

**“John: A Cosmic Conception”**  
by Rev. David J. Wood  
4th Sunday of Advent: December 21, 2025  
First Congregational Church Camden, Maine

**Genesis 1:1-5**

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

**John 1:1-5, 10-14**

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 overtake 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. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

~~~~~

During these Sundays of Advent, we have been focusing on one Gospel at a time and asking what would our celebration of Christmas be like if we only had that Gospel? We started with Mark who gives us “A Concealed Conception.” Then we went to Matthew who gives us “A Scandalous Conception.” Last week, we took up Luke, who give us “A Subversive Conception” of Christmas. Today we take up the Gospel of John who gives us “A Cosmic Conception” of Christmas.

If Luke gives us a Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger...John give us a riddle, wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

*“In the beginning....”*

No doubt you noticed that the first words of Genesis are the first words of the Gospel of John.

In John, we are back to the beginning not just of Jesus...but of all things...where Jesus was...with God...is God... and maker of all things!

How's that for a mystery?

John does not want us to miss the point that the coming of Jesus into the world is no less momentous or monumental than the creation of all things!

"The WORD" ...in Greek, "the LOGOS" ...meaning, "the LIFE FORCE of the UNIVERSE" ...was present at the Creation of the World, at the very beginning of all things...the very being of God...the source of all that is LIFE.

*The Word, that Word*, has become flesh and lived among us...that Word, John proclaims, is non other than Jesus Christ.

In the 4th Century, the Church encapsulated John's way of naming Jesus in what became known as the Nicene Creed:

We believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
begotten from the Father before all ages,  
God from God,  
Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made;  
of the same essence as the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven...

In Genesis, we learn that the human being was made in the Image of God.

In John, we learn that God was made in the image of the human being.

The theological word for that is INCARNATION: which literally means, "in flesh."

Simon Critchley a philosopher who has had a rather negative take on religious life. However, in his latest book, he confesses an “Intoxicating fascination with the concept of Incarnation.” He notes, while it’s not unique to Christianity but it is Christianity’s core claim about God.

As he put it, “the Divine becoming human; the Timeless emptying into time; the Absolute Idea becoming Matter. The impossible union of spheres of existence.” I think John would affirm his summation of “incarnation.”

The infinite encompassing the finite is something we can get our mind around. It’s the finite encompassing the infinite that’s beyond our comprehension.

There is more to us...to this world...to God than we ever conceived or imagined. As one theologian put it, “All that was MORE than flesh became flesh so that all that was flesh – might become MORE.”

What is beyond our comprehension has the possibility of enlarging one’s soul.

Have you ever had that experience of finding yourself in a location, a physical location, where the horizon opens up and all of a sudden, you are grasped with the magnificence and beauty of the world. It’s in such moments you realize how small you world had become – not the world so much as your perception of it. In such moments, you feel drawn out of something small into something large and you yourself feel enlarged...in a good way...not in an egotistical way..but in a soulful way.

In this world of ours, we become so closed in and closed off. With all our screen time, our horizons don’t expand...they shrink...we get smaller and lose our bearings... so much gets screened out.

You know that impulse, when you have spent too much uninterrupted time at your computer: “I’ve got to get up and go outside!”

John wants us to get outside of our small, shrinking, trivializing habits of thought and encounter the mystery of the God who has come near to us in Christ.

“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 overtake it.”

This is the perfect day, the Winter Solstice for us to encounter these words from the Gospel of John. Today, at precisely 10:03 a..m. Eastern Time, the world tilted from darkness to light. We have begun our journey from darkness to light!

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overtake it.” In him a whole new possibility of and for life has opened up for us.

“To all who received him, who believed in his name,  
he gave the power to become children of God  
who were born not of blood  
or of the will of the flesh  
or the will of man,  
but of God.”

It so interesting to note, that the only explicit reference John makes to birth in these opening verses is to possibility of OUR re-birth. (As you may recall, John is known for that way of putting spiritual transformation.). In John, we learn that Christ’s coming promised, then and now, nothing less than a new beginning for each of us...and for the world.

What a magnificent story! Such is the story has the power to concentrate our lives... even as it opens up our horizons.

*I want to take you back to the day before the 4th Sunday of Advent in the year 1968. It was that Saturday, December 21st – 57 years ago yesterday that Jim Lovell, Bill Anders, and Frank Gorman were strapped into a capsule atop the most powerful rocket that had ever been built. The launch that day would be the rocket’s first manned space flight.*

The astronauts were piloting a redesigned command module of a spacecraft that had burned up on the launchpad in a tragic accident just a year before. It was a daunting mission.

