

## Glory to God

When I was in sixth grade we were given an assignment that must have been “write about your Christmas vacation.” I turned in what I called “An Untypical New Year.” I wrote about how on New Year’s Eve, when my friends were shooting off illegal fireworks, I was much more aware of the silence of the snow and sensed the immensity of time. It seemed silly to me to celebrate the beginning of just another year. I don’t remember what the teacher made of my essay, but I’m sure that eleven-year-old contemplatives were not in her student repertoire.

In my own small, childish way I was trying to say what John the Evangelist expresses so beautifully in the Prologue to his Gospel. Last night on Christmas Eve we heard the familiar birth narrative from Luke, with its angels and shepherds and Mary and Joseph and the baby, which lend themselves so well to a children’s pageant. We can relate to that, seeing Jesus in the context of a particular day, a particular point in human time.

Today John sets human days within cosmic time, God’s time, and puts that baby within the context of eternity. “In the beginning” he starts, the beginning of time, of course, the same way that the Bible begins in Genesis. That wasn’t the beginning of the Word, however. The Word already existed with God. In fact, the Word *was* God. Everything came into being through that Word that God spoke.

Only after establishing the eternal existence of the Word does John begin to place Him in human time. When the Evangelist was writing, there were probably disciples of John the Baptist still around, so it was important to say that he was not the one but rather pointed to the One.

Finally, fourteen verses in, we hear that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The power of that gets me every time. Had not the Word become flesh, there would have been no crucifixion, no resurrection. That’s why the Incarnation is regarded so highly in our Anglican tradition, why we bow our heads when we recite it in the Nicene Creed.

In John’s eyes, Jesus Christ came to earth as the fulfillment of all that God had foreseen since the beginning of time. That’s what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews also wants to get across. He wants to show that the Son fulfilled the “many and various ways” God spoke to his people long ago. So he begins his letter by quoting the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the psalms, to show that the Son through whom God created the world is the one whose years will never end.

Today I’m especially aware of the passage of time, as this is my last Sunday at Trinity Cathedral. In the Anglican tradition we talk about passing faith in Jesus Christ from generation to generation not just in teaching but physically through the hands of bishops. We believe our apostolic succession goes right back to those first disciples who followed Jesus. It came here through Henry Washington Lee, the First Bishop of Iowa who built Trinity Cathedral, and it continues today through Betsey Monnot, the Tenth Bishop of Iowa.

It also came through the generations of faithful who worshipped at Trinity, and those who brought you and your ancestors to faith. It will continue through the generations to come. For ten years of that journey I have been the Dean of Trinity Cathedral. Do I grieve that I am leaving this

place? Of course I do. In the context of John's Gospel, however, I rejoice that I have shared the light of Christ with you for a time, and rejoice that you will continue to carry the light forward into the future in this place.

I kept that sixth-grade essay for quite a while. It disappeared in what my siblings call The Great Move, when my parents went from a five-bedroom house to a two-bedroom apartment. I was in college at the time, unable to sort through my stuff, so many of my things went the way of all flesh. I'd probably be embarrassed by my juvenile writing, anyway. At least I still remember the gist of what I wrote.

There's a closing sentence in the Daily Office, adapted from the Letter to the Ephesians, that really expresses how I feel about my last Sunday here, nearly forty years since I first walked through the doors. It's a fitting conclusion for my time.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

[Christmas Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14.]