



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

The Cosmic Christ

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

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Mark the Evangelist describes Jesus' baptism in very few words, only three sentences. "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." But there is a lot of meaning packed in those three sentences.

First of all, to be baptized in the Jordan by John put Jesus in opposition to the authority of the Temple in Jerusalem. John was a religious insurgent filled with all sorts of ideas that were upsetting to folks in power. People were flocking to him, to hear something different, symbolized by a new kind of cleanliness offered in the waters of the river. In the Gospel of Mark, we know nothing of Jesus before this – it is the beginning of his story of Good News. Jesus joins the other pilgrims and submits himself to John. He allows himself to be put under the water, clearly an act of faith. In the Middle East at that time, people did not swim, mostly because they didn't know how to swim, so to find yourself in water over your head could easily result in death. That's why we refer to baptism as dying and rebirth.

In Jesus case, it is the beginning of a very particular new life, for as he is rising up out of the water, the heavens are being torn apart. This phrase tells us that Jesus was not just joining a religious movement—his baptism was a cosmic event. The verb tense, in the original Greek, evokes the meaning that a greater power is breaching a barrier. It is the same language used at Jesus' crucifixion when the curtain in the Temple was torn apart. What it means is that everything that has kept the world shut off from the divine realm has been destroyed. In that moment, God's spirit spills through the tear and settles on Jesus. It is now his to spread throughout creation. His ministry is to continue to tear away the barriers that keep God's people blind and lost. It is a cosmic ministry.

Nearly 25 years ago, Matthew Fox published a most marvelous book called *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. Matthew Fox was a Roman Catholic priest of the Dominican Order whose academic passion was fired by the wisdom of the great Christian mystics. He studied the works of medieval men and women like Hildegard of Bingen and Meister Eckart, names that were virtually unknown before he drew them out of the shadows. He developed a theology that moved away from the doctrine of original sin and lifted up instead original blessing – which was the title of one of his early books. He developed the Institute for Culture and Creation Studies –

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(Not to be confused with fundamentalist *creationism*). It may come as no surprise that Fox's kind of thinking was frowned upon by Church authorities. And like Galileo, he was censured and forbidden to teach. But, in the 20th century, Father Fox had more options available to him than did Galileo and eventually, he left the Catholic Church. In 1994, he was received as a priest of the Episcopal Church. I love our big tent!

At the center of Fox's work is the notion of the Cosmic Christ, which represents, as Fox puts it, "the divine pattern that connects" everything. (p.135) Much has changed since Fox first wrote of the Cosmic Christ. Back in the 1980s, we were still deeply mired in the mentality of the Enlightenment. Intellect was everything, spirituality was unnecessary fluff. Newtonian physics continued to tell us that the universe was merely made up of discrete bits of matter that operated like parts of a machine, all knowable through observation and study. Since then the scientific understanding of what constitutes reality in our universe has bumped into mystery and indisputable interconnectedness of all energy and matter. What our scientists are seeing is what Fox has identified as the Cosmic Christ.

There are two important theological implications to this concept of the Cosmic Christ. First, it is present of opposites...heaven and earth, light and darkness, fullness and void, power and weakness, rich and poor. Polarity is a reality of our universe—without its force of push and pull, positive and negative there would be no stability in the structure of matter. But polarity in human culture can be problematic, as we well know here in the West. It can do damage to a community or a nation. But in Jesus the Cosmic Christ, polarities are reunited and wholeness is restored. He taught his cosmic unity in stories, like the one in answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?" The gulf between enemy and brother is overcome. We are indeed our brothers'—and our sisters'—keeper.

The second implication of this Cosmic Christ is the necessity for awareness or mindfulness in our lives. Meister Eckhart, a 14th century German theologian said "What good is it to me if the son of God was born to Mary 1400 years ago but is not born in my person and in my culture and in my time?" He also said that "we are all meant to be mothers of God." The Cosmic Christ came to earth to give us a living example of what it means to fully present to our divine nature. It is God's intention that we know our divine origin and live in close relationship with God. Mark reports that at his baptism, Jesus is revealed as the Son of God, the anointed one, and God's pleasure is evident. When you discover your divine nature, you become aware and mindful of how important you are to the unfolding of God's plan.

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"The name "Christ" means "the anointed one." Our baptisms unite us with Christ, likewise anointed and beloved. Matthew Fox says, "We are all royal persons, creative, godly, divine, persons of beauty and grace", but unlike Jesus, we have a much harder time embracing that truth. In his description of Jesus' baptism, Mark reminds us that God is well pleased with all of us. With his depiction of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ, Fox reminds us that we are a critical part of God's Creation. We are the ones who are called to find unity within the cosmos, to follow it into lives of compassion, love and justice. We are anointed to stand against the forces of polarity and divisiveness, to show that all of Creation is designed to live in balance, harmony, and integration. As 2012 begins, let us begin the search for the pattern that connects everything; it can be found wherever you look for it. Believe in it and become a part of the coming of the Cosmic Christ.

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