The mission was Apollo 8 – some would argue, it was the most important of all the Apollo missions. Before Apollo 8, no human had left earth’s orbit.

For verifiable reasons, NASA engineers were worried that the mission could be a catastrophic failure – so many unknowns... Given the mission’s proximity to Christmas, in the event that it *was* a disaster and its crew were literally lost in space, Christmas would forevermore be shrouded in tragedy.

Apollo 8 and its crew blasted off for the moon without incident. Eventually, on track and on schedule, and to the great relief of NASA, Apollo 8 slipped into lunar orbit. Its crew became the first humans to orbit the moon

It was Christmas Eve.

The plan was for the crew of Apollo 8 to orbit the moon 10 times and then return home. On the first three orbits...their spacecraft was flying backwards with its windows angled downward towards the surface of the moon. Their mission was to photograph the surface of the moon as much as possible to determine the best landing site for a moon landing that would come to pass in future missions.

Believe it or not....No one had even considered taking a picture of the earth.

It was on their 4th orbit of the moon, they maneuvered the capsule so that it rolled to face forward. And as they emerged from the far side of the moon they were stunned to see what no human being had ever seen before... the earth was rising just over the horizon of the moon.



Earth appeared as a beautiful blue orb of light and color over against the completely black void of space. Once it came into view, they scrambled to load color film into the camera. Up to then, they were using only black and white film.



That's will Bill Anders snapped the iconic picture that would become known as "Earthrise."

Anders later said, "We were sent to examine the moon... instead we discovered Earth."

Inside mission control, it was standing room only. In 64 countries it was estimated that a billion people – more than a quarter of the world's population – were glued to

televisions and radios.

At 8:30 p.m. Houston time, CBS interrupted the Doris Day show and cut to Walter Cronkite and a never-before-seen picture flickered into view.

In the black and white video, a small orb shone in the upper left part of the screen – likely earth, but viewers didn't know for sure. Video imaging was blurred.

Also, it was the first time earth was being seen from the Moon. Then came the voice of Frank Borman, "This is Apollo 8, coming to you live from the Moon."

He took a few minutes to explain how they had spent Christmas Eve – taking pictures, doing experiments. Then the astronauts spent time describing the moon. They described its landscape – its mountains, its landmarks and caters.

As the scheduled TV time was winding down and as the spacecraft moved across the Sea of Tranquility, they had one additional unscheduled thing to do before signing off.

Bill Anders spoke up, "We are now approaching lunar sunrise and for all the people back on Earth, the crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send you."

No one in Mission Control, or anyone else – not even the astronauts families – had any idea about the content of the message the men were about to deliver.

While the face of the moon continued to move across television screens, without further introduction, Anders began,

"In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light."

And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness."

Jim Lovell continued:

"And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst to the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.'

"And God made the firmament and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day."

Frank Borman picked up from there:

"And God said, 'Let the waters under the Heaven be gathered together unto one place. And the the dry land appear.' And it was so. And God called the dry land Earth. And the gathering together of the waters He called seas. And God saw that it was good."

Borman paused, and continued:

"And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, and Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you – all of you on good earth."

The astronauts signed off and A moment later, TV screens around the world went dark.

Inside Mission Control, no one moved.

Then, one after another, these scientists and engineers in Houston began to weep.

Back in the studio of CBS, Walter Cronkite fought back tears as he came back on the air.

Such was Eve of Christmas, in the year 1968...a year when earth was in great turmoil: the Vietnam war raged, two national leaders – Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy had been assassinated, anger and outrage had irrupted in riots & protests across the land. Violence, division, dissension was rife throughout the nation.

But that night...at the end of a tumultuous year in the midst of a tumultuous time, a word was spoken and we saw the earth as if for the first time and something awakened...

The ancient words and the view out of their tiny capsule beamed from the heavens called to a longing for ourselves and our world...

This is the time of year we tell the story of how God who has come near to us...how the God of heavens entered our skin, took on our life, and, in time, our death, and if we receive that Word...we we will never see our life or our death or this world the same way again...

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us”

Thanks be to God. Amen.

~~~~~

Note: For many of the details of the Apollo 8 mission and, particularly, the account of the Christmas Eve broadcast, I am indebted to Robert Kurson’s account in his book, *Rocket Men: The Daring Odyssey of Apollo 8 and the Astronauts Who Made Man’s First Journey to the Moon*, (New York: Random House, 2018), pp. 260-263.