the Incarnation. Not that many years ago, in the Anglo-Catholic parishes at least, we read this passage at the end of every Eucharist. The prologue was read with both the priest and the people kneeling, symbolically honoring the moment that God became man, symbolically acknowledging that the indwelling of the Word was then, is now and will be forever. Now days, even Episcopalians hear this reading only once a year, and in many Christian denominations, it is never read. So much is lost when you discount John's prologue. The prologue reminds us that just as each Sunday points to Easter, because each Sunday celebrates the miracle of Christ's resurrection, so each Sunday's worship brings us into the tangible presence of our Incarnate Lord, and the liturgy should remind us of the Incarnation.

In our faith, we, also, are an incarnate people. When we receive the Holy Spirit at baptism, God dwells in us. We are filled with the presence of God and we remain as filled with the Spirit as we allow ourselves to be. So, to the extent that we permit it, God is incarnate in us, too.

We are blessed by God and are his children because Jesus makes us so. Our acceptance as children of God is certainly not of our own doing. It is God's gift to us and it is a daily gift, given through the miracle of the Incarnation and the Incarnate Son's Resurrection. On this first Sunday after Christmas, as the twelve days of Christmas continue, let us rejoice and thank God for this gift of his Incarnate Word. *Amen.*