

Christmas Day Sermon, 2011

John 1:1-14

John's Christmas card has no manger, baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, friendly beasts, or wise men. John in profound theological/philosophical language says Jesus is the Word and has come into the world from another world. For John there is a clash between the Word and the world. Like an alien from outer space to use a questionable metaphor. Do you like alien invasion movies? The theme is always pretty much the same. American radar screens pick up unidentified flying objects (Think of our preoccupation with flying saucers and UFO's). The space craft attacks earth with plans to destroy and ravish all resources. At first, the aliens appear unbeatable, but human ingenuity comes to the rescue. For my money, *Independence Day* is the best alien invasion movie ever made: "Hello boys, I'm back," cries the alcoholic Vietnam veteran pilot as he buries his fighter jet into the alien mother ship.

I mention aliens because Jesus appears in our world as an alien. OK, I admit that I was at the bottom of my metaphor barrel, but please go with this alien motif. After all, Jesus came to earth from another place, not in a space ship, but a virgin's womb. Christian faith insists that he left heaven's glory to become a human being. Jesus was an alien without credentials or papers. He was called Rabbi but wasn't officially ordained as a rabbi. He healed the sick but wasn't a licensed physician. He forgave sin but had no religious authority to do so. He hung out with outlaws, reprobates, tax collectors, Samaritans, lepers, and all kinds of riff raff.

But this is where Jesus departs from our science fiction depictions of alien invaders. From his own clear teachings and his consistent pattern of conduct and his ministry of healing, we know that he didn't come to destroy the planet. He didn't come to enslave us. Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save the lost." "The Son of Man is not come to destroy lives, but to save them." "I have come that they might have life and have it in sheer abundance."

Now, the metaphor begins to break down like unstable molecules. because somehow it doesn't make any sense to treat Jesus as if he's not from here. How can the maker of all that is be an alien in his own world? John tells us, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."**

OK, here is where my metaphor gets turned inside out because it turns out that Jesus was no alien invader but he was treated like an invader. Isaiah intuitively saw it coming all those long centuries earlier: He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering* and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces* he was despised, and we held him of no account. The political and religious leaders treated Jesus as an alien. Today, we use him for questionable gain and that amounts to the same treatment. How does John say it? He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet **the world did not know him**. He came to what was his own,* and **his own people did not accept him**. Jesus was treated like an alien from outer space or from Mexico. In Hebrews 13 read, "Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. ¹³Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured." Jesus, our Jesus, was treated as an alien.

We tried to destroy him because we thought he was trying to destroy us. The first question asked of Jesus was "Have you come to destroy us?" (Mark 1:24) Herod tried to kill him in his manger. Satan tried to co-opt him in the wilderness battle. His own synagogue tried to throw him over a cliff. His family thought he was insane. His followers betrayed, denied, and deserted him. The "world" defined as all the gathered forces that oppose God and God's purposes, conspired to kill him. In spite of God loving the world that opposed God, we hung Jesus on a cross. It is hard to sing "Happy Birthday to you and many more" to a man who will in 33 short years die on a cross.

But Jesus really is from here and just in case we missed it, he became one of us. As Philippians puts it, "[He] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." As the Nicene Creed puts it, "**He was made man.**"

Today we celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ – the unique one who is not from here **and** is from here. Let's say we grant Jesus a wish. I believe he has always had an eternal wish. Jesus' wish is that we will be in relationship with him. I believe Jesus would have come even if we had never sinned. The incarnation comes out of the abundance of God and out of God's eternal desire to share the joy of being with creatures capable of bearing the divine image. In the Old Testament, God keeps showing up incognito here and there. God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. Enoch walked with God. More importantly, God walks with us. Jesus came to show us God, to demonstrate who we were meant to be. We would have needed those lessons even if we had not sinned.

Jesus wants to spend Christmas with us. There is a powerful word that you should hear with the ears of your heart: WITH. John says "The Word was with God" and the Word became flesh and lived with us. Jesus' last words to the disciples, some worshipping him and some doubting him, were: "And remember I am with you always." At the end of the Bible's story, there are these words: "God will dwell with them; they will be God's peoples, and God himself will be with them." Turns out there's nothing alien about Jesus. Turns out that before we were, he was. Turns out before there were powers and principalities arrayed against us, he was with us. "God with us" means that we are already in a relationship with God before we've even thought about it. Every person we encounter is in a relationship with God before they have any kind of relationship with us. And if that doesn't make us approach strangers and aliens and outsiders with reverence and amazement, I don't know what will.

Starting on Christmas Day, 2011, let us go forth to produce all the peace and praise we can muster. Every day, with every breath, as long as we live, let us wage peace. We will be fulfilling the Christmas wish of our Savior. Merry Christmas!