

THE TWELFTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS  
*A sermon on John 1:1-18 by the Revd Karen Quah*

Today we celebrate the last or the twelfth day of Christmas. Most of you are probably familiar with that weird carol. You know, *On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me*, a bunch of weird stuff? It was brought to my attention recently at Compline, that there are several parodies of this carol which I wasn't aware of. Also, in my extremely serious research, I came across a Tik Tok version – *On the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, my true love gave to me trust issues, crushing gas lighting anxiety...*

Anyway, if you're anything like me, you may be wondering what these twelve days of Christmas are all about. Coz as things stand, the way the commercial season goes, the season of 'Christmas' which began sometime in November or October in some cases, is finished. New Years Eve celebrations, gone. We've had the fireworks. The Christmas tree's been taken down or needs to be. The lights and decorations too. Until in October/November, the whole 'Christmas' machine will start all over again, like Groundhog day.

Now, the traditional Christian celebration of Christmas goes a bit differently. If we dig deeper into Christian history, we discover that Christmas Day itself ushers in twelve more days of celebration, ending tomorrow on January 6 with the feast of the Epiphany. These 12 days give us the opportunity to reflect on what the Incarnation means in our lives, which is basically the gist of our Gospel reading today – John 1:1-18.

Today is the final day that we, as a Church, get to contemplate the most momentous event in human history – the arrival of God into the world in the form of a baby.

*V.14 The Word became flesh and made its dwelling among us.*

And so, in light of this and whatever may lie ahead in 2025, I'd like to invite you on a kind of Lectio Divina, a holy or sacred reading of the text – whereby we read the passage with intent – trusting God in our inmost beings with what surfaces at a heart level. In a Lectio reading, we don't examine each verse like in a Bible study or an exegetical reading of the text. Instead, we allow what God wants to show us to be the focus of our Lectio.

And so, today, given that it is the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, we will be focusing in particular on the verse I just mentioned – which is the very essence of Christmas.

*Verse 14: The Word became flesh and made its dwelling among us.*

On the fifth of January, two thousand and twenty-five years after the birth of Christ, what does this verse mean for you personally - in your everyday life? What does it

mean for us in our communities, our country, in the world that we live in today that *The Word became flesh and made its dwelling among us?*

To contemplate this question further, let us consider the meaning of things.

Most of us will know that the Gospel of John was originally written in Greek. And that the Greek word for “Word” is “Logos” – *The Logos became flesh*. But how many of us know exactly what Logos means? Or more importantly, what John meant by the word Logos?

Logos was a concept used by theologians and philosophers, both Jews and Greeks, in all kinds of ways. In Hebrew Scripture, for example, ‘the Word’ could mean several things. In Psalm 33:6, it means an agent of creation (*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made*). In Psalm 119:11, it means God’s law (*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you*).

In the Greek language, Logos can also mean many things – Besides ‘the word’, it can also mean thought or principle. In Greek philosophy, Logos was the principle of reason, the divine masterplan that governed the world. But in Hebrew philosophy, “the Word” was also another word for God.

The Franciscan priest and writer, Richard Rohr, has an interesting take on the word Logos in John 1. It is Blueprint. He reads Vs.1-3 like this - *In the beginning was the Blueprint, and the Blueprint was with God, and the Blueprint was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

Now, regardless of which definition of Logos we think John had in mind – Whether in the beginning was God or the Blueprint or universal divine reason, I think the essence of what John is trying to communicate to us is this – That the inner reality of God has existed since the dawn of creation. And this inner reality, this divine masterplan through which all things and people were made, was about to become real in this world, in and through the person of Jesus.

So, in our Lectio - our contemplation of this passage today, as we sit with the words and let them sink deeper within us, we become aware, first of all, that the Prologue of John’s Gospel is not about how Jesus came about or what he did. It’s about who Jesus is – God – the Blueprint - God’s principle for governing the world.

That – (Vs4-5) *In him was life and the life was the light of all humankind. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it* – And my Lectio of these verses might go something like this – God, what am I to make of the word “life”? What is this Life that was in Jesus, that he came to bring to each one of us?

Do you mean that Jesus is eternal life and that he came to give us all the hope of this life? Or could it mean more? Could it be, God, that you who are Love and the act of perpetually giving love away, came to us in the baby Jesus – So that in receiving this boundless love in and through Jesus, we too may be this very giving and receiving of love in our lives and in the lives of those around us?

And what of the light, Lord? How was Jesus the light of the world? And if I reflect on your Son, Jesus – who he was and how he came into the world, I get the sense, God, that the light of the world is not a boastful, showy, razzle-dazzle kind of light. It is humble, it is wise, it is merciful, it is healing, it is just. It is real. And if Christ is in me and I am in Christ, could it be, God, that the purpose of the light of Christ in me is to bring authenticity, empathy, understanding, justice into the places of brokenness, suffering, sickness, loneliness, and despair?

