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John 1
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***Jesus the Christ:
A Thin Place***

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

There are four stories about the life of Jesus in the New Testament. We call them the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Scholars believe that Mark was written first. It doesn't tell any Christmas story. Rather it begins the story of Jesus with his baptism as an adult. Matthew and Luke tell the familiar Christmas stories. Matthew tells the story from the perspective of Joseph and includes the magi. Luke tells the story from the perspective of Mary and includes the shepherds.

The gospel of John, which was the gospel written last is a more philosophical gospel and takes a cosmic perspective. It starts with *In the beginning...* just like the book of Genesis. With these three words, John immediately connects the story of Jesus with the story of creation itself.

SERMON

Recently a group of international high school students who attend Lincoln Academy in Damariscotta came to visit with me in our sanctuary. They are in a world religions class and were visiting various religious communities. The students were from China, Vietnam, Spain, and Russia. Their religious backgrounds are Buddhist, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and none.

One of the questions a young woman, with no religious background, asked me was, *Why wouldn't you do whatever you want, and then just before you die say you believe in Jesus, so you could go to heaven.*

I noted that people have been asking that question since the days of Jesus. We can hear it being explored in some of the letters in the New Testament. I told her that for me being a follower of Jesus isn't primarily about what happens when I die, rather it is about how I live now.

Focusing on life after death - in heaven - as the goal of religious belief is a perspective that doesn't value life on earth very much. It is a perspective that has been used to justify social injustice here and now. It also places a firm barrier between heaven and earth, between the spiritual and the physical.

Many religions, including segments of Christianity, have denigrated life on planet earth, saying that only the spiritual realm is real and valuable. But Christmas is a radical argument against that. Not only is God willing to visit earth; God is present in the flesh. This proclamation shocked many people in the time of the early church.

The writer of the gospel of John expresses this perspective in the poetic words:

*The Word was God...
and the Word became flesh,
dwelling among us full of grace and truth.*

As some of you know, in Celtic tradition, people speak of thin places – places where the space between heaven and earth is oh so thin. When using this image people are usually referring to physical places in creation where we particularly sense the presence of the holy – sacred mountains, holy wells, etc. But I think it's also a great way to describe Christmas. Jesus is a thin place where heaven and earth are woven together.

Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of Creation. Christ is not Jesus last name. It is not Jesus Christ; it is Jesus the Christ. Christ is a word we use to name the manifestation of God's presence in the world.

Recently I was sent an unsolicited new book, *The Universal Christ*, by Richard Rohr, a Franciscan monk. I appreciate the ways he expressed this powerful mystery of the weaving together of physical and spiritual.

When Christians hear the word "incarnation," most of us think about the birth of Jesus, who personally demonstrated God's radical unity with humanity. But...I want to suggest that the first incarnation

was the moment described in Genesis 1, when God joined in unity with the physical universe and became the light inside everything.

...

*We daringly believe that God's presence was poured into a single human being, so that humanity and divinity can be seen to be operating as one in him – and therefore in us! But instead of saying God came **into** the world through Jesus, maybe it would be better to say that Jesus came **out** of an already Christ-soaked world.*

(The Universal Christ, pg. 13-16)

When our daughter Karin was young – probably around four – she said to me,
God must be in a million pieces.

When I asked why that was so, she said,
*Because God is everywhere,
So God must be in a million pieces.*

At the time I thought how sweet of her to concretize an abstract thought. But you know – *Out of the mouths of babes*. She was expressing the same wisdom as Richard Rohr.

*The universal Christ has joined in
unity with the physical universe
and is the light inside everything.*

And thus is everywhere-
In millions of pieces
and millions of people.

Jesus is not the exception –
the only one in whom God is present.
Jesus is the rule –
reminding us that God is present
in each of us and in creation itself.