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The Rev. Dr. Giovan Venable King

Last night, we heard Luke's story about the birth in Bethlehem, shepherds alerted to the birth by angels singing the glories of God, a young mother pondering these things and treasuring them in her heart. In about twelve days, we will turn to the infancy story of Matthew, in which the magi from the East make their appearance.

Today, we hear the nativity story according to John, the *cosmic* version. "In the beginning was the word"--it was with God, and, in fact, it **is** God creating all that has come and that is to come. The writer intentionally hearkens back to Genesis (literally, "the beginning") of Holy Scripture--"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth," God's first recorded "word" was: "Let there be light."

And, so the writer of the Gospel of John finds it natural to speak of the creation of Christ into the world as a light that shines in the darkness, a light that darkness cannot dim. In the Incarnation, God has demonstrated that divinity can inhabit every aspect of our lives. Your own story, á la Luke, the details of your birth, life, and death, can be the *harvest* of God's self-revelation. Your Johannine mystery as a person, your depth and intuition and sense of self, can be the *ground* of God's self-revelation.

My father was very creative and artistic. It was he who, during my childhood, decorated our home for Christmas. I have in my scrapbook a picture of me, in my new, red, Christmas nightgown, praying in front of a bust of the Madonna with child, a bust that my father created. And, in front of the bust lies a simple piece of wood with beautiful calligraphy on it, also by my father. It reads: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." Luke and John joined together. How I always learned it. How we should always remember it.

Tom and I used to awake on Saturday mornings in Los Angeles to the "Satellite Sisters," on my radio alarm clock. Their show is a cute concept--they are sisters who live in Los Angeles, New York, Texas, and Russia, and they are connected telephonically as they conduct their syndicated radio talk show. The sisters banter back and forth about a variety of subjects and we awoke a year or so ago to hear them talking with Alan Alda about his new book, *Things I heard while Talking to Myself*.

Alda suffered a nearly fatal intestinal obstruction a few years ago, while interviewing astronomers on an 8,000 foot high Chilean mountain top. The presence of a local physician, who was able to diagnosis the problem, was the only thing that saved his life. Alda spoke about how much better life tastes now, after having tasted the possibility of death. And, he looks for ways to deepen his awareness of life and truth. He puts it this way: "I have now been given this extra time on the clock that I'm very much aware is a great gift and I really don't want to waste it." As Harry Smith has said, "Alda looks at the world the way it should be and acts accordingly."

To look at the world the way it should be and to act accordingly sounds like kingdom living, like living in the light, not allowing the darkness to overcome it. One challenge is to invite the light of Christ to shine forth and be willing to see what that light might illumine.

The other day a banner hanging in a store window caught my eye which read, "Wish Big." Marketing folks were no doubt wishing that we would enter to make big purchases. But, what if we wished bigger than that? What if we walked into the store and said that what we wish for this Christmas season is an end to poverty--what shelf is that on? Or, we're looking to put a stop to the ravages of tuberculosis or AIDS, or discrimination of any kind--on what aisles would we find those items?

Not only are they not on the shelves or in the aisles of our stores today, they probably won't be there with a "50% off" sign tomorrow, either.

Jesus is a gift that simply makes reciprocity impossible--there will be no running to the store for the last minute sweater or gift certificate. But, this gift of the Word dwelling with us is an invitation to "wish *really* big" and to live into our wishes. Jesus walked among us, and walks with us still, reminding us that we are God's own beloved children. The Christmas miracle is that humanity and divinity have touched, that the thin places, between the divine and human, can get even thinner still.

We ended our candlelight service last night by processing toward that metaphorical silent night, singing of the Son of God, who is love's pure light. *This is the light that overcomes the darkness.* We are called to reflect that light into the dark places of the world. It would serve us and the kingdom of God to remember that in times when blessings abound, others have needs for justice and equity, for peace, and the lightening of their darkness. After all, their darkness is, in reality, our darkness.

The Incarnation is a revelation to humanity about what it is to be human and about just how close our relationship with God and in turn with each other can be. An early church father summed up the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord in this way: "He became what we are that we would become what He is."

The author of Psalm 85 wrote poetic words about justice and peace kissing each other. "Truth springs up from the ground; and justice looks down from heaven." Christmas is the marriage of heaven and earth. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt"--in Greek, this reads, "the word pitched his tent" or "tabernacled"--amongst us, and we gazed upon his glory. And in this glory we find the coming together of heaven and earth, of grace and truth.

As the Bishop of Durham, England, notes: "Our world has tried for far too long to get truth without grace." But, if the world has tried to have truth without grace, Bishop Wright acknowledges that the Church has often been tempted towards grace without truth--as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, "cheap grace" - not so much that God loves you no matter what, but that God is on your side, no matter what.

But for something to be full of grace, it must include truth, and *true* truth cannot exist without grace. It is in Christ that we hear that grace and truth have met together; justice and peace have kissed each other. As he tabernacled with us, you are invited to tabernacle, to pitch your tent, with him, to taste his grace and truth in bread and wine, and become yourselves wedding guests, feasting at the marriage of heaven and earth.