Where is God calling you to shine the Light of Christ in the year ahead?

This brings us to our key verse, Verse 14 – That the Blueprint *has become human and made its dwelling among us*. I love *The Message* translation of this verse – *The Word became flesh and moved into our neighbourhood*. Which gives us this simultaneous feeling of intimacy, friendship and community with Jesus. The Word became flesh and moved into South Yarra or Box Hill or Gembrook or Istanbul. The Divine became human and moved into wherever you live - to meet you right where you are. Where are you in your life right now? Know that Jesus loves you and meets you right where you are.

Now, after contemplating the word, Logos, we may turn to the word “dwelling” - God became flesh and made his dwelling among us. The Greek word, skénos, also means tent or tabernacle. And so, if we read Verse 14 like this, *The Word became human and tabernacled among us* – now, it starts to take on a richer, more profound meaning.

After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they wandered the desert for 40 years before entering the Promised Land... And in that time, God instructed them to build a temporary place of worship so they could communicate with God wherever they went. This was the Tabernacle. It was a mobile worship centre that served as God’s dwelling place for the Jews before they entered the Promise Land. Exodus 40 tells us that when the Tabernacle was first raised in the Wilderness, the cloud of the Lord, God’s Glory, rested on the tabernacle.

Then when the Temple was built, the tabernacle was located at a dedicated portion of the Temple. And in the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies – which housed the covenant that contained the tablets of Moses on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. The Holy of Holies where the Glory of God lived. It was separated

from the lesser holy place by a veil or a curtain. Only the high priests were allowed to enter the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and even then, they had to go through all sorts of cleansing rituals.

Now, why am I telling you all this?

Well, fast forward to Jesus' death. Remember what happened after Jesus breathed his last breath on the cross? (Matt 27:51-54) There was an earthquake and the temple curtain tore in half. This was the curtain that separated everyday worshippers – people like you and I - from the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. When Jesus breathed his last breath, the curtain that separated humankind from God's Glory/ God's Presence ripped in half - And the centurion and those guarding Jesus exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Now, in the context of John 1:14, as we consider the word "dwelling" or "tabernacle," we become aware that God becoming human to *tabernacle* among us, can only mean one thing – That the Presence of God – the Glory of God is no longer some unreachable faraway thing. With the incarnation of Jesus Christ who is both the Logos - divine, and flesh - human, through his death, resurrection and ascension, there is no longer anything to stop us from entering the presence of God. No more veils, no more barriers. God is not waiting for us to be good or better. God is not waiting for us to pay off our mortgage or get a job or get well or get our act together. God is already one with us and we are one with God through the Logos made flesh who came to tabernacle among us 2025 years ago.

Now, you might sit with this in your Lectio and go Wow God, that is truly amazing. But you might also say, Well God, that is great, and I don't mean to be ungrateful, but how exactly does this help with the conflict in Sudan, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, Myanmar, Ukraine, and so many other places in the world right now? And I think it's okay to speak to God like this. After all, this is the God who made us, who knows our words before they even appear on our tongues. And I may be speaking out of turn here, but I reckon God would appreciate the honesty.

In any case, as we read John 1:14 in context of the world today, we might remember that God became human *and moved into the neighbourhood of Gaza*. That God became human *and tabernacled among the Jews and Palestinians of the region*. And so, our Lectio could go something like this – Lord, today on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, well over a year since the Israel-Gaza war began, something tells me that it's no coincidence that your son Jesus, who was born of a human mother and conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born into a time of conflict and oppression in this very region where hospitals are being bombed and millions of innocent children and civilians have been killed. I don't think it's a coincidence, Lord. But help me discern with the light of Christ – the light of healing and justice and wisdom, what this means.

Lord, when I read John 1:14 in the context of what's happening in your neighbourhood today, I feel nothing but sadness and rage. Where are you in all this, Jesus Christ the life and light of all humankind? Where are you in your neighbourhood that has been described by the UN as a graveyard for children, where it's estimated at least one child dies every 30 minutes? Help me to understand, Lord, and then help me to know what you want me to do with it.

Now, during the week, or maybe throughout the month or year, you may like to come back to this reading and continue to journal your answers – or draw them – or go for walks and contemplate the answers through nature. Whatever the case may be, it may take a while, maybe a lifetime, maybe more to derive the full meaning of the text. But that, in many respects, is irrelevant. The point of Lectio Divina is not to get all the answers at once. The point of Lectio Divina is to read with intent. And at a heart level, to listen – to digest – to sift through the layers. So that we may discern more clearly the Voice of God. And allow that voice to take root in the deepest parts of our heart. And then for those parts to grow and flourish and go forth, giving out the incarnational life and love and light of Christ to communities and the world around us in a way that is uniquely Christ-like.

And here ends our sacred reading of our Gospel reading today. I hope it's been helpful. And I pray it will serve you well on this 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas and in the year to come. Amen.