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# God's Super Power

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A Sermon By

The Rev. Susan Thon

The First Sunday After Christmas

December 27, 2015

Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

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John 1:1-18

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Good morning and Merry Christmas on this First Sunday after Christmas Day. On most Sundays I am sitting out there with you all (at 10:30) with my husband Peter and granddaughter Marleigh. I'm grateful to Andrew and Amanda, and to you, for the opportunity this morning to offer to God, and to all of you, some thoughts in response to this morning's Gospel.

When my now 30-something son was two going on three, he was fascinated by superheroes: Superman, Bat Man, Wonder Woman, Spider Man and the like. (There weren't quite as many superheroes and heroines back in those days as there are today.) One afternoon at nap time I left him in his bed while I rocked his new baby sister to sleep in the next room. I came back only to find big brother still wide awake, pondering deep questions.

"Mommy," he asked, "does God have powers?"

I took a breath. "Oh, Chris; God *made* the powers," I said. (I never know where those kinds of answers come from. But I knew then, and I know now, it's true.)

His eyes got wide. He was very quiet. We shared a moment of awe and wonder.

This is where we are this morning, with John: in awe and wonder, in the presence of something HUGE.

The angels have gone back into heaven; the shepherds have returned to their fields and flocks; Mary, Joseph, the babe in the manger, the kings and charming camel, all have gone home. The costumes are stored away until next year. We are not in Bethlehem any more. But, it is still Christmas.

The Gospel according to John is telling us the same story we hear in Luke and Matthew: the story of the Incarnation, God with us in the flesh, living among us as one of us. It's just that there is no baby in John. John comes to the story of Jesus from a different angle, a celestial perspective. John sweeps us up, away from a lowly cattle shed and into the swirling space of unformed cosmos.

We are way back here, IN THE BEGINNING, the opening of everything. "In the beginning God created . . ." the Book of Genesis begins. "Let there be light," God says; and there is light.

John intends for us to hear that opening song from Genesis in his own song here. The Word speaks creation into being:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

It is the very nature of God to communicate, to reach out for relationship, in word and action. We are made for this. The Lord God who walked with Adam and Eve in the garden has never stopped seeking relationship with us. God called Abram and promised that all the families of the earth will be blessed in him. God gave the law through Moses so people could live together in peace and dignity, in community with each other and God. God spoke and speaks to us still through the prophets, calling us to return.

And now, the creating, communicating, relating Word is come into the world. The One who was before all and is beyond all makes his dwelling *among* all people, *for* all people. He brings God *out* to us, to bring us *into* the light and life of God.

All the elements, all the energies all the powers in the universe came into the being through him; including our human powers of imagination that create stories of superheroes and heroines, who can fly, see through everything with X-Ray vision (except lead, of course); climb walls and spin strong threads and webs like a spider. They arrive on the scene in the

nick of time to save the day, catch the bad guys and hand them over to receive their just deserts. We cheer, and breathe a sigh of relief. But superheroes are the creations of wishful thinking.

There are real dangers in the world; there is evil; there are people whose understanding of life, purpose, meaning, and themselves is so twisted it leads them to do really harmful acts and to seek to control other people through violence and fear. In John, everything of the sort, everything that resists the light and life of God and God's message of goodwill, collects under the name "darkness."

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* The darkness did not overcome and will not ever overcome the light. We know this because Jesus shows us the power and purpose of God to bring God's own light and life into the world; and to bring new life and light even out of death, in the Resurrection.

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* The Greek verb translated here as "overcome" has a range of shades of meaning. It can mean "suppress" or "put out," in the sense of "overcome" in our translation. It can also mean "grasp", "appreciate", and "comprehend", as in the King James Version: "the darkness comprehended it not."

Light and life are so closely connected that they are almost inseparable, almost one and the same. Cruelty, evil, violence are so far removed from God they may not even understand the power of light and life that God communicates to the world. They just don't *get* it. And what they do get, they seek to destroy.

We human beings will never be able to bring about peace on earth, goodwill among all people through our own power. Whatever our education, titles, experience, we are all ordinary people when it comes down to it. But, then, Mary was ordinary, too. And Joseph. And all the disciples. All ordinary.

Mary and Joseph are our models of listening, receiving, accepting and acting on the Word that comes to them. The disciples followed after Jesus, watching, listening and wondering, until they finally really grasped that he is who he shows himself to be.

Not one of them was endowed with superpowers. And yet, the light shines more brightly because of their life and witness.

What they *did* have is the same power given to each of us here, to generations of ordinary people before us, and all the generations yet to come: power to become children of God. “Born of God,” it says, right here in the text. There is no baby in John, but there is birth; it is ours.

Like Jesus, we, too, are children of God, close to the Father’s heart; held in the bosom of the Father. We have only to receive the gift: God’s love begotten for us, in us, and of us. We have only to open ourselves to his presence and keep on turning toward the light.

With John we are in the realm of wonder and awe.

When I was a new, younger, priest, part of my work was as the chaplain of a parish day school for young children, three-year-olds through pre-first. Our weekly chapel began with children from one of the classes lighting the altar candles, helped by my steadying hand. What followed was a litany of call and response:

“Who is the light of the world?”

“God! Jesus!” children’s voices would call out.

“Who else is the light of the world?” I would ask.

“We are! All of us!” they called. They knew it well.

We continued with “This little light of mine, I’m gonna’ let it shine,” of course. And shine they did.

Mulling over this morning’s collect, the light of “God’s incarnate Word *enkindled* in our hearts,” I wondered, Why only “enkindled”? Just a little light? Why not a roaring fire to light the darkness?

It takes only a little light to pierce through the darkness and show the way. The new light of God’s incarnate Word is kindled in our hearts. When darkness gathered on the night before

his death, Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”

Nothing spectacular is required.

Only trust that he is who he has shown himself to be, and that you and the whole world are held in his light and life. The flame of love in only one heart, yours, will lighten the whole house. How much more the light of all our hearts giving witness in our lives to the incarnate Word, who is the light of the world!