



December 28, 2025  
The Rt. Rev. James R. Mathes

### **Christmas Service of Lessons and Carols**

*Come Holy Spirit: Touch our minds and think with them, touch our lips and speak with them and touch our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. **AMEN.***

Our first lesson tells the story of God's creation including humankind. But Holy Scripture has not one but two creation stories. The first version has a lot more to say about what happened before the sons and daughters of Adam showed up.

Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. *Genesis 1: 3-5*

Astrophysics tell us that it all began with the collapse of a molecular cloud. And after the forming of our sun, 4.6 billion years ago, spinning cosmic dust coalesced into protoplanetary disks to become moons, "planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home." And ultimately out this star dust, our most ancient of ancestors were formed.

We can see through the Hubble telescope a faraway star born. Einstein's theory of relativity posits a relationship between matter, space, time and light. Biologists look for the blueprints of life in DNA. All are trying to answer the question of how. How did this happen? Why did darkness give way to light?

Alongside these powerful and interesting questions which we are all bound to ask, there are deep questions of the human heart: questions not of how but why? These are the questions of faith and of this night. Why are we here? What is our purpose? How shall we live in this world?

The lessons we read this day offer stories that tell what is behind all the scientific questions of how. They do not answer as fact why. Rather these are stories of a deeper relationship between the lover of creation, that we call God, and creation, including us.

The French scientist and Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, believed that these questions of how and why were ultimately intertwined, compatible and intrinsically about love: To quote,

The most telling and profound way of describing the evolution of the universe would undoubtedly be to trace the evolution of love. (1)

To the scientist/priest, the animating power of creation is beautiful and good. The fire of fission which casts the light and energy of the sun is no less than the fiery light of God's love. The author of the first Epistle of John agrees "God is love."

And yet, throughout so much of human history love seems to not be in the mix. Too often our stories are of sorrow, brutality to each other and creation. Borrowing from the words of the traditional confession of the church, too often "we have erred and strayed from [your] ways like lost sheep." Too often, "we have followed too much the desires of our own hearts." The lessons that we read today and our carols rejoicing in Christ's birth are only part of the story of sacred. The fallen parts of the sacred story are not included in our six lessons for this day because this is a day of rejoicing. And yet, we rejoice because we were once lost and are now found. Borrowing from the words of the traditional confession, it is because "there there is no health in us" that we are so grateful to the God of love who is always the divine physician offering redemption, healing and wholeness.

Frederick Buechner was once asked to sum up all of Scripture in brief. He did it in three sentences:

God created the world  
The world became a damn mess  
God did not give up on the world. (2)

That is the story of Holy Scripture. Today we tell veritable sonnets of love from the fire of creation, through the prophets, even to a manger - especially in a manger and a cross to come.

Sometimes it may feel that God has given up on God's creation that God calls God. Never! The birth of Jesus is testament to God's everlasting and steadfast love, love that we sang of in our carols:

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love divine  
Love was born at Christmas;  
stars and angels gave the sign. (3)

No, God does not give up on the world; God as love came down. The world that God so loves is still a mess. But God does not give up on the world.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. *John 1: 14*

This passage is the veritable crescendo of our Lessons and Carols. We feel the power of the prose. But in our translation from the original Greek, we can miss something crucial. The word that is translated as "lived" is the Greek word ἐσκήνωσεν ([eskēnōsen](#)) which is better translated "pitched tent," and the word became flesh and pitched a tent among us."

Jesus has moved in and is not leaving. Jesus is born among and through Christ. God dwells among us. Jesus is intertwined in our lives. He is here to stay. God does not give up on us- not you, not me, not anyone.

Scientists will continue to attempt to understand “the how” of the universe. And in doing so, they uncover much beauty and wonder. In the afterglow of Christmas, we tell the sacred stories of God’s saving acts to understand what it all means. We also tell these stories to understand our place in the universe - why we are here and how we are to be.

Two millennia after that birth in Bethlehem, our vocation to imitate the love of Jesus remains. And this is where the scientist and the theologian cross paths. We both talk about light. We know that life is not possible without it. It is essential energy and light that is life for the world.

Surrounded by angels in wonder, we look at the once upon a time birth of Jesus as a veritable rebirth of the sun. It is a moment that cannot be seen through telescopes or verified by quantum physics. Rather it is found in the mystical human soul. Like light, it is inextricably related to matter and energy. And it is of God. It is the binder and bound of all creation. It is Love. To quote one more time, Teilhard de Chardin:

“The day will come when, after harnessing the winds, the tides and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.” (4)

The word has become flesh and pitched God’s tent among us. This is fire kindled again. Let us share the flame.

- (1) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *On Love and Happiness* (Harper Row, 1984)
- (2) Frederick Buechner, citation lost.
- (3) Christina Georgina Rossetti, 1884.
- (4) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Evolution of Chastity*, 1934.