

A Sermon

26/27 December, 2015

First Sunday after Christmas, with Baptism

Merry Christmas St. Timothy's family, guests, and visitors. This has been a week filled with celebrations and hopefully, with some recovering from those celebrations. The Advent season of waiting is behind us. Jesus, Santa Claus, and Star Wars: The Force Awakens all arrived as anticipated, whether we were ready or not. Each bringing a mystery of its own – Should a pregnant woman ride a donkey? What is the power source for Rudolph's nose? Who are Rey's parents – really?

Our celebrations continue this weekend. Before we are finished here this morning we will celebrate two more much-anticipated arrivals as we welcome our newest Episcopalians into the family of God through baptism. Little Miss Heidi Elsa, also known as Caitlin Amanda Hotra who, following in her Grandmother's footsteps, began her liturgical service in the role of baby Jesus Christmas eve, and Flynn Marshall Smith, whose brother Connor was the cutest cattle lowing you've ever seen. They will begin their lives anointed and sealed as full members of this family of God.

Our readings this weekend speak of beginnings. Early beginnings like baptisms. Some of which many of us have experienced – like birth, weddings, adoptions, pushing seeds into the ground – beginnings with particular trajectories. There are other types of beginnings – later beginnings – many of which we have also experienced – whose trajectories are not as clear. Beginnings like death. Like leaving your home. Beginnings like success, and like failure. Each transition in this life, even and sometimes especially those we did not choose, brings with it an opportunity to begin again.

We began Advent wandering around a little in the creation story we inherited in the book of Genesis. John's Gospel here today suggests that this Word becoming flesh in Jesus is the same Word that was in the very beginning, back when the Gods of Genesis were crafting light and land, and having conversations about where to put the water, the photographs, and the Christmas tree; their spirits hovering over the surface, like conductors seeking to make order out of the chaos of that wild symphony of beginning. John says the word was there - in that beginning.

What we believe about what was in the beginning – matters. Nearly every civilization, including those that predate our Genesis writers by thousands of years, found it important to craft a story about how it all began. Stories of Gods & wolves. Of fires & explosions. Stories of turtles & buffalo. Of conflict and peace. Stories rich with purpose, identity, and direction.

We also have wondrous, more scientific explorations of how it all began. One of the many things to love about being Episcopalian is that we get to believe that not only did God walk on the earth – but so did dinosaurs. We care about theories of big bangs and quantum physics, the 10 ish dimensions, and the speck of force that exploded all of us into being.

Ancient storytellers crouched in fire circles looking for beginnings in sparks and embers. Modern astronomers and physicists – peering through their telescopes – searching back through time into our past – for possibilities. They believe, as we believe, that what we believe about the beginning lays the groundwork for now and for what's next to come.

And as much as we'd like some certainty, we find ourselves agreeing with great Sages and Wise Ones from the past who maintain that the mysterious transcendence of this creative force called God or Brahman, Nirvana or the Word, or maybe even The Force, will always, ultimately, elude our knowing.

We believe that God was in the beginning. That the Word was God. Was light. And that light shines in all of us.

The prophet Isaiah says the creator counts all the stars, and knows them each by name. That's us too. Eventually... eventually... that starlight is breathed into these wonky and wondrous bodies. Into our bodies. These carbon based bodies that will return to the earth – to this earth, on which we are also made incarnate. Made flesh. On which Jesus and all of God's people have walked, and through whom God's word is known. My flesh. Your flesh. The Word from the very beginning through Jesus, up to right now.

My friend and Episcopal priest Mark Bozzuti Jones and his wife Kathy wanted to ensure that the children in their parish understood the concept that God - being made flesh in Jesus – is not entirely unlike how God is alive in them. When they set their nativity scenes out each year, they now include a small mirror next to the head of the infant Jesus, so everyone who peeks into the manger sees that it is not just Jesus who is born with God's face – but all of us. All of us are created in God's image. All of us have the opportunity to reveal something unique about God.

We have stepped off, into the next. Each of us. New beginnings, on particular trajectories, wearing our fleshy costumes, seeking to make the Word known – to be light.

I am so thrilled to join with this community to make promises to Ms. Caitlin Amanda , and Mr. Flynn Marshall. To promise them that I believe in their creation myths, in their beginnings, which have the power to direct what might come. I believe that God's light is in them, that light and Word from the very beginning. I can't wait to promise them that, with God's help, I will pray and hope and fear and push every good desire into the current of this river of baptism surrounding them; to see God's face in theirs.

Let's Pray.

God our lives are in your hands

And for that

We give you thanks

Amen.

Heidi Carter Clark, *Lay Associate for Ministry*
St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, Creve Coeur, MO