

Homily for December 25, 2021. (John 1:1-18)

The scripture passages the Church gives us on Christmas morning are very different than the passages we hear on Christmas Eve. As you noticed in this morning's gospel reading, there is no journey to Bethlehem, no descending of angels from the heavenly realm, no shepherds, no Joseph, no Mary, and no baby Jesus.

The four gospel writers all have different starting points in their attempt to tell us the Jesus story. The Gospel according to Mark starts us off with an adult Jesus who is calling the apostles to leave their boats and follow him. The gospels according to Matthew and Luke begin the story not with an adult Jesus but with the birth of the baby Jesus. John, our gospel writer today, backs the story up even further. He does not introduce us to an adult Jesus, nor to a baby in a manger. He goes right back to the beginning of time: ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*** John wants to tell us the story of God's coming into flesh from an earlier and a higher point of view. This is what theologians call "high Christology," that is, an understanding of Jesus emphasizing his divinity—he's God. "Low Christology" emphasizes Jesus' humanity—he's just like us. Of course, Jesus is both fully divine and fully human, but then again, so are we.



John, the gospel writer, tells us that when the Word went forth from the mouth of God, life came into being. God's words and actions are one. God said, "let there be light," and light came into being. God said, "let there be mountains, fields and oceans," and they all came into being. ***All things came into being through the Christ, the Word, and without him (the Christ), not one thing came into being.*** Wherever and whenever you have spirit entering into matter, you have the Christ;

you have the revelation of God. The Christ existed from the beginning of time even though Jesus Christ was born only 2000 years ago.

This can all be very philosophical and hard for us to get our minds around. After all, who can fathom a reality that has no beginning but has always existed? Suffice it to say, God's words and actions are one. What God says, God does. That is what we call integrity. When we follow up our words with actions, we are imitating God; we are men and women of integrity. The only people Jesus ever had any trouble with were the Pharisees. Why? Because they exemplified the opposite of integrity—hypocrisy. A hypocrite is a person who says one thing (especially things that give the outer appearance of holiness), but does another thing. The inner and the outer are not integrated. The words of hypocrites have no power because we can see straight through them. We just know they have no intention of following up their words with actions.

Jesus like God, the Creator, has integrated his words and actions. He doesn't just talk about taking up his cross, he actually dies upon a cross. He doesn't just talk about love of enemy, he actually—with his dying breath—forgives his enemies. Jesus' words have power in the same way God the Father's words have power to bring forth life in the entire universe.

Here's a little story that I have shared with you before. It does not seem like a Christmas story on the surface level, but it does remind me of the power of words. We can create and give life to others with our words, or we can tear people down. This is a story of how the word went forth and life emerged.

This is a true story of a woman named Mary Ann Bird as she recalls an episode from her childhood.

I grew up knowing that I was different, and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I must look to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth and garbled speech. When my classmates would ask, "What happened to your lip?" I'd tell them I'd fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me.

There was, however, a teacher in the second grade who we all adored—Mrs. Leonard by name. She was short, round, happy—a sparkling lady. Annually, we would have a hearing test. I was virtually deaf in one of my ears; but when I had taken the test in the past years, I discovered that if I did not press my hand as tightly upon my ears as I was instructed to do, I could pass the test. Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in class, and finally it was my turn.

I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something and we would have to repeat it back...things like “the sky is blue” or “do you have new shoes?” I waited there for those words which changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said in her whisper, “I wish you were my little girl.”

I love that story because it reminds me of the power of the spoken word. Words, from the mouth of a person of integrity, can create life from where there was no life before. When that happens, Christ is born again.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of the human race.

Fr. Phil