

The Darkness did not Overcome it
John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12)
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A long, long time ago, in a galilee far far away. As stories go, you can't get anymore fantastical and creative than the Christmas narrative. I don't mean the run up, the surprise pregnancy, the tense conversation between Mary and Joseph, "What do you mean it was an angel". No, all of that is par for the course, a little out there, but not that strange. The real scandal is that God has a body. And that God's body feels, aches, is strong, and weak, just like my body and your body. That's the real scandal of Christmas. John describes it as when grace and truth came and dwelt amongst us. Eugene Peterson in his Message translation paraphrases this scandal as one where God, pitched his tent and moved into the neighborhood.

Now in case you're wondering, this is kind of crazy talk. That God, a deity, any deity, would take on human form is kind of not the done thing. Sure, Gods can and do take human form for finite amounts of time, but when they do they came as warriors or animals, fierce animals; in brief, as Donald Trump would say, they're winners.

Jesus, on the other hand is not a winner. His parents are losers, and so it's assumed he is a loser too. But that's just the kind of logic that the incarnation is meant to up-end. The very word: incarnation comes from the root for flesh, carne. It's also the root for another word Carnival. In fact, throughout the middle ages advent and Christmas celebrations were often celebrated with carnival like whimsy. Priests would wear their vestments backwards, the liturgy would be misspoken intentionally to illicit laughter from the congregation and the nativity scene would often be paraded through town were there would be, well, let's just say lots of celebratory libations.

The end result was meant to convey one thing: In god becoming flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, all the logic of the world has been upended, so that, the only way to make sense of the world is to fix your eyes on Jesus' example. This announcement, or euengallion, was called the gospel, one that still hold true for many in the orthodox eastern church, where it is not Christ's death on the cross that elicits the most gravity, but rather his birth.

This upending of the logic of the world, John calls it Kosmos logic, is a difficult pill to swallow, even if we've been Christians for a long long time. So much so that we need to revisit the story, and orient ourselves anew to the logic of this tiny baby, and how in his flesh, flesh like yours and mine, provides the very seeds of peace, hope, love, and faith.

That God could have a body has worried the Christian church for much of its early life, and controversy over the very nature of Christ's body can still fill conference schedules today, almost two millennia later.

If God can have a body, does that mean that God can suffer? If he can suffer, can he feel pain? If he can feel pain, is he actually almighty? These are more than academic theses, for in them lie some of our largest concerns about the validity of the Christian faith.

What appears to be most important to John, today's gospel carnival barker, seems to be the issue of light. This isn't strange for John for in fact his gospel has come to be known as the gospel of light. You can bet that when John starts talking about night, or darkness, that he means to convey danger, unbelief, doubt, things that don't allow you to experience Christ in his fullness.

So when he talks about Jesus as true light, it is clear that to be able to see the light is not the same as believing in the light. "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John hits the nail on the head when he tells us that although Jesus made the world and came in to the world, the world did not recognize him (7-8)." What might he be driving at here.

Once again, I think we need to go back to this idea of God having a body. And I think we need to go back to this idea of a light that shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Now, no one here needs convincing that there are a myriad of things in the world that we can classify as darkness. And since I've already mentioned Donald Trump, I rest my case. But we all know of things that kind of pollute the world we live in. Things that deform the human experience, things that cloud out the light.

Theologian Richard Beck, in his book entitled *Unclean: meditations on purity, hospitality, and mortality*, makes the case that the incarnation we see the most illogical thing happening. In Beck's view what is most at stake is the logic of

negative dominance. Negative dominance is the foundation of pollution. So, when I tell you that religion and politics go together like ice cream and horse manure, you get the idea. In negative dominance, it's the ice cream that gets polluted every single time. The pollutant is the stronger force.

This is why the Pharisees get bent out of shape over Jesus eating with prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners. These people defile the most observant Jew every single time, even if that observant Jew is God in the Flesh. It is culturally and psychologically counter intuitive that Jesus' presence might sanctify or purify those sinners he is eating with.

But here's the real problem with that. It's that a couple of thousand years we are not too far off from the Pharisees in the way they think about pollution, be it evil, sin, or whatever. The real doubt in all of our minds is whether we can really stake our lives on what Johns says here, that in Jesus, the light has come into the darkness of our world and our lives, and that the darkness will no over come it.

This is the scandal of the incarnation. Now, it's really easy to pay lip service to this, but this is where we need to be strengthened in our belief. If we have any chance of persevering we must lock our hearts on the utterly illogical good news that Jesus is stronger than the polluting, shameful, defiling darkness.

I wonder if we do believe that? That in Jesus the light of the world has come and, in coming, the light pushes out the darkness.

In deserves mentioning that this question, whether the light of the incarnation has the power to overcome all the pollution in our lives and world could be the most important question we ever ask.

It's not an easy one to answer, and it seems like it might be one of those questions we need to ask ourselves each and everyday until we can walk in confidence knowing that in Jesus God has truly come down to earth, and rendered the ultimate judgment on all of humanity and creation, that we are valuable in God's eyes.

A friend of mine was leading a bible study in a men's prison back in America and he was commenting on how this idea, that in Jesus, God was showing us how much we are loved and how little the pollution of our lives matters, was the most important breakthrough moment for most of the offenders he worked with.

I wonder how many other types of people need to hear this gospel a fresh? I wonder how many of us know of someone who simply believes that the darkness of their own lives is just too thick and too awful, that they are beyond God's mercy and reach?

I'm thinking of those that have just spent these holidays alone, because the love of their lives is gone;

I'm thinking of young girls who feel like they need to be thinner, taller, and funnier;

I'm thinking of young men who are feeling small and insignificant, unheard and invisible;

I'm thinking of all of those that struggle with addiction in one way or another;

I'm thinking of all those whose families have been marked by failure, letdown, or betrayal;

For all those who feel like they literally own property in the Darkness,

Well, if that's you today, or if you have a chance to talk to that person in the next week's time, I hope you hear the message this morning. God's love and light has come to us once and for all, not in a mighty king or in a ferocious soldier, but in the meekness, and vulnerability of a small child. And in this child is both grace and truth. And this grace and truth are truly enough to overcome all the rubbish of our lives, if only we will believe that this child, the baby Jesus, is God in the flesh. The logic of darkness, the shame and the guilt, will have no power in the face of this messiah, this anointed one. For in him, the light of the world was coming, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Amen.