



**MERCY
GLOBAL
PRESENCE**

Introduction for Month Four-Incarnate God in Cosmos and in Person of Jesus

Elizabeth Davis rsm (Newfoundland)

We have completed our third month of contemplation in Mercy Global Presence – *People and Deep Social Change*. The theologian, Julie Upton, reminded us, “Agency means nurturing the understanding that we *can* do something about these global concerns; access means that we become educated on their root causes; action means doing something about them within our sphere of influence.” The artist, Mary White, through painting, blog and photograph, challenged us, “The open space in the painting, for me, is the doorway in which all can continue to enter, be informed and experience transformational emergence.” Susan Brown, who ministers within a hostel, lives the reality of Catherine McAuley’s approach, “Catherine McAuley knew all too well that healing and growth come from a relationship of respect and mutuality as much as from practical assistance. She did not ‘do unto’ the needy: she loved and thereby empowered them.” Angela Reed emphasized the same theme when she introduced us to Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, who has initiated a worldwide movement termed “The Shift” whose primary goals are to: 1) provide a platform to unite and amplify support for the right to housing; 2) change the conversation; and 3) encourage government engagement and action.

Ailish O'Brien reminds us about the power of education to transform society by bringing us distinct voices from the Solidarity Teacher Training College in South Sudan: a parent (Christine Baptist), two students (Josephine Kuol and John Dau), and a graduate from the school (Tereza Peter now a teacher). Carmel McDonough prepared the prayer reflection – a collage of Images, music, biblical quotations, *Laudato Si'*, Buddhist philosophy and young women leaders; she introduced us to the Aboriginal word, *Dadirri*, a process of deep and respectful listening to build community. The good reading list gave us wisdoms centered on a changing world, social media, activism, effective altruism, statistics, tribalism, and vision for the future.

Now we begin our fourth month, circling back in some ways to our first month with its focus on cosmology and the shifting grounds of our theology, spirituality and ministry. This month’s theme is incarnation – *the Incarnate God in the Cosmos and in the Person of Jesus*. In the Gospel of Matthew, when we first are made aware of the coming of Jesus, we are given his name Emmanuel, God-with-us. This name flows directly from the Old Testament which celebrates an indwelling God whom the Rabbis call Shekinah. Matthew’s emphasis on the indwelling of this God-person Jesus is echoed in the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:1-2, 14).

These biblical insights are the foundation for new thinking about incarnation that is emerging today in two interconnected ways: that cosmos itself is the Body of God and that, in the Incarnate One, God becomes Jesus sharing the life condition of the least in creation.

Richard Rohr says,

The Incarnation of God did not happen in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. That is just when we started taking it seriously. The incarnation actually happened 14.5 billion years ago with a moment that we now call “The Big Bang.” That is when God actually decided to *materialize* and to *self-expose*. Two thousand years ago was the *human* incarnation of God in Jesus, but before that there was the first and original incarnation through light, water, land, sun, moon, stars, plants, trees, fruit, birds, serpents, cattle, fish, and “every kind of wild beast” according

to our own creation story (Genesis 1:3-25). This was the “Cosmic Christ” through which God has “let us know the mystery of God’s purpose, the hidden plan God so kindly made from the beginning in Christ” (Ephesians 1:9).

“Deep incarnation” is a new theological expression, first named by the Lutheran theologian, Niels Gregersen, and echoed by Catholic theologians, Elizabeth Johnson and Denis Edwards. It means the coming-into-flesh of God’s eternal Word – not only human flesh but flesh that is the life in all creation. By assuming the particular life-story of Jesus the Jew, God’s own Word joins the material conditions of God’s world of creation, shares and ennobles the fate of all biological life-forms, and experiences the pains of all sentient creatures. In Elizabeth Johnson’s words, “Deep incarnation is the radical divine reach in Christ through human flesh all the way down into the living web of organic life.” God becomes flesh, the Creator becomes clay, the Word becomes Earth. In Jesus, God joins the web of life, becomes part of Earth’s biology.

In a resource for the *Season of Creation*, the biblical scholar, Norman Habel, explicitly proclaims that the Gospel is Good News not only for human but for all creation. He says: “It is this God in this piece of Earth, this God immersed in our biology, this God incarnate deep in creation, that we know as Jesus Christ, the Crucified One. The Gospel is a message that embraces creation through this deep incarnation. God not only creates, God also suffers. The God whose presence fills Earth and who suffers with creation is also the God who through Christ is restoring creation and reconciling the alienated ones in creation.”

With new eyes, let us look at our Advent readings and Christmas stories. How could we not have seen God’s intimate presence in all creation when we heard these words: “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid” (Is 11:6) or “God determines the numbers of the stars and gives to all of them their names” (Ps 147:4) or “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom” (Is 35:1) or “Let the heavens be glad and let Earth rejoice, let the sea roar and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it” (Ps 96:11-12)!

And our Christmas narratives are threaded through with God present in all creation – Cosmos and Earth. In Luke’s Gospel, the Good News is brought to Earth from heaven, to the shepherds by the angels who sing “Glory to God in highest heaven and on Earth peace” (Lk 2:14). In Matthew’s Gospel, the Wise Ones from the east are led by the star in the heavens and they bring gifts of Earth – the rock that is gold, the frankincense and myrrh that are resins from trees. Jesus’ birth in the stable and his first sleep in the manger happened among animals. We have seen all these connections as merely ways to enhance the story. Now we are learning that the songs and the star of the cosmos and Earth’s gifts of stone and trees and the animals are not decorations for a story focused solely on humans. The birth stories of Jesus reinforce the indwelling of God in all creation – the Good News comes to light, water, land, sun, moon, stars, plants, trees, fruit, birds, serpents, cattle, fish and humans. “The radical divine reach in Christ through human flesh comes all the way down into the living web of organic life.”

Let us rejoice in this Good News as together we explore incarnation, the precious gift from our God who loves all creation enough to dwell among us, to become one with us, to share our vulnerabilities and suffering, and to restore all of us in this sacred communion of all creation to wholeness.

Blessings of peace, joy, hope and love in these Christmas days!