

Sunday, December 24, 2017
Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14

Lois Harder

Love Came Down

This morning I've chosen texts that are full of esoteric, heady words with which the writers are trying to describe the mystery that is Christmas – the confusing, confounding, crazy claim we make that the Creator of all that is wrapped itself in human skin and was given birth into our world. Both the writers – of Hebrews and the Gospel of John use poetry, eloquent cadence and alliteration which, of course, is lost in translation.

So to honor the efforts of the writers of Hebrews and John, I would like to try, using English, to focus on the essence of their message with poetry, both spoken and sung.

Both writers tell us that from the beginning of time – from creation – until now, God has made Her Love known to us. God, our creator and redeemer.

This part of the story is told beautifully by the Spanish poet Aurelius Clemens Prudentius who died in the year 413 of the Common Era. His poetry makes the point that Jesus existed WITH God, participated in the creation and now, has come to us as one of us. This hymn is found on number 104 of our blue hymnal. You may turn to it, if you like – feel free to chant along with me, or just read the words, or just listen. I'll sing a different 4th verse than the one printed. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-of-the-fathers-love-begotten>

Of the Father's love begotten

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 and have been, and that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore.

By his word was all created. He commanded and 'twas done.
Earth and sky and boundless ocean, universe of Three-in-One.
All that sees the moon's soft radiance, all that breathes beneath the sun,
Evermore and evermore.

This is he whom seers in old time chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets promised in their faithful word.
Now he shines, the long expected. Let creation praise its Lord,
Evermore and evermore.

O that birth for ever blessed. When the Virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving, bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe, the world's redeemer, first revealed his sacred face,
Evermore and evermore.

The writers go on to remind us that God has sent many messengers, over the millennia, telling about God's creation and redemption and love. God has sent angels, and prophets, and angels... many angel messengers... Here is Maya Angelou's amazing poem called "Touched by An Angel". I will give a few moments of silence for reflection after I read this poem.

Touched by An Angel by Maya Angelou

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

Although Mary is not mentioned in either of our texts this morning (we have to wait until this evening to hear more about her), there is a wonderful text that expresses many of the paradoxical mysteries of this story, by asking Mary whether she knew what all was "contained" in the bundle that was her baby... *Mary, Did You Know?* performed by Pentatonix.

And this from Fredrick Buechner, about grace and mystery and light:

Christmas itself is by grace. It could never have survived our own blindness and depredations otherwise. It could never have *happened* otherwise. Perhaps it is the very wildness and strangeness of the grace that has led us to try to tame it. We have tried to make it habitable. We have roofed it in and furnished it. We have reduced it to an occasion we feel at home with, at best a touching and beautiful occasion, at worst a trite and cloying one. But if the Christmas event in itself is indeed as a matter of cold, hard fact all it's cracked up to be, then even at best our efforts are misleading.

The Word become flesh. Ultimate Mystery born with a skull you could crush one-handed. Incarnation. It is not tame. It is not touching. It is not beautiful. It is uninhabitable terror. It is

unthinkable darkness riven with unbearable light. Agonized laboring led to it, vast upheavals of intergalactic space/time split apart, a wrenching and tearing of the very sinews of reality itself. You can only cover your eyes and shudder before it, before this: "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God . . . who for us and for our salvation," as the Nicene Creed puts it, "came down from heaven."

Came down. Only then do we dare uncover our eyes and see what we can see. It is the Resurrection and the Life she holds in her arms. It is the bitterness of death he takes at her breast.

~originally published in [Whistling in the Dark](#) and later in [Beyond Words](#)

Finally, I leave you with Madeleine L'Engle. Her poem, "First Coming". I invite you to turn to hymn number 208 which we will sing together to end the sermon.

First Coming

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace
He came when the Heavens were unsteady
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came down when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine. He did not wait

till hearts were pure. In joy he came
to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
He came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
For to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love; Rejoice! Rejoice!