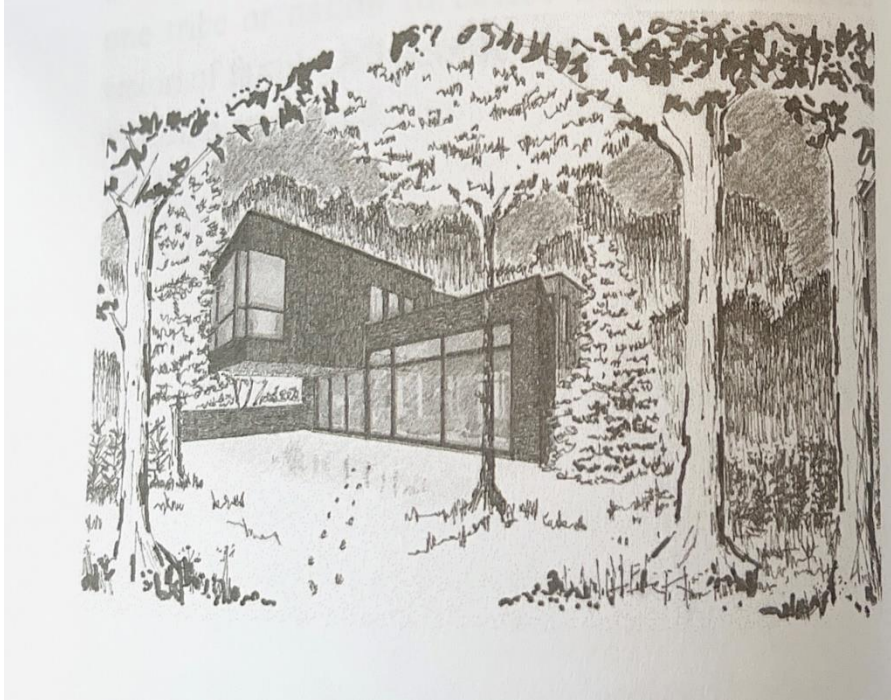


“Christmas at the House of John”
John 1:1-5, 14

One of the favorite Christmas movies for many people is “It’s a Wonderful Life” which recounts the struggles of a good man by the name of George Bailey who finally reaches the end of his rope. Everything and everyone seemed to conspire to give him the message that his life was worthless. George had dreams of traveling the world and leaving his small town behind, but every time he tried to leave, a crisis would take place, and he would end up getting stuck in town. Even though he tries to make the best of his life, he ends up having a major crisis when his uncle loses \$8,000 of the company’s money, and George was going to face financial ruin and even prison time as so many people depended on the loans his company provided. All of this drove George to a sense of deep despair. He got to the point of wanting to end it all. As he was about to end his life, an angel intervened by jumping in the water and having George rescue him. Then, this angel showed him what his town would have been like if he was not born. When George realized that his life was worth living, everything changed in his mind. Even though everything was still the same in his life, his perspective changed and that made all the difference: <https://youtu.be/uDQVRxRIGdQ>.

Seeing life from a divine perspective can make all the difference in our lives. That is what Christmas at the house of Cousin John is all about. This Gospel does not begin in human history, it instead begins in God’s cosmic view of life. The birth of Jesus is directly tied to God’s acts of creation and recreation. At John’s house, we are invited to see the good news of the birth of Jesus as a reminder of our connection to eternity. We are people who are connected to the universe. Our home is not just here but also among the stars. Jesus came at a time of oppression and empire, but he never lost track of his eternal and cosmic home. His love was so large because his home was larger than any of our small boxes. We are citizens of both this time but also of all time.

But this kind of awareness is not always accessible to all of us all the time. In her book, *Christmas in the Four Gospel Homes*, Cynthia Campbell articulates our struggle this way, “The first problem in visiting John’s house is finding the house itself. The directions are a little sketchy. The house, you see, is set far off the main road. Once you find the driveway, you wind down a long dark road, trees pressing in on both sides. Just when you think you’re completely lost you round the curve, go up a hill, and there it is---a fabulous home that looks as if it is made out of light, a light that shines in the deep darkness.”



The language of the Gospel of John may seem difficult or inaccessible to us. But that is how it is sometimes for us as we look at the world with our ordinary vision while still trying to see with the eyes of faith, the eyes of the soul. Let's listen to John 1:1-5, 14. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John is like the angel in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life." He is trying to help us see more deeply into reality. There were many people who missed the sacred meaning of Jesus' life and ministry because they only focused on the physical realities of the world. But not so with those who have the ability to see both the physical and the spiritual realities of life.

