

**EMMANUEL, COME ... AND
STILL HE COMES**
John 1:1-5, 14-18
December 11, 2011

There are questions raised by this passage. Sometimes preachers fall prey to the habit of answering questions no one is asking, but I think if not now, certainly in the course of living (unless we succeed in creating our own reality, our own fantasy), we wonder. We ask questions. The first task for the preacher may be stimulate questions.

1. Are we alone in the universe?
2. Is God real?
3. If so, what is the nature of this God . . . impersonal or personal, caring or aloof?
4. How can God be known?

If those questions ever occur to you, there are answers proposed by this Scripture passage.

John 1:1-5, 14-18

Last week we read Mark's description of Jesus' entry into the world. In fact Mark didn't "waste" any words on the Nativity. No Mary and Joseph, no manger or magi, no angels or shepherds watching their flocks by night. Eager to get to Jesus' beginning . . . the beginning of his public ministry announced by the fiery preacher/prophet John the Baptizer, Mark plunges ahead.

Now we turn to John's account of the beginning of Jesus and find he backs it up not to Isaiah's prophecy as Mark did (about 400 years) but to the beginning . . . the real beginning of it all. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." That's as far back as you can trace anything. It's referred to as pre-existence. Jesus therefore was a long, long, infinitely long time before He actually made his appearance on this earth, that is became flesh and blood human in a baby, to grow into a man . . . God incarnate, in the flesh.

If we weren't already exposed to such a claim; if we hadn't heard it all our lives and

were hearing it for the first time, we would be astonished, incredulous, even fearful. You see, then as now, we have contradictory drives within ourselves. We want to be close to God, on the one hand; but on the other we want to keep God at a safe distance. God at a safe distance means different things at different times. When we are down and feeling destitute; despairing, we want God close. When we are relatively comfortable, well provided for and feeling competent, we still want God but at a safe distance, i.e. far enough away to not challenge the personal management of our lives. "Thank you God, but I can take it from here if you don't mind."

Lest I digress too far, John continues his description of this Word, the divine communication we have come to know as Jesus, by telling us not only that He existed/pre-existed, but is the means by which everything, no exception, came into being. God spoke creation into being and the Word was Christ, thus a magnificent claim – Christ was the life and light of all people and

remains so . . . shining in the dark never to be extinguished.

Are you shaking yet? Are you stunned at such an announcement?! Or, is it evocative of a knowing nod. That is after all something we know we are to believe and is appropriate to the season.

I have imagined a scenario of a church service at this time of year, where someone who had never heard such outlandish claims was present, maybe several since the foundational story seems more and more muted by the commercial obsession and merry making of the "season without reason." When this passage was read some may mutter, "How primitive." Others muse it's important to remember the occasion for our celebrating . . . "Give it some religious basis is all good and proper." But in the 22nd row on the left side of the auditorium, a man forgets himself and rises to his feet. It's completely out of order and you can feel the congregation stiffening as he speaks. "I don't know that I've ever heard this before, but something in me is crying out, 'It's true.'

It's true isn't it! We are not alone in this cold universe. It's true." The ushers hadn't been trained for anything like this. They scrambled, conferred and quickly agreed he must be removed. "It's true," he said, louder this time. There was nothing else to do. Two of the ushers went to his seat and gently removed him. He did not resist. As he was taken out of the sanctuary his words, echoing down the halls, grew fainter, but still clearly audible. And then it stopped.

It wasn't easy for the preacher or the congregation to regain composure. Some were thinking, "How dare he disturb the silence and sanctity of this holy place!" But there were others, a number actually who left church that day unable to get the sound of that man's voice out of their heads. It ruined their Christmas, for you see they couldn't just go on with business as usual. And when Christmas Eve and the day came, they found in themselves a more reflective profound peace, a deeper joy and heartfelt love for God and humankind. They sought ways to respond that were compassionate. It's true! The eternal light

shone in the darkness and the darkness did not, nor has it overcome it.

There are lots of ways to ruin your Christmas:

- exhaustion; physically and financially
- family tensions; different ideas about how to do Christmas
- unable to find a promised gift
- a health issue, loss of a loved one

Maybe you never thought about Christmas being ruined by the realization that we are not alone; that we are cared for by a personal, loving God who has invaded this world with the express intent of recapturing it/us with love for each and all of us. Think about it.