

The Ever-Present Jesus
December 9, 2016

One man in the Bible has a name which has become synonymous with suffering.

As James said,

We give honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about JOB . . .

Job is suffering, and God doesn't seem to be doing anything about it, so he complains!

Tom is going to read some of his lament from Job 23:

Even today my complaint is bitter;
his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning.
If only I knew where to find him;
if only I could go to his dwelling!
I would state my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.
I would find out what he would answer me,
and consider what he would say to me . . .

But if I go to the east, he is not there;
if I go to the west, I do not find him.
When he is at work in the north, I do not see him;
when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him.

Where are you Lord!

When we come to this time of year have baby Jesus in the manger

Perhaps we say, "I wish I could have *seen* him,"

because often we feel like Job.

Where *are* you Jesus?

Many people have asked that question.

Many honest seekers have asked that question.

Jesus, who are you and where are you?

Let me tell you the story of an entire race of people who,

though they were told about Jesus by well-meaning, devoted Jesus followers,
they just couldn't make sense of it all. They just couldn't see Jesus.

The story starts with a question to you.

So, in what month was Jesus was born? (December?)

It couldn't have been in December, the rainy season,
because we are told the shepherds were out watching their flocks by night,
which wouldn't have been in December.

Nor would Caesar have called for a census to be taken during the rainy season
in December. Bad time for traveling.
(We for example, traveled in late October at the end of the tourist season.)

HMMM . . .

Next question: When did Christians first start celebrating Christmas?

At first, they didn't.
There was no Jewish tradition historically or during the time of Jesus
for celebrating birthdays.
The Apostle Paul never even mentions any details of Jesus' birth.

Jesus didn't tell his disciples,
"Remember my birthday until I come again."
No. He said, "Remember my death!"

So, certainly, it wouldn't have occurred to first century Christians
to celebrate Jesus' birthday.

The first recorded date of Christmas being celebrated was in 336AD,
during the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine
(the emperor who converted to Christianity).

A few years later, Pope Julius I officially declared that the birth of Jesus
would be celebrated on the 25th December.

**But, if Jesus wasn't born in December,
and for 300 years no one celebrated his birthday,
how did we end up with Christmas on December 25th?**
(History of Christmas and the Celts, Alexander Shaia)

Ah. This is where it gets interesting.
Christianity first took hold in the Mediterranean culture,
but as Christianity began to spread into northern Europe during the reign of Constantine,
they encountered the Celtic people.

The Christians tried hard to evangelize them, but the Celts just didn't get Jesus.
Christians would say, "Jesus the Messiah was born,"

And they'd say, "The who?"

You know, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The Lamb?

You see, they didn't come from the same traditions of Messiahs and sacrifices and lambs.

They didn't speak the same theological language.

Nor did they didn't live with the same cosmic experiences.

Let me explain.

In the Mediterranean area, where Israel is, it was warm most of the year,
and time was marked by the cycles of the moon.

The Celts, by contrast, lived in very cold climates

where the length of days was dramatically different between summer and
winter. They marked time by the appearance and disappearance of the sun.

The sun slowly died as winter approached

that the shortest daylight of the year being December 21st, the winter solstice

And the sun came back to life again as they approached the longest day

of the year, on June 21st, the spring solstice.

Winter was an extremely depressing time,

and they longed for the sun to come back and give them longer, warmer days

What they needed to know was,

"How does this Jesus of yours fit into our understanding of the cosmos that we experience.

Some brilliant Christians said, "Aha! Let me tell you!"

You know the story of the sun.

We know that story too,

in at a deeper way that could bring meaning to your experience of the cosmos.

You think of this as the rebirth of the SUN.

We understand it as the birth of the SON.

So just as nature goes to the process of rebirth,

so the soul of man goes through the process of rebirth.

We all want an end of the darkness, so the sun will shine again.

Let us tell you how that *really* happens.

Jesus the Son of God came to show us the marvelous light of God.

He is the light of the world who broke into the darkness.

BINGO!!

They got it!

Oh, the coming of Jesus is like the coming of the sun after the winter solstice!

It's in the deepest darkness that the Son was born to bring us light.

And these barbarians, as Romans called them, were born again.

SO, the celebration of the birth of Jesus became forever linked to the celebration of Solstice, the day that the sun/Son comes to earth.

But . . . winter solstice is on December 21st, how'd we get to December 25th?

It's all about evolving calendars.

It started out being on December 21st,

back when the calendar only had 362 days ever year.

