

# The Incarnation

**Sr. Ann Nielsen, DW**

What is this mystery of incarnation? Simply put, it is God's love poured out. It is Wisdom's love penetrating and permeating all that is. Theologians these days speak of more than one incarnation: the outpouring of love within the Trinity from all eternity, the outpouring of love in the vastness and immense variety in creation, and the outpouring of love in the mystery celebrated each year on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. This Feast celebrates the cosmic Christ, Eternal Wisdom, taking on our human flesh in the womb of Mary, his mother, and thus becoming Jesus of Nazareth, Wisdom Incarnate.

In the first of his ten Christmas Carols, St. Louis Marie uses a telling image to shock us into new awareness. He evokes the mystery and vastness of the galaxies. This he does to remind us of where Jesus comes from and where he goes – straight and wholeheartedly into our flawed humanity to heal and make whole.

His central image is designed to evoke in us both awe and wonder:

*God dwelling in infinite heights,  
Vast beyond our wildest imaginings,  
God Eternal, God of Might,  
You arrive this night as a new born babe.  
How is it possible?*

Then he allows himself the time to contemplate and be jolted by the paradoxes:

*I see you, timeless eternal God, become an infant only one-day old.  
I see you, Word echoed eternally in Creation, now a baby incapable of uttering a single word.  
I see you, Almighty and all powerful God, rendered helpless and utterly vulnerable.*

To this vision, Montfort's response is a spontaneous and simple exhortation:

*Know him, adore him, praise him, and love him.*

Hymn 57, Christmas Carol of the Angels, verse 1.

Is this image merely 'sweet and sentimental'? Far from it! Incarnation is cosmic yet also personal. It is ecstatic in its contemplative domain yet agonized in the domain of humankind's ecological and social reality. It is meant to be transformative not only of each person but also of the planet.

One of the most original insights of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudate Si* is that those who approach creation and the environment with awe and wonder will speak the language of family relationship and beauty in their relationship with the world they live in. (LS 11) They are not likely to harm it. They know by experience that *the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.* (LS 12)

In his hymn no. 26, Montfort explores the sense of God's presence and revelation in creation. He sees Eternal Wisdom *shaping harmony and order in all creatures great and small.* He perceives with the mystic's eye the interrelatedness of all creation: *all God's creatures interacting know God's help and loving care.* (H 26, v. 20) Pope Francis, introducing 'the mystery of the universe' (LS 76 ff.), echoes this insight. *"In this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation."* (LS 79)

Yes, our first response to Incarnation has to be *"know him, adore him, praise him, and love him"* in the immensity and beauty of creation. But we also need to learn and live out the collaboration, cooperation, interdependence, respect and harmony that it reveals.



In his contemplation of the miracle of Jesus' incarnation in Mary's womb, Montfort came to understand how Jesus of Nazareth, Incarnate Wisdom relates to creation. In a unique and original insight, Montfort sees the Transfiguration as a brief glimpse of Christ in relationship with the universe. It was a moment of grace that filled the disciples with consolation and ecstasy. *This is my beloved Son... Eternal Wisdom, of immense splendor, vast, sublime, everlasting and more ancient than the created universe.* (LEW 19) He interprets John the Baptist's exclamation *Behold the Lamb of God*, as revealing that Jesus *integrated within himself all the sweet delights of God and of humanity, of heaven and of earth.* (LEW 119)

Pope Francis says, *The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty in the world because he himself was in constant touch with creation, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder.* (LS 97). *"Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed..."* (LS 98). And he concludes: *In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning.* (LS 99)

Finally, the function of 'mountaintop experiences' – the contemplation of God eternally present and of Christ incarnate in creation' – is always and everywhere to prepare us for mission.

In Montfort's time, the seeds of colonialism, exploitation, and the economic 'gap' were already in place, but he didn't have the information or resources to imagine the 'global village' or to contest 'unjust economic structures'. Yet, in his Christmas Carols he addresses both avarice and 'the gap' as unjust social realities squarely at odds with Christ's Incarnation in the stable of Bethlehem.

### **The 'Gap'**

*O princes of this world below  
What stately castles you possess;  
What overwhelming wealth you know;  
What skilled valets to help you dress.  
But Christ, your Lord, the King of Kings,  
In wretched wintry stable sleeps.  
He lacks the most essential things  
And not a single servant keeps.*  
(Hymn 62, Carol of Zealous Souls, v. 6)

### **Avarice**

*O miser, seeking only gold  
And counting all that you possess,  
To wild extravagance you hold  
And know not how to do with less...  
Now come, you greedy one, and see  
This infant newborn from above  
And know that your avidity  
Flies in the face of Jesus' love.*  
(Hymn 62, Carol of Zealous Souls, vv. 3, 5)

As the focus of Christian consciousness and action in our times, Pope Francis identifies avarice (the rape of the earth) (LS 20-47); aggression (use of power; human trafficking), (LS 102-105, 123) and the incredibly widening gap between rich and poor. (LS 48-52; 156-158)

As we contemplate the Incarnation contextualized this year in the Lenten Season, let our prayer be full of awe at the wonder of creation and full of compassion for those victimized by avarice and power. Let us learn to fast from consumerism, waste, and selfish individualism. Let us network and cooperate with others (as Montfort did) to feed, heal, and restore dignity to the poor and to challenge the rich and powerful. In short, let us live and act in the light of our God, revealed to us in and through the universe and the all-embracing stance of Jesus, Wisdom Incarnate.



*Photos: Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth, Israel.*