

**Trinity Church in the City of Boston**  
The Rev. Dr. William W. Rich  
December 25, 2019  
Christmas Day – John 1

Please be seated.

I invite you to take the blue hymnal from the pew rack in front of you, and open to Hymn #82. I'm going to sing the first verse, and you can sing along if you'd like, or you can simply read the words.

“Of the Father’s love begotten, ere the worlds began to be, he is Alpha and Omega, he the source, the ending he, of the things that are, that have been, and that future years shall see, evermore and evermore!”

A flash of unimaginable light and a Big Bang!

The explosion of the Divine Love that could not be contained within God happened, they say, about thirteen and three quarters billion years ago. The Source of all being could not contain Itself. To stay within the Godhead would have been selfish. And God is anything but selfish.

And so the Divine Love exploded into Light and Being for us, so that we might be. “Let there be light, and there was light.” (Genesis 1:3) In that Light, in that light, there was Love. But such powerful Light can be blinding. Such powerful Love is hard to embrace. You cannot cuddle up to a cosmos. It's simply too powerful. Too much Light to see the Love that's embedded within it.

And because the God who made that Light, and made it for Love, wanted us to be able to see and not be blinded, not burned up by the Light and Love that we could not comprehend or take in: the Love and Light of God did a shift, just the way that light does. Instead of exploding and overwhelming, God decided to hem in the Divine Light, willingly, and humbly. And en-womb the Divine Love in a form that we could see and touch and love in return. God in our flesh. A human vulnerable child, not nearly so scary as an explosive light. Lovable. Touchable. Someone we could see as one of us. Someone we could sing to as a babe, hearing a lullaby. Someone we could wrap up in warm clothing. To shelter that one from the winter's cold. Someone who, like us, needed to learn how to speak words. “Mama. Papa. Love. Light.” Someone who needed to learn to speak those: so that he could embody love and light.

Earlier this month I visited the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. Maybe you've seen pictures of that enormous Creche and Neapolitan Christmas tree that's visited there by thousands every year. But what you can miss, as you walk into that room, is a statue. A statue of the Mother and Child. It's made of limestone. There are traces of color and gilding on it. There's blue and salmon red on Mary's cloak. She is life-sized and seated.

She has two things in her lap. The Child, the Christ Child, is supported on her left hip and nestled into the crook of her left arm. And on her right hip, a large book. She has opened it, and her

thumb and forefinger are holding up a page for him. While, with her other three fingers, she marks a place in the book, a few pages along that she wants to turn to next.

He is maybe four years old, and he helps her mark the pages with his finger. He looks up at her. His head is tilted back. He's looking directly into her eyes, tenderly. But inquisitively. He looks at her, while with his right forefinger he points to something in the text that we cannot see, as if to say with a wordless gaze, "What does this mean, mother? What does this mean?"

So I've been imagining, ever since, that it was his fourth birthday. And that he says in a kind of dialogue with her, something like this...

"Mama, can I have four stories for my fourth birthday? One for each year? Four stories, mama?"

"Of course, my love. What four stories would you like? What are your favorites?"

"Mama, you know, all my favorite stories are 'L' and 'L' stories."

"'L' and 'L'?"

"Light and Love stories, mama. Light and Love."

"Well, which one would you like to start with?" she says.

"The one where Adam and Eve get wrapped up in skins."

"Oh, and why do you like that story?"

"Well, mama, you know, the serpent tricked them, and things went bad. The world became a kind of dark and not very lovable place. But what I love about the story is that God doesn't seem to be too angry. God wants them to be warm, and warmth is a kind of light, isn't it, mom? God wants them to be loved. And so God becomes a tailor, and sews up for them skins. So that they can be warm."

And she says, "You know what that reminds me of, my son?"

He says, "Yes, mama, I know. You like thinking about the night I was born when all you had to wrap me up with was some bands of cloth. And every time I think about that story of God, the tailor, I think about you and Papa wrapping me up in bands of cloth because you wanted me to be loved. You wanted me to know the world has light in it and not just dark."

"So, what's the second story you want to hear? my son."

"Oh mama, it's another 'L' and 'L' story. It's an 'L' and 'L' story about Moses and his sister, Miriam."

"And what is it you love about that story? my son."

“Well, mama, the world didn't stop being a dark place just because God sewed up garments for Adam and Eve. The world was still a hard and unloving place. You know, our ancestors were slaves, slaves in Egypt. But Moses and Miriam... Moses and Miriam followed a pillar of light out, out from slavery to say, “God still loves you.” God still loves you. And I've wondered ever since mama. Has that pillar of light continued in our world, or did it disappear when they walked out of Egypt?”

“Oh no, my son, the pillar of light still is here. Raise your right arm, my son. There's a pillar of light. You can be a pillar of light. Because you know, there are so many people still, our people and other people, oppressed and enslaved, and they need someone to lead them like a pillar of light. Would you like to be their pillar of light?”

“Sure, mama. Sure.”

“And what's your third story, son? What's the third one that you love?”

“Well, it's about our great, great grandfather, David, the shepherd King. How many ‘greats’ is it, mama?”

“Well... well count your fingers and toes, my son. How many?”

“Well, let's see, mom, I've got, uh, 10 fingers, and uh, I think I've got 10 toes.”

“Well, you need to say ‘great’ that many times and more to find out how great your grandfather was.”

“Wow. He was great, wasn't he? But what I love about him, mama, is the story about him and Goliath. You know the slingshot story? Like the one you got me for my birthday. What I love about that story, mama, is he was just a little boy. Maybe not much bigger than me. But he had the light of courage. He loved his people, and loved them so much, that he was courageous enough to go against this giant of a man.”

“I wonder, mama. Was...was he afraid?”

“I think he was, my son. It's okay to be afraid. We're all afraid in this dark world.”

“Well...well, mama, then: how did he do it? How? How did he find the courage, since he was afraid?”

“Well, my son, you know that, that wonderful poem, that they say David wrote? ‘The Lord is my shepherd.’ You know that poem, my son. You know what it says near the end of it? It says, ‘You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.’ It says, “‘Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. They...they strengthen me.’ Maybe, maybe David, the shepherd, knew that God was rod and staff and comfort and would prepare a table before him. Even in Goliath’s presence. Light in the midst of darkness. Love in the face of giant hatred.”

“I love that story, mama.... Mama, I don't want a fourth story. I'm getting hungry. Can... can... can we have my birthday breakfast now, mama? And... and mama, I know I've never been allowed to have anything other than a little bit of bread and milk. But today for my fourth birthday, can I have a taste of wine? My first taste of wine, mama?”

“Of course, my son.”

“Mama, I've been thinking about bread and wine. I've been thinking about how bread strengthens us. And what about this wine that I'm going to taste? What does that do?”

“Well...well, wine gives you joy, my son. A little bit of wine gives you some joy. That's a kind of light too my son. Joy.”

“Mama...mama, could I be bread? Could I be joy?”

“Well, you already are to me, my son. And maybe you will be for others too. Maybe. Maybe together a little bit of bread and a little bit of wine. Maybe together we can be light and love for the world. Because, God knows, this world needs love and light. So, let's celebrate your birthday, my son. A little bit of sweet bread. Your first taste of wine.”

Joy. Joy to the world.