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St. Mark's Episcopal Anglican Church – Fairland

2nd Sunday after Christmas

Sunday, January 3, 2021

2 Christmas B, Holy Eucharist Rite II

In the Beginning

The Celebrant and LEM stand, maintaining physical distance. There is no procession.

Opening Rites

Celebrant: Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

LEM: *And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever.*

Celebrant: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Celebrant: Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One,

LEM: *Have mercy upon us.*

The Collect of the Day

Celebrant: The Lord be with you,

LEM: *And also with you.*

Celebrant: Let us pray.

The Celebrant says the Collect.

God of every creature,
whose Son was born for all the world;

we praise you for the shepherds
who lived between the earth and sky,
who, with animals and angels,
greeted the Word made flesh:
may we share their urgency
to meet the promised child
with wonder and with joy;
through Jesus Christ, who binds all things together. Amen.

The Lessons¹

The Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 62:6-12

⁶Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have posted sentinels;
all day and all night
they shall never be silent.
You who remind the LORD,
take no rest,
⁷and give him no rest
until he establishes Jerusalem
and makes it renowned throughout the earth.
⁸The LORD has sworn by his right hand
and by his mighty arm:
I will not again give your grain
to be food for your enemies,
and foreigners shall not drink the wine
for which you have labored;
⁹but those who garner it shall eat it
and praise the LORD,

¹ The readings are from the Revised Common Lectionary. See: <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>.
The table for readings in Year A for the Season After Pentecost may be found at:
<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/lections.php?year=A&season=Season%20after%20Pentecost>

and those who gather it shall drink it
in my holy courts.

¹⁰Go through, go through the gates,
prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway,
clear it of stones,
lift up an ensign over the peoples.

¹¹The LORD has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:
Say to daughter Zion,

“See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.”

¹²They shall be called, “The Holy People,
The Redeemed of the LORD”;
and you shall be called, “Sought Out,
A City Not Forsaken.”

LEM: *The Word of the Lord.*

Celebrant: Thanks be to God.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 97

¹The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!

²Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

³Fire goes before him,
and consumes his adversaries on every side.

⁴His lightnings light up the world;

the earth sees and trembles.

⁵The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the Lord of all the earth.

⁶The heavens proclaim his righteousness;
and all the peoples behold his glory.

⁷All worshipers of images are put to shame,
those who make their boast in worthless idols;
all gods bow down before him.

⁸Zion hears and is glad,
and the towns^[a] of Judah rejoice,
because of your judgments, O God.

⁹For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.

¹⁰The LORD loves those who hate^[b] evil;
he guards the lives of his faithful;
he rescues them from the hand of the wicked.

¹¹Light dawns^[c] for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.

¹²Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name!

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

The New Testament Lesson

Titus 3:4-7

⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water^[a] of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

LEM: *The Word of the Lord.*

Celebrant: Thanks be to God.

The Gospel

John 1:1-18

Then, all standing, the Deacon or a Priest reads the Gospel, first saying

Celebrant: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

LEM: *Glory to you, Lord Christ.*

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.^[b]

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own,^[c] and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,^[d] full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,^[e] who is close to the Father's heart,^[f] who has made him known.

Priest: The Gospel of the Lord.

LEM: *Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

The Sermon: ...and the Word was God²

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When I was growing up, it was the Bird that was the Word, mostly because the two words rhyme, which a band called the Trashmen put to memorable, if rather nonsensical, use in their 1963 song “Surfin’ Bird”. The Bird is either “a word” or “the word”, depending on whether one listens to the Trashmen sing that song, or the Ramones. The latter is the definitive version in more ways than one, but either way, the lyric means nothing and isn’t meant to. Either way, too, the song stays in your head with something of the persistence of a divinity or a migraine. Some pop tunes be like that. It’s so much the case for me that, to this day, every time I hear the prologue of the Gospel of John – our gospel for this morning, having as it always does the Christmas season’s last word – part of me cannot help hearing “In the beginning was the Bird, and the Bird was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was the Bird / Aaah, bap-a-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa / Ma-ma-mow ma-ma-mow / pa-rum-pa-pum-pum” and all the rest – which, the lyric insists by the time it finally ends, everybody’s heard, and everybody knows.

If you didn’t before, you do now. Sorry. Bang the drum slowly.

But whether or not the Bird is the Word, it’s the Word we have to focus on this morning, so let’s get there on a different road, via different words, some of those we won’t hear this year as often as we’re used to: Joy to the World, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king. What child is this, away in a manger, no crib for a bed, on Mary’s lap a-sleeping? O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie this silent night, this holy night, round yon virgin while shepherds watched their flocks and the herald angels, hark! sing glory to our newborn king.

