

## Christmas Eve Sermon: 24 December 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper

### John 1:1-14

#### Christmas Reflection and Lighting of the Christ Candle

The Word was first,  
the Word present to God,  
    God present to the Word.  
The Word was God,â  
    in readiness for God from day one.  
Everything was created through him;  
    nothing—not one thing!—  
    came into being without him.  
What came into existence was Life,  
    and the Life was Light to live by.  
The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;  
    the darkness couldn't put it out.

The Life-Light was the real thing:  
    Every person entering Life  
    he brings into Light.  
He was in the world,  
    the world was there through him,  
    and yet the world didn't even notice.  
He came to his own people,  
    but they didn't want him.  
But whoever did want him,  
    who believed he was who he claimed  
    and would do what he said,  
He made to be their true selves,  
    their child-of-God selves.  
These are the God-begotten,  
    not blood-begotten,  
    not flesh-begotten,  
    not sex-begotten.  
The Word became flesh and blood,  
    and moved into the neighbourhood.  
We saw the glory with our own eyes,  
    the one-of-a-kind glory,  
    like Father, like Son,  
Generous inside and out,  
    true from start to finish.

[SLIDE] It was the highly regarded Edinburgh Professor of Theology,  
T.F.Torrance, in his famous book on *The Incarnation*, who said that the

incarnation of God's eternal Son "fully reveals his being love ... giving himself up for others and having his being in his beloved ones, regardless of their responsiveness".

The Bible says, "Christ is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3:3).

The Good News of Christmas is Immanuel, which means, God is with us. We might say it as Christ is in us. And according to Tom Torrance, Christ is in us, regardless of our responsiveness.

That hasn't always been mainstream Christian teaching. But that doesn't mean it's wrong.

[SLIDE] More recently, Richard Rohr said a similar thing when he wrote that, "there has never been a single soul who was not possessed by the Christ, even in the ages before Jesus existed".

The presence of Christ in all people might well account for the fact that all people, deep down, have a strong desire for love and justice, and are innately good, merciful and peaceful.

The incarnation of God in Christ, is nothing less than the bringing together of physical matter and spirit into an all together oneness that belies the delusion of humanity's separateness from God.

There is no sacred/secular divide. All is one in Christ. Everything is holy and nothing is excluded.

The 13th Century saint, Bonaventure (1217-74), said that [SLIDE] Christ "is the one whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere".

The birth of Christ in the midst of poverty, refugee status and violent, imperial domination shouts to us that there can be no especially sacred places or especially sacred times.

If there were especially sacred places and times then Christ would have been born in an especially sacred place and time, not in the midst of poverty and oppression.

And even if such any sacred/secular had division existed before hand then the birth of Christ would have healed any such division and declared the profane holy by his presence.

Everything then, is an occasion for good and everything is an occasion for God.

[SLIDE] Truly God has “filled the hungry with good things” (Luke 1:53), as Mary sings in her song of praise as she carries the Christ child.

God’s essence is goodness. God’s incarnation with us is goodness. Christ is that goodness one with us and in us.

The incarnation is a mystery. We don’t see it with our natural means. The spiritual is hidden within the material - veiled in flesh - as the hymn says.

Christmas means that goodness resides within all of us and waits to come forth in loving action.

As Paul says, your true life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3).

We can’t say it too often - Christmas is good news. What matters is the extent to which we’re prepared to surrender to the good news; or to hunger for it, as Mary put it - for it’s the hungry that are filled with good things.

God in Christ is goodness and love personified, and the same goodness and love find their home in us thanks to the incarnation and our willingness to believe the promise.

Listen to The Message translation of Ephesians 1:4-5, 10-12:

Long before he laid down earth’s foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4-5 MSG).

He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.

It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone (1:10-12 MSG).

So tonight, of all nights, when we celebrate the birth of Christ, and the coming of the Life-Light, may we surrender our lives into God’s eternal plan of goodness and love, everywhere, in every place and in every thing.

This is good news from the Lord and in the light of this, I wish you a truly happy Christmas.