

A Storytelling Commentary on John 1:1-20

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This is John's story of Jesus' birth and it is an introduction to the whole of the Gospel. It is also John's creation story. It, like Genesis 1, introduces a new story of the creation of the world.

In the background of this story is the extraordinary experience of Jesus in the lives of people. Those who composed this tradition were simply overwhelmed by the character of Jesus. The impact of this one person on them and on the world lies behind this story. When you tell this, you want to convey that impact in the tone in which this hymn is recited. It is a hymn to be told in a spirit of love and honor, of glorification and of worship. The spirit of this Logos hymn is a spirit of the recognition of the presence of the holy one in the midst of human life.

The hymn is cosmic in its scale. I've just been reading about a new gamma ray detector that is going to be blasted into space and will circle the world to perceive gamma rays that are produced by the explosions of supernovas throughout the cosmos. That's the spirit of this hymn. Jesus exploded upon all of creation and the energy that was generated by his life, death, and resurrection radiates throughout all of subsequent history and it also, as John recognized, sets all of previous history in a new context.

The creative power of the word of this story as told and heard by people is linked with the energy that created the whole of the cosmos. This creative energy of life, hope, and love radiates through this Logos hymn. One of the dynamics that is present in this hymn is the contrast between the light that Jesus brings into the world (which also is a verbal thread with the first day of creation in Genesis 1) and the darkness of chaos. Just as the creation of the world began with the creation of light and the separation of light and darkness, so also here the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. This metaphor comes from Genesis 1 but it is also descriptive of the later stories of conflict between Jesus and his adversaries and of those who were given new light like the man born blind who saw and upon whom light dawned.

The people who believed in him experienced a new life. Everything was set in a new light. A related motif in the hymn is that Jesus gave those who believed in him power to become children of God. Just as they recognized that he was one with God so also Jesus gave people who believed in him the ability to become children of God, to be born by God's Spirit. Jesus gave this possibility of intimacy with God to others. It is also implied that this ability to be a child of God is also given to those who hear and believe in the story that follows this hymn.

Thus the word becomes flesh in Jesus but it also becomes flesh in the telling of Jesus' story. The embodiment of the word that happens in the storyteller telling this story about

Jesus is also part of this extraordinary energy. Another characteristic of the telling of the story needs to be that spiritual energy and the communication of the energy of God that was made present in Jesus. This energy is also related to Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Through his relationship with God, Jesus made known God's very identity and the character of God. So these are words of love, of honor and glory, of holiness, of awe and wonder. They are also words of intimacy, joy, and light. As you tell this story, pay attention to the energy that is generated by these words and the dynamics that are created between you as the teller and performer of these words and those who are listening. The dynamic of intimacy and joy that is created in the telling of this hymn is itself part of the energy of Jesus' Spirit. It is a sacrament of Jesus' real presence.