That's what I thought: babe and king, manger and Mary, shepherds and angels, but no Bird, no Word. Maybe the first road was the right one after all. See, in John 1, as in Genesis 1 which it echoes, there are both, either by mention or implication. In the beginning was the Word God spoke, and there was light, and the light was life, and that light shone among us and upon us, and the darkness could not overcome it, for through it all things came into being and all on which it shone were good, at least to start with, and once the word had spoken, or been spoken, God rested. In the beginning.

More commentary has been written on this biblical chapter than on any other. Why? Because it presents in pristine simplicity an entire understanding of what is, how it came to be, and why. At first there was nothing, or worse: chaos. Then there was sound: a voice. Then there was light, then there was life, and it was good. There was, finally, a difference between then and now, before and after, and a distance between things that had the same origin but were no longer the same. Yet in that time and in that distance there were new things: silence when the voice stopped, and darkness where the light stopped. There was emptiness where there was not something; there was, and there was not. There was death remaining when life ended, turning living things back into just things, and then other things: soil and coal, diamonds and marble. Yet there remained all the things that God spoke into being and that the Word let become, things that were, things that are, and some things that did not come to pass but could have, things like rocks and stars, gold and neon, the yawning nothing of the space between the stars, and on any earth where life could one day come to be, the sea. But the sea was not life, though life could not

exist without it. The air was not life, though no life could live without it. The lights themselves were not life – not the sun, not the stars, not even the fires burning at the heart of worlds known and unknown, yet life could not abide without them, or with only them. In the cold, dry silence where there was nothing, nothing could be. Yet all of a sudden there was, and there is.

It didn't know it; it couldn't. None of it. Not one thing that came into being through the Word that was with God and was God knew that it was, or that 'there was when it was not', until us. Most of what is still has no idea that it is – and most of what 'is', they tell me, is the emptiness between things, from stars and galaxies to the particles that make up atoms, and energy in one form or another racing massless among it all, somehow making things come to be all the time, yet none forever. Almost none of that knows it, either. It does not live, it does not love, it does not celebrate or regret. It does...nothing, or just does what it does, which ends up signifying much the same thing. Life that is aware of itself is the only thing, of all the things that God spoke into being, that knows anything. That is, we.

But what does any of this have to do with a manger and a newborn king?

As far as the other gospels are concerned, not a single blessed thing. They manage to tell all of Jesus's story without much reference to creation. They pass down the history and legends of Mary, his blessed mother and Joseph, his longsuffering father, the twelve apostles, the seventy disciples he sends out, his three best friends and the woman, that other Mary from just down the road, who loved him best and Thomas, called the twin, who knew him best, without making him the verbal and eternal essence of creation, the very light that made life and the life that was light that came

among us though we knew it not. They present him speaking on the mount and on the plain, healing, teaching, preaching; tried, crucified, and risen; transfigured, even, and ascended, all that a son and a rabbi and a messiah could be, without making him, without seeing him as, God. Son of God, yes; that they realized. But God? That's John. Why? That's what the commentators were trying to figure out. What had John seen? What did John know? How did John know?

It is entirely possible that Jesus did not know that he was divine and equal with the God whom he knew as Father, the Father, his Father. Both trinitarian and non-trinitarian Christologies (that is, studies about what it means to be Christ) are consistent with this, much in the way that Buddhists teach that one may not necessarily be aware of one's own enlightenment. Being enlightened means having shed all attachment and illusion that enables one to act with infinite compassion for all living things and to become one with the nothing-that-is. One may simply do this, without realizing why, as though one could do no other. Jesus may have lived as God not knowing he was God, to show us what that was like, with all of us realizing at the end, or after the end, what it meant. This is, of course, how it all worked out. Jesus never referred to himself as the Word, or even as the Bird which the Word was, the Spirit taking the form of a dove from the earliest days of Christian reflection. John does have him say that "I and the Father are one," but no other, let alone earlier, source has him say it, and it bespeaks no false-put doubt to wonder why not. Much in the manner of a king who puts on a cloak and walks among his subjects though they know him not, God could have very easily put on the cloak of humanity and walked among us fully of love and as love, fully alive and as

life, but always mindful of all that God is. As such, God as God could see what we would do about that, we whom he loved enough to create and allow to become self-aware and have powers very like his own, if on a smaller scale. Would we recognize it, honor and cherish it, be wise enough and self-aware enough to live as pure love would have us live? Would we do so knowing that we would not last forever and were subject to the hurts and torments, as well the joys and achievements, that are as plain to us as the noses on our faces and the songs in our hearts? Would we seek to enlighten ourselves as we sought to preserve ourselves, and would we see that, as God sees that, as good?

