

The Incarnation reveals both intimacy and vastness of God's love for us

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JOURNEY TOWARD HOLINESS



It was nearly Christmas a few years ago, and I was visiting people at a community meal, part of our parish's family faith formation program. At one table there was a young Dad with his eight-year-old daughter. "Sister," he said, "my daughter has a question for you." After a bit of prompting, she asked: "How can God get all into a little baby?" Thinking quickly but perhaps not brilliantly, I said, "Well, if God could curl up

everything needed for our universe into something smaller than your little fingernail, don't you think God can get into a baby?"

Maybe you can do better, dear reader! It was a great question! This young believer had correctly gathered up the two ends of the mystery of Christmas — the mystery of Incarnation: the intimate union of the Divine with his creation revealed in the infant of Bethlehem.

When I grew up, we used words like 'infinite' and 'all powerful' to describe God. But I had no clue what these words meant in the measurable terms that our present cosmology describes. The Divine which "gets all into a little baby" unfurled our universe about 13.8 billion years ago — perhaps using matter and power from the collapse of a previous universe. The universe that the Divine — whom we name Creator Father — gave us to exist in has somewhere between 100 and 200 billion galaxies in it. Some of the biggest or giant galaxies have 100 trillion stars in them, cosmologists estimate. And, they point out, new stars and planets and galaxies will continue to be born until this universe ends, maybe 20 billion years from now.

Besides all this hugeness, this universe is also dynamic, an alive place of cosmic explosions and implosions, relationships and motion. The immensity and dynamism of the universe as we know it today reveals a God of unimaginable creative potential and power. When we reflect on all this, the faith question asked in previous ages becomes more urgent today: how is it possible to have a relationship with this expansive and perhaps somewhat terrifying Creator God? I wonder if that is why, according to a survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, many Catholics are not sure that a personal relationship with God is possible?

Our faith tells us that, just as the Creating God unfurled this dy-

namic material universe from a singularity at the beginning of time, God also unfurled into that universe a spiritual intentionality and presence that we call Logos or Word or Christ. Thus, the universe was destined not only to "be" something measured and ordered by the laws of physics; it was destined to "become" something which we can only glimpse and imagine, something that Jesus taught us to call "kingdom." When we humans had evolved enough to take this in, God revealed this divine purpose and destiny of the universe to us through the historical event of the birth of Jesus, the Divine, become dramatically concrete and visible.

Christmas is beloved by children. But Christmas also is a Feast Day for us adults. As we gaze at the child in the creche, we grownups know that the life of this child reveals our own destiny: that although stars collide and people get cancer, all death leads to new life, unfolding until the end of time.

Perhaps, though, the little girl might have asked why, not how, God got "all into a little baby." Why a baby?

Pope Benedict XVI said (*Deus caritas est*: 10): God is the absolute and ultimate source of all being, but this universal principle of creation — the Logos, primordial reason — is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love. The vast universe is full of the giving and receiving love which is God.

We must all be children at Christmas, gazing at a baby. A baby is ultimately human and vulnerable, one like us. We all — even guys long to hold babies when we see them! God wants to be held by us — acknowledged and embraced by our minds and hearts. Through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, God revealed that he has "pitched his tent among us," this God who is knowable and near and approachable as a baby. For God is not "out there" but "in here," in every smallest instance of our existence. So thanks, Matthew and Luke, for starting your Gospels with an infancy narrative. Through the baby that God "got all into" we can better understand our God who wants to be taken up, taken in, and hugged during our life journeys in the vast universe God created.

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