

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,” writes the author of Hebrews. From the beginning God has been about communicating, seeking relationship with human beings.

God speaks creation into being.

God says to Adam and Eve, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden.” but not of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. Walking in the garden in the cool of the day, God calls to them, “Where are you?”

One day, out of the blue, God tells to Abram “Go from your country . . . to the land that I will show you.” Making a covenant with him, God comes close in a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. God visits Abraham and Sarah at their tent, by the oaks of Mamre.

In a bush that is burning but not consumed God says to Moses, I AM WHO I AM, I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE. The great I AM speaks to him from the cloud atop Mt. Sinai; and in the tent of meeting in the wilderness, they talk face-to-face.

God speaks to Elijah in the sound of sheer silence, silence that is fine as gossamer, in which God is present.

Down the ages, God continues to speak, always waiting for us to respond, to reflect back to God and one another the steadfast love and mercy God has been speaking from the beginning.

Today we make a startling claim; we celebrate a shocking reality. The Word who has been speaking from the beginning of creation comes among us now, in a Son. The Word, who was in the beginning; who was with God; who was God; through whom all things came into being is become flesh and blood.

We are feeling our way in the realm of mystery here. One way of talking about the mystery of the Incarnation, or anything else, is to tell a story. The Gospel of Mark begins the story with John the baptizer out in the wilderness proclaiming that one more powerful than he is coming after him. Matthew and Luke begin with the story of a baby born in Bethlehem. An angel sent from God reveals that Mary will bear a child, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We know the names of his mother, Mary, and his human father, Joseph, and the particular circumstances and place of his birth. The mystery and wonder are there, wrapped in the particulars of the story.

The only birth that takes place in the beginning of John’s gospel is a birth in those who receive the Word and believe in his name. To them God gives “power to become children of God . . . born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”

John just gives the big picture, the meaning, who Jesus is. And you are free to know him, or not; to accept him, or not. With John, there is no mistaking how enormous is the reality we are given to accept or turn away from.

The Word is *Logos*, Greek, from which we have *logic*. *Logos* is the organizing principle of the universe. It is order and purpose, over against, distinct from human order—the order imposed by the census of the Roman emperor Augustus, for example (about which we heard on Christmas Eve from the Gospel acc to Luke). The *Logos* is far beyond the order imposed by any human institution; something like what a Buddhist would name the Ground of all Being. It is the goodness and love at the heart of the universe, an order inherent in the Creator and creation.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The enormity of this gets away from us. We can't get our mind around it, no matter how many times we have heard it said or said it ourselves. There are stories of gods coming to earth, even being born of a human mother, but none like this one. Jesus comes into the world not at some mythic time, but in a particular time and place, in history—at the time of John the Baptist. He comes fully human, not in disguise. At the same time, he does not hide his relationship with God, whom he calls Father.

Is it any wonder, really, that all through the Gospel of John people are so perplexed about who he is and what he is saying to them. How could one who is flesh and blood be the One through whom all things were made? It is, as many have said, scandalous.

And yet, the Word *became* flesh and lived among us—"tented" among us is a better translation. He pitched his tent among us, threw in his lot with us. He is pleased to travel with us, as God traveled with the Israelites through the wilderness. He is on the move, God with us.

The Gospel according to John portrays Jesus as rather bigger than life, always in control. But his dwelling place in the world is permeable, vulnerable. Like all human beings, his life is fragile, his flesh finite.

"He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being," writes the author of Hebrews. In him, we see God. In him, God speaks to the world directly, in his words and his actions.

He changes water into the finest wine at a wedding; feeds five thousand men (not to mention women and children) with five loaves of bread and a few fish. He bespeaks the abundance of God's graciousness, the fullness of life and joy. He is the bread of heaven.

He looses the bonds that paralyze both body and spirit: a man ill for 38 years stands up and walks.

He gives sight to a man born blind. He is light and life. Right here, right now, in the world.

He breaks the power of death: "Lazarus, come out!"

It is in him to purpose and to be able to do these things because all things have been created through him. It is in him, also, to give himself up to death, willingly, for the sake of the world. He shows us God both vulnerable and all-powerful.

In him, God speaks to us of the eternal relationship of love, from before time—into which we are invited and welcomed, now and forever.