

Year C 1st Sunday of Christmas

2021.12.26

Isaia 61:10-62:3; Psalm 147:13-21; Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7; John 1:1-18

St. David's Church 8 am and 10 am Chapel and Livestream

Rev. Emily Zimbrick-Rogers

The Cosmic Comes Close: Emmanuel, God with Us

Good morning and merry Christmas! Today the first Sunday of Christmas is also the second day of Christmas in a 12-day season that stretches until the feast day of the epiphany when we celebrate the visit of the magi. Thus, we have time to continue our reflection on the light of Christ and how it is enkindled in our hearts as our collect says and how we might seek to live out this light in our lives.

Today I hope you will permit me a little bit of creativity for our sermon reflection time. Many of you were at church or watched the live stream on Christmas Eve, some of you were here for church yesterday and most likely in the last few days or weeks, you've been bombarded by words, images, sounds, activity—and I know for myself at least, not all of those things have led to deeper spiritual awareness or connecting with God.

Thus, today on this first Sunday of Christmas, we might take a moment to pause, to reflect, to search more quietly in contemplation of the great and profound mystery we hear about in our gospel passage, the prologue or beginning of John. I'd like to invite you to some visio divina, which is meditation of art for devotional application. We will look at three images together that were inspired by our today's readings and the themes for today—very good news that the Lord has

done marvelous things for Israel and for us and for the whole world. The light, the eternal word, coming into the world this very cosmic message is also good news comes so close to us. The word became flesh and lives among us and we have seen his glory full of grace and truth.

Those of you who are joining us on the live stream you can print out the bulletin from the email that was sent out but the images also will be shown on the screen for you to also participate. If you are at home you are invited to get some colored pencils or crayons or markers as there is an interactive art piece, and kids in the congregation, if you flip to the third art piece it's one that you're invited to color as you listen. The whole congregation is invited to take home the bulletin this week and spend some more time with the images and with the scriptures in your own prayer and devotional time—perhaps all of us might color in the last image as we read the scripture and pray.

If you have a paper bulletin, I invite you to turn to the first reading from Isaiah and the image *Can't Keep Silent* by Lisle Gwynn Garrity.

Take a moment to gaze into the image as I read a few of the verses again. Notice the color, notice the movement, notice where your attention is drawn. The artist envisioned this woman as Mary, Jesus mother, and sees in this reading echoes of her later prophetic hymn in the Magnificat. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord my whole being shall exalt in my God for he has clothed me with the

garments of salvation and covered me with the robe of righteousness. ... the earth brings forth its shoots ... the Lord will cause righteousness and praise spring up before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent ... the nations shall see your vindication and all the kings your glory.

We see the boldness and confidence in this woman matched by the bold confidence of this prophetic word from Isaiah, who could not see in his own day how God would fulfill this promise. Isaiah had this vision that was both for Zion or Jerusalem the close community around him but the hope was that the good news was not only for Israel's sake but for all the nations. Israel was a beacon or a lighthouse pointing back to God. The call to Isaiah, to Israel, to Mary, to ourselves, to invite others to come along with us as we see the glory of God as we trust in the promises that what God has planted will spring up, righteousness will be a sheltering tree.

Where do you find yourself in the scripture or in this image? Can you envision yourself as Isaiah or Mary proclaiming this prophecy to the world? Or perhaps might you be the one who is hearing these words from her or from Isaiah? You shall be called by a new name, you shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord. Perhaps you see yourself under the shade of this tree. Perhaps you are the tree yourself, rooted deep, growing out to be shade and home and shelter for the birds of the air and critters of the earth and the humans who will come and sit

against your strong trunk. If you can't enter into the image, try to find yourself somewhere in the words of the scripture.

Let us turn to the page in the bulletin or see on the screen the blue and gold abstract painting titled *Light Pierces Through* by Lisle Gwynn Garrity.

This image is inspired by John chapter 1—the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. Gaze into the image, breathe deeply and let yourself connect. I don't think it is inconsequential that this scripture is portrayed abstractly. The scripture is so cosmic and so otherworldly and so it is difficult for us to grasp or put into words or images. John 1 is a creation story just like Genesis and we are invited into participating in this re-creation. Light from light true God from true God—coming to dwell among us.

We know about the persistence of light even in the midst of the darkest dark of space. Light travels endlessly and does not diminish. We might see this in this image the gold leaf covering over, yet not erasing the very dark dark blue that perhaps represents deep space, deep water, all of creation. The light we see from the sun and the stars comes to us from billions of light years away not feeling not diminishing and the artist Garrity reflects that this is God's nature and orientation to endlessly travel to reach us. We have not seen God yet we have seen Christ and Christ is in fact this light that has traveled endlessly to reach us. Many people today thousands of centuries have felt like they sit in darkness. May you reach out

and grasp the light that is coming God is traveling endlessly to reach you with grace and love, made known to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Let us turn to the third image Thread of Creation by Lauren Wright Pittman.

If you have colored pencils or crayons, you're welcome to listen and color at the same time. Let your gaze scan over this image and hear the words of holy scripture that inspired the artist.

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. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

I love how different this black-and-white pen drawing is from the previous blue-and-gold painting, both inspired by the same scripture. This is perhaps an invitation for us on pondering how to live out the light of Christ into our lives. Light Pierces Through is serious and bold, where Thread of Creation is playful and invites our co-creation to color the image. Each artist we've heard from today has given us a gift of themselves, interpreting and applying Holy Scripture to their own unique gifts and callings.

The star in the center of the image radiates out through the seven days of creation and then out into a second circle of houses, towns, and countryside. Hands

point in to the center light, perhaps to represent John who is mentioned in this passage as a witness or guide. We also see open hands and light is pointing into them. Perhaps that might represent Mary and us receiving this light in ourselves and giving it out in the world. There's nowhere this light does not reach in the image. The light draws us to one another and draws us in to the center, which is Christ. The artist Lauren Wright Pittman wrote that God lives among us that we might truly live.

And then the light invites us to be sent out to testify to the cosmic re-creation of God calling us children and the Holy Spirit being given to fill our hearts and our lives. Let us find ourselves this week and throughout the 12 days of Christmas circling back again and again to this good news that light comes to us and that we can shine forth that light as light bearers to the world.