

Christmas Day + December 25, 2018
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Marshall
John 1:1-14: “Cosmic Considerations”
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John’s first three words, “In the beginning,” do not take us to the beginning. They take us before the beginning. They take us to pre-creation. Because only from there can the beginning take place. In the pre-creation there is nothing but the Word with God. At the beginning the Word is set into motion as the one by whom God becomes known to the universe. The Word is revelation of God to all creation.

The great hymn that opens John’s Gospel invites us into this cosmic perspective. At Christmas we usually dwell on God’s gift of Jesus for us, God in human form, so that we can come to know God through him. But how can we know that God’s revealing Word comes only to human beings? Are we alone privileged to have God’s Word enter our world? Can God be known only on Earth? If so, then we must be the neediest beings in the entire cosmos, needing Jesus to free us from the straitjacket of sin in which we have been bound ever since Satan fell from heaven.

This line of thinking reminded me of a [story](#) in the Wall Street Journal that ran two years ago at Christmas. It is titled “Christmas Eve in Space and Communion on the Moon.” The author tells about how, on December 24, 1968—exactly 50 years ago last night—the astronauts of Apollo 8 marked Christmas Eve by taking turns reading from the first ten verses of the Book of Genesis, as their capsule orbited the moon 250,000 miles from earth. Their distant-sounding voices were broadcast live that night over radio and TV. For a few brief

moments, it was said, they brought the world together, in an awareness of the common humanity of all people and of gratitude to God who for the beautiful planet given to be humankind's home.

The WSJ story did not end there. Seven months later another NASA spacecraft, Apollo 11, carried two astronauts to the surface of the moon. One was Buzz Aldrin. He had thought of doing something similar, but more that reading from scripture seemed to be called for to mark the first time human beings landed on another heavenly body. It occurred to him: What if he were to take communion on the moon?

The pastor of Aldrin's church in Texas gave him a small amount of consecrated bread and wine and a tiny chalice, and they came with him to the moon. In the radio broadcast that followed the Eagle's landing, Aldrin began by asking listeners to contemplate the events that had just taken place, and to give thanks in their own way. That's where the broadcast ended.

What few knew until only recently was what happened next—that, right there on the silent surface of the moon, Aldrin then took communion. He wrote, "I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon the wine curled slowly and gracefully up the side of the cup. I ate the tiny Host and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility. It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements."

There it was: The body and blood of God's Word, the Word which was present even

before the universe was created, serving as a means of grace by which Christ becomes known on another planetary body than Earth.

The mystery of God is so deep that all we can really do is ask questions. But if God created us in his image, as Genesis says, who are we to assume that God has not created other beings or objects across the universe that are also in his image—an image common to that particular world?

So that we may know God, God gave us his Son as fully human and fully divine, so that we may come to know God intimately. But why couldn't other planetary beings, or objects, or stars, or even the ever-expanding network of the universe also be images of the unseen God? In fact, If God created all things in love, would not everything in the universe be an expression of that love? If so, all those things glorify God simply by living, or being, or burning, or hurtling through space just as as God created them to do.

Where we poor humans have fallen down is that we've allowed our consciousness of self to get the better of us and of our world. Satan is constantly nipping at our heels, urging us to be terrified of death. In this ever-present fear we forget all about God and go to great lengths to build ourselves up to stave off the reality of death. If you want a tangible example, nowhere in modern life is the tendency toward self-aggrandizement more acute than in the rampant capitalism that has an iron grip on America. The capitalist mentality, in which those in power live only to enrich themselves, is waging war against our God-given habitat.

Where in the midst of all this is the Word of God, the one who was with God in the beginning?

In the manger. For the Christ child who grew to be a man, it was not an easy road. As John's Gospel goes on to say, "...the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." His own people are still not accepting him. Maybe what's needed to rescue humans from their self-centeredness is this cosmic perspective on the mystery of creation. For if we hold John's words to be true, the power to become a treasured child of the author and creator of the entire universe has been handed to us in Jesus Christ.

Here on Christmas Day we have the invitation to renew and refresh our welcome to this Savior who was born for us, who lived in considerable hardship for us, who willingly went to his death for us and who was raised to eternal life for us so that we might receive and believe that same promise of eternal life now, today, and forever. In this great work of God for our salvation lies all our hope. Let us be tireless messengers of that hope.

Amen.