

Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Jesus the Word who becomes flesh and lives among us. Amen.

The Christmas presents are all unwrapped, aren't they – and some already returned perhaps? The guests are gone – or if they're not yet, maybe they should be? Vacations are pretty much over – unless you're retired? But retirement aside, if you haven't already seen it yet, you'll soon face work or school, or at least see life again without the gloss and glare of Christmas.

And yet, today we come together on this Twelfth Day of Christmas, perhaps without the same gloss of a candle-lit Christmas Eve or the same glare of tinsel and presents; but we come together nonetheless to gather around a lit candle and nativity set, to revel in the beauty of the tree, and to hear a cosmic Christmas creation story in these opening verses of John's Gospel.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

It's no secret that there's not just one, but two creation stories in the first book of the bible, Genesis. The first (in chapter one) tells the story of a cosmic creator God, who creates by separating: separating light from darkness, separating heaven from earth, separating dry and wet land. And declaring each of the six days “good” with a divine rest on the seventh day.

The second creation story (in chapter two of Genesis) reveals a creating God who looks a bit more like a farmer. Scooping up a handful, if not a whole armful of dirt, cradling it like a newborn, God breathes life into earth to create an *earth being* (an Adamah in Hebrew, an Adam in English).

But right here in today's gospel reading – right in the middle of the long story of scripture – there's a third creation story. In this creation story, the main character at the very heart of God the Creator is one whose name is “Word.” The “Word” with a capital “W” in English, The “Logos” in Greek with a capital “L.”

And at first, God seems in this third creation story to be not so different than the cosmic creator God revealed in the first creation story – *all things came into being through the Word, without the Word not one thing came into being.*

But then John’s creation story takes an armful-of-dirt kind of twist – you might even say, a Christmas twist. It becomes a Christmas creation story – not with smelly shepherds or well-traveled wise men or even the humble, straw-filled manger – but all just the same, *this Word* (with a capital “W”) *becomes flesh and lives – literally dwells, literally gets out a tent and camps out in the dirtiness and all the messiness of life – with us.*

If you’re feeling a little down or dreading the return to ordinary life, maybe you can think of this as one final Christmas gift to unwrap this final – this Twelfth Day of Christmas – a cosmic Christmas creation story to unwrap as a gift and then wrap yourself up in today. So much better than a sweater or a pair of socks, isn’t it?

Last fall I had the privilege of listening to Susan Briehl a Lutheran pastor from the Pacific Northwest speak about the Gospel of John. And I don’t remember who she quoted, but she said that one John scholar spoke about the words that John’s Gospel uses (in the original language it was written), being like “dime-store” words. John uses cheap, common, very ordinary Greek words like *see* and *dwell*, *light* and *life*. But then the author of John’s Gospel starts working with them, polishing them over the course of the story with the skill of an artist until they shine and glitter like jewels.

No doubt, you’ll see some of these “dime-store” words being polished through the story if you go to Pastor Tom’s Bible study on the Gospel of John over the next eight classes during Wednesday Night Life (how’s that for a shameless plug?).

But if Wednesdays don’t work, you can look and listen for it on Sundays in most of Lent (in March) as you’ll encounter – through the words of John’s Gospel – people who encounter the Word (Jesus) in conversations. There are a lot of conversations – *a lot of words* (lowercase “W”) in John’s Gospel! And even though some of them read like a “Whose on first...” routine... these long conversations often center around one or two “dime-store” words.

There's the story of a man named Nicodemus who wonders just how exactly someone can be "*born again*" without entering the womb a second time. Then there's the Samaritan woman at the well who wants to know where to find this "*living water*" which quenches one's thirst forever. There's also a man born blind who seems to "*see*" more clearly than all the religious leaders combined. And, of course, there's a man named Lazarus whose death reveals what true "*life*" is.

This talk about taking "dime-store" words (common, cheap, ordinary words) and working with them until they shine; it's not such a bad metaphor for the good news of Christmas.

Because the good news of John's Gospel and the good news of Christmas is that God in Christ Jesus most certainly takes on this "dime-store" world of ours... God in Christ Jesus takes on the flesh and the dirtiness and the messiness of our lives... God in Christ Jesus shows up in, with and among common, cheap, broken places and people, sets up tent and starts working with the skill of an artist until ordinary "stuff" shines. Flesh-and-body kind of "stuff" shines through its brokenness and glitters and dazzles with newfound purpose and life.

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen the Word's glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth... And from the fullness of the Word we have all received, grace upon grace.

I know I've shared this story before, but it seems appropriate with our cosmic Christmas creation story today. The story goes that a little girl climbs into her parents' bed late at night, telling a story of fear and a tale of dark corners in her room and saying she just can't sleep. As parents do, they kindly tell her to go back to bed. They offer a half-hearted reminder that God is with her. They tell her really she has nothing to fear.

The girl seems convinced. She returns to her bedroom. But only minutes later – just as the parents are starting to drift off to sleep – the girl returns and crawls under the covers, and repeats her concern and her fear and her tale of dark places. "Go back to sleep." The parents say groggily. "There's nothing to be scared of. God is always with you." They say with less assurance and more dismissively.

"I know..." The girl replies, "but I need someone with skin."

Brothers and sisters of the Word – this is the good news of Christmas, told in John’s Gospel with a cosmic creation Christmas story twist – that God is among us with skin, *the Word made flesh*, daring to *dwell among us*.

Thanks be to God for cosmic Christmas creation stories, which reveal God dwelling among us in common flesh, in “dime-store” words, in ordinary and broken places. In body, in blood. In bread, in wine. Freely giving grace upon grace to all creation.

And so as Christmas breathes its final breath, we say once more: “thanks be to God” for creation stories written with a new Word (that’s “Word” with a capital “W”). Amen.