After using this calendar for a while, the seasons started shifting,

So a new calendar, the Gregorian calendar, was introduced

which had 365 days with an extra day ever 4 years.

When they changed to this calendar,

Christmas somehow got bumped ahead four days.

Hmm. . . What to do?

After much ado, the Christians said, wait a minute, this is even better!

For the first three days of the winter solstice the eye cannot detect any growing light.

But on the 4th day, the eye can perceive that the light is growing.

For 3 days their world remains dark.

OK, so what comes to mind when you think of 3 days of darkness and death?

The three days in the tomb awaiting the resurrection!

So, Christians said, Wow! This is even better!

So, Christmas, the birth of the Christ child, is celebrated on the day

when we can first perceive that light is returning to the earth.

It's that fabulous?!

**Now, I said this was the work of some brilliant person
who understood creative evangelism.**

But it was really the creator who wove this Jesus story into creation.

We read in . . . John 1: 1-2, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Who said, “Let there be light?”

The WORD of God.

Who is the word of God – the one who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Jesus the WORD, spoke the universe into existence;

He infused himself into the creation.

Jesus was already here, and the people just needed a little help to recognize the Jesus they already knew and whom their soul already loved.

Jesus the Nazarene was God-Incarnate, God in human flesh

Jesus the WORD was God-Infused into the very creation

By the way, we throw around the word incarnate like we all know what it means.

Carnate is the Greek root **carno**

From that, **Spanish** people eat “**carne**” the flesh of the animal.

The word “**carnivorous**” means animals that eat flesh.

The word “**carnage**” describes the slaughter of people (human flesh)

The word “**carnal**” refers to the desires of our bodies, our flesh.

which run wild at “**carnivals**”.

So, **IN-carnate** means to put **something INTO** human **flesh**,
in this case, **The Great I AM** himself.

So, Jesus of Nazareth in **God-Incarnate**.

Jesus, the WORD, the Great I AM, the YHWH,
the one who spoke to Moses from the Burning Bush,
is also the **God-Infused** into all of creation.

That's why the Psalmist says, (Psalm 19)

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

The birth of Jesus is the reality that is woven into all creation.

Nature has been telling the story that Jesus amplifies.

So, Christmas doesn't just point us back to a day in history that happened 2000 years ago,
but to a reality infused into all creation.

Jesus is not the truth of an isolated group of people
who have this rational theological concept that they proclaim is right
over and above everybody else's rational theological concepts.

Jesus unfortunately gets co-opted by religion, by Western Civilization, by politics
until he is hardly recognizable – even to Jesus!

Rather, Jesus is the truth that permeates everything in the universe,
all time and all space.

Jesus of Nazareth came to reveal what was already known,
what was already here,
the BEINGness of the entire created order.
the one who our soul longs for and loves.

When we try to “evangelize” people, introduce them to Jesus,
it's not that we're taking Jesus to a new place;
it's that we reveal the Jesus who is already there,
who is already unfolding his presence.

We simply help people see the EVER-PRESENT JESUS who is already there.

Last week we spoke of the pre-incarnate Jesus, the I AM,
who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush.
This same pre-incarnate Jesus also journeyed with the children of Israel.

The people again, like at Marah, are without water.
They panic, they complain, they accuse Moses of mismanagement.

Exodus 17:5-6

And the Lord said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel

A great salvation, of which the Psalmist declare:

Psalm 114:7-8

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.

Water from a Rock – but who is the Rock?

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

“All our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

The Ever-Present Jesus was the Rock

He was there all the time. They just didn't recognize him or know his name.

So, now let's return to where we started:

Tom read for us Job's bitter lament that he couldn't find the LORD. He diligently to the north, south east and west, but could not see him.

But listen to how his lament end?

But he knows the way that *I* take;
when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

We see the first inklings of hope.
I may not know where *he* is, but he knows where *I* am.
I may not be able to see *him*, but he sees *me*.

Then what happens?

Job 38:1-3

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:

“Who is this that obscures my plans
with words without knowledge?

Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.

The Almighty gives Job a dressing down until there is no fight left in him.
Then Job repents in dust and ashes saying:

Job 42:5

My ears had heard *of* you
but now my eyes have **seen** you.

Like the sun that slowly becomes visible the 4th day after winter solstice,
The light begins to dawn for Job.
And then he declares – my eyes have seen you.

BENEDICTION

**May we be given spiritual eyes to SEE the EVER-PRESENT JESUS,
Who is God-Infused in all of creation
Who is God-Incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth
And who lives without our heart,
The well of living water springing up to eternal life.**