Cynthia Campbell writes, "Irenaeus said that God became what we are in order to make us what God is... The Word became us--flesh and blood--so that we might become what we were meant to be.... Our true identity is to be reflections of the divine... of course, we have messed this up royally. Our history as a human family is brutal and sordid. We go to war with each other, tolerate poverty and oppression, and fail to protect the earth, our home. Each of us carries the scars of things done to us and the unhealed memories of wrongs we have done. We carry anger and shame. Saddest of all, we carry resignation: that's just the way it is, we say there's nothing we can really do to change it, we say. But that is precisely the idea that the incarnation is meant to dispel once and for all. God became what we are in order to make us what God is: that is, in

order to set us free from all that hurt and brokenness and shame. The Word was made flesh so that we can be restored as the beautiful and loving people we are meant to be.”

We are drawn to Christmas at the house of Cousin John because it reminds us of the gift of light which we need to see our lives and our world with clarity. What makes the world our home is love and our deep connection to the source of love. The light we encounter in the house of John reminds us that no matter how hopeless our lives and our world may seem, there is always hope and there is always another chance for redemption. All we need is to let the light of Christ help us to see what is real.

I am reminded of the Sesame Street Christmas special when Elmo saves Santa from being stuck in the chimney. As a result, Elmo is given a magic snow globe that allows him to make special wishes. Elmo wishes that Christmas could come every day of the year. But then Elmo is shown how bad it would be to have Christmas every day of the year. By the end of the year, people are hoarse from singing Christmas Carols every day. The stores are being sold because they haven't been open for a year. And the people who went to visit family are missed by those who didn't get to go anywhere for Christmas. So Elmo asks to make another wish . . . this time he wishes that Christmas would come only one time a year, so it would be special when it came. What Elmo needed to learn is that having Christmas every day is about something bigger, it is about keeping the spirit of love alive each day.

It is easy to imagine a perfect world where no one has to die, get divorced, have financial trouble, get sick, or feel hurt. It is easy to feel frustrated when the world seems full of conflict and despair, but the house of Cousin John reminds us that it is about living with Christmas eyes each day. Cousin John invites us to see both through our physical eyes and the eyes of our souls.

We are going to allow for some space and time for us to enter into this experience of the light of God coming to us in the birth of Christ using a guided meditation.

(Adapted from [Arts & Faith: Christmas Imaginative Prayer Exercise - Ignatian Spirituality](#)).

Take a few deep breaths and center yourself. Now imagine yourself at home and it is two o'clock in the morning Christmas Day. The lights in the house are off except for those on the tree. All the weeks of preparation are over. This year you went to Christmas Eve worship. The church was beautifully decorated. People sang all the hymns that you love. You felt lifted up. But when you came home, there was something inside you that felt cold and empty. *Perhaps I'm already feeling the holiday blues, the letdown even before it's all over*, you think. Watching the lights on the tree you remember the anticipation you felt as a child. It was so strong that it hurt inside your chest. Smiling, you close your eyes thinking of that time—a time when Christmas and life seemed simpler.

You begin to fall asleep, not a deep sleep, but that moment when you are half-awake and half-asleep. Dreaming, you see yourself walking along the streets of your town. It's dark and you're alone. You look around and see no one else, not even cars on the

streets. There is light from the street lamps and the store windows. You look up and see a night sky filled with light from the stars and moon.

As you turn a corner, you look down a street. There is a bright yellow light softly glowing from a garage. You're drawn to that light. As you approach, you hear people talking, but you can't make out what they are saying. When you reach the door, you see people gathered around a makeshift crib or bassinet. Squirring inside, all arms and legs, is a baby. Everyone is looking at the baby. Standing outside the garage, a man approaches you. He smiles and asks, "What are you looking for?"

You look at him, trying to remember how you know him. "I was out walking and saw the light from the garage, so I came up to check it out."

He looks at you, his eyes soft and warm, and then you know who he is. It's Jesus. What do you say to him? How does Jesus respond to you? Jesus stands beside you. He reaches out and puts his hand in yours. You feel such peace, such joy it hurts inside your chest like it did when you were a child. No more words are spoken. You stand there with Jesus, both gazing at the small, helpless child. You realize that in this baby's face you are seeing the face of God. You begin to wake up. Your eyes glance over to the nativity scene you've had since you were a child. You look at the baby Jesus and you smile. All is well, you think. All is well.

We give you thanks O God for this gift of seeing your light and your love. Help us to live each day aware of your presence within each of us. Amen.