God could've come among us as fully God to find out. Instead, God emptied god's self and came among us that way, as a child that knew nothing except the warmth of its mother and the hay, the lowing of the cows in the byre and a father's smile, a mother's tears and laughter, and the need for food. Becoming human, becoming a part of God's own creation, Jesus, like the rest of us, had to learn the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, light and darkness, freedom and license, duty and chains. He had to learn how to let forth the light that was within him, as we must learn to do. He had to come to understand and accept that that light could go out, that he could put it out, or others could do it for him. He had to learn, as we have to learn, that there was when we were not, and there will be once we are gone. Life will go on, in one form or another, mostly unaware that it is. God, known or unknown, bidden or unbidden, will go on while life lasts, and things are.

We are, as far as we can tell, the only things that live that know this, though even the simplest creatures somehow 'knows' that it is because it 'knows'

what it must do to keep on living. Until something stops it or it finds its own end, it does, and it 'knows' this. We say that God saw all this and saw that it was good, but we are also told that it did not remain so. We say, as Genesis and John say, that when creation reached in us its latest pinnacle of self-awareness and creativity, it fell. It learned – we learned – to make light, but we also learned to make darkness. We learned that we could make the light shine, physically and metaphorically. We also learned that we could put in out, physically and metaphorically. We learned that we could create life, in some ways, and change it in other ways. We also learned that we could end it – and did, had to, in order to survive. We learned that we were capable equally of ecstasy and terror, could be as gods, could even make gods out of our own desires or needs or imaginations, but could not be God. We could create, but not create all that is. We could destroy, but not destroy all that is.

That, too, God saw, and so emptied himself to become Jesus, entering the world as the life that was light, to make sure that that light did not go out. He came so that life itself could be saved from itself. He came so that all who lived could be made holy, in the power of the Word that spoke it all into being in the first place, and speaks it still. Be that Word a Bird, the Bird or neither one, as the Christmas season comes to an end again, now everybody's heard – and everybody knows. *Amen.*

Preparation of the Table

A musical offering may be bade The Deacon or Priest prepares the altar for the Eucharist.

The People make ready their gifts of bread and wine. The LEM continues

The Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

The LEM prays. In the silence after each bidding, the People offer their prayers without speaking.

I ask your prayers for all God's people; for our bishops, our clergy, and this gathering, and for all ministers and people. Pray for the Church.

Silence

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all. Pray for justice and peace.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison.

Pray for those in any need or trouble.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of God. Pray that they may seek, and pray that they might find.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the departed [*especially N.N.*]. Pray for those who have died.

Silence

I ask your prayers for those on the prayer list of this parish, and those whose needs are known to you alone.

Silence

The Celebrant adds a concluding collect.

The Peace

The People stand.

Celebrant: The peace of the Lord be always with you,

LEM: *And also with you.*

The Ministers and People greet one another in silence while keeping physical distance.

The Holy Eucharist: The Great Thanksgiving

Celebrant: The Lord be with you,

LEM: *And also with you.*

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

LEM: *We lift them to the Lord.*

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

LEM: *It is right to give God thanks and praise.*

Then, facing the Holy Table, the Celebrant proceeds

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, Because you gave Jesus Christ, your only Son, to be born for us; who, by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, was made perfect of the flesh of the Virgin Mary his mother; so that we might be delivered from the bondage of sin, and receive power to become your children.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the host of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to the glory of your Name:

The LEM says

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the

highest.

Blessed are they who come in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the
highest.

The people stand or kneel. The People hold forth their gifts. The Celebrant continues

Holy and gracious Father: In love you made us for yourself, and, when we had fallen into sin, evil, and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you. He offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his friends, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this in memory of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine, gave thanks, gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

LEM Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

The Celebrant continues

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O God, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ by whom, and with whom, and in

whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. Amen.

Now, as Christ taught us, we are bold to say,

The LEM prays

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

Give us this day our daily bread.

*And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those
who trespass against us.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

The Breaking of the Bread

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread, and then keeps a period of silence. The Celebrant continues

Celebrant: [Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;

LEM: Therefore, let us keep the feast. [Alleluia.]

Celebrant: The Gifts of God for the People of God.

The People consume their gifts. After Communion, the Celebrant says

Let us pray. *The Celebrant prays*

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

The Celebrant says

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord be with you, this day and always, and give you peace.

The LEM says

Let us go forth, in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

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For information about St. Mark's, please visit our website:

www.stmarksfairland.org

www.stmarks-silverspring.org

We hope that today's service has been a blessing to you.

We are here to serve you, and hope to see you again.

Please feel free to call us, email us, or visit us online.