

The Smallness of God

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the Second Sunday after Christmas, January 2, 1994. Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

When I was in eighth grade the only thing I really wanted for Christmas was a telescope. The science class I had that year had filled me with a curiosity about the stars and the origins of the universe. On Christmas morning I found my heart's desire under the Christmas tree, a \$29.95 Sears and Roebuck telescope. A whole new world opened to me when I looked through that telescope from my backyard. I saw the craters of the moon. I saw the rings of Saturn and four of its moons. I saw the giant planet, Jupiter, and its moons. I focused on one of the stars in the constellation Orion, a brilliant red star so huge that ~~the~~^{our} own sun is a speck of dust in comparison. In another part of Orion I saw a binary; two stars that revolve around one another, one of them bright blue and the other red. Wonder filled me as I stared at these celestial objects. I knew that when I looked through my telescope I was looking back in time. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second. Some of the stars I looked at were so far away that the light I saw had left ~~these~~^{them} ~~stars~~ when dinosaurs still roamed the earth. The silence of infinite spaces fueled my imagination.

Astronomers with much more sophisticated telescopes than mine have discovered that the most distant objects in the universe are traveling away from us nearly at the speed of light.^{These objects are the distant objects in the universe, they travel from these objects have travelled as much as 18 billion light years} They discover that all the galaxies are retreating from one another at various rates of speed. The universe is expanding. When they

calculate the distances and the speeds of these celestial objects they're able to trace everything in the universe back to one particular place and time when everything was packed together.

Most physicists and astronomers, Christians and non-Christians, believe in what is popularly known as "the big bang" theory of the universe. Scientists believe that about 20 billion years ago everything was contained in the area the size of the nucleus of an atom. Everything! Galaxies with millions of stars, all the planets, the nebulae, all the light, matter, and energy in the whole universe was compressed into the space of the nucleus of an atom. Not even the most powerful microscopes can capture the nucleus of an atom. But scientists believe that everything in the universe was compressed in an area that small about 20 billion years ago.

Steven Gore, writing in the *National Geographic* magazine said, "All the cosmos that we can observe-- was condensed into a region much smaller than an atom." Robert Jastrow, in his book, God and the Astronomers, writes, "... all of the universe that we can see today was packed into the space of an atomic nucleus."

What does all this have to do with our Scripture lesson. The Gospel of John says, "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... And the Word became flesh and lived among us..."

Think of that! What an incredible statement. Christians believe that the creation of the universe is the handiwork of a baby born in Bethlehem almost two

thousand years ago. All things, atomic particles, quarks, quasars, pulsars, galaxies, nebulae, black-holes, all things visible and invisible were created by him and for him. Before the so called "big bang" which scientists believe started off the universe is a Person - One who became a human being. The One who was born in Bethlehem is none other than the One who flung out the stars from his hands. Incredible! Christians confess that a Jewish baby born in Bethlehem is the architect of the universe.

Richard Crashaw said it so well when he wrote

Welcome, all Wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span.
Summer in Winter, Day in Night.
Heaven in earth, and God in Man.
Great little one! Whose all embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.

So we are faced with two incredible beliefs. Scientists believe that everything in the universe was once packed into a space the size of an atomic nucleus? Christians believe that the eternal God who created the universe was packed into the space the size of a 6 pound baby. Christians who are scientists hold both of these two incredible beliefs. I'm certainly not scientifically trained, but I, personally hold to both of these beliefs.

Just as those who first knew Jesus were reluctant to believe that he was God in the flesh, Scientists were also reluctant to believe, at first, that the universe was ever compacted into the size of the nucleus of an atom. At first they rejected the theory as absurd. Only after years of struggling against the weight of his own theories that Albert Einstein finally bowed to the evidence and came to believe in

"the big bang" theory of the universe.

Just as all the scientific evidence leads physicists to the incredible conclusion that the whole universe was once contracted into a space the size of an atom, millions of Christians have been led to believe by the testimony of men and women who knew Jesus. Some Christians, like C. S. Lewis, found Christians beliefs about Jesus so incredible that they struggled for years against believing that the eternal God became a human being in him.

Maybe you or some of your friends are skeptical about these claims. I encourage skeptical men and women to approach the Christian faith as a scientist examines the empirical evidence. Read the Bible. Attend worship. Join Bible study groups. Minister to the sick and poor and hungry. Actually try to live the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount until you become frustrated with your failures. As we do this we often become drawn more and more into the life of Body of Christ, the Church.

Christian faith doesn't usually come all at once. Many Christians can't think of a specific time when they first received Christ. It's kind of like falling in love. Some people fall in love at first sight. One enchanted evening you look across a crowded dance floor and you see her and you know she's the one you'll marry. It doesn't happen often but we always enjoy hearing the stories of people who fall in love at first sight. Most people fall in love slowly as they do things together. They share common interests and spend time together until one day she says, "I don't know for sure. But I think I'm in love." I've known people who say, "When I first met

him, I didn't like him at all. But he grew on me."

That's the way it is with receiving Christ and believing in him. People who don't believe that Jesus is the One who was in the beginning by whom all things were made - people like that don't usually suddenly start to believe. Rather, they discover that a friend is a Christian. That Christian friend invites them to a worship service or a special put-luck dinner or to a Bible study. They slowly become drawn into the life of the church until one day they say, "I think I believe in Christ. I want to know him better. I want to follow him."

As we continue to study and read and talk and listen and worship and minister we begin to have the strange feeling that the One whom we have been studying is, in fact, has been studying us. We're draw slowly but irresistibly by some strange fascinating magnetism to worship Christ and confess that he is "the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God."

Almighty God, you have filled us with the light of the Word who became flesh and lived among us. Let the light of faith shine in all that we do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.