

*God gives snow like wool; God scatters hoarfrost like ashes. God scatters hail like bread crumbs; who can stand against God's cold?*

These last couple of weeks it seems like God has been scattering a lot of frost and snow and cold our way. People have been asking me if it reminds me of Minnesota. I'll be honest with you: I'd just as soon *not* be reminded of Minnesota in this particular way! But one thing I have thought of is a time a few years back when we in Minnesota had a very cold snap at the end of December, and how I got up one morning and looked at the window and found it covered, absolutely *covered*, top to bottom, with frost crystals.

Now I know just enough science to be a little dangerous; and one of the scientific facts I've picked up in my readings is that when water freezes it forms six-sided crystals, and at the corners are six growing-points where new molecules can be added to the crystalline lattice and the crystal can expand. Ice crystals are very regular in their six-sidedness. But ice crystals are also very sensitive to slight changes in temperature and air pressure and surface tension—and that means that the regular six-sided crystals can connect with each other in very spontaneous and unpredictable ways. That's why snowflakes are always very regularly six-sided, and yet form in an infinite variety of unique spontaneous forms. That's why on my window, on that very cold day, the frost crystals assembled in an incredible panoply of regular-yet-spontaneous shapes. In one corner of the window there were very definite, clearly visible six-sided shapes, interlocking at their corners, almost as if they were tiles on the glass. In a different part of the pane, crystals had formed in layers, pointed in different directions, so that there were ice spars lying over each other, almost in a checkerboard kind of pattern. And in the top part of the window there was this tremendous line of frost stretching almost all the way across the glass, and from its edges very fine lines of frost, almost like feathers, branching and branching and rebranching in six-way expansion all along that frost spine. There on my window was this incredible display of how very simple elements, following very simple relational rules, when joined together and repeated over and over and over, can form the most complex and intricate and wonderful realities.

And our Psalm says: *God gives snow like wool; God scatters hoarfrost like ashes.* And the Gospel gets even more specific: John's Prologue traces this creative complexity back to God's Word, the Word that is in the beginning, the Word that is with God and is God, the Word through whom all things are made, the Word without whom not one single thing comes into being. According to the Gospel, that six-sided splendor of frost crystals is encoded in God's Word; or, seen the other way 'round, there is a pattern in God's Word, a pattern in God's Wisdom, a pattern in God's everlasting ideal of Beauty, a pattern that was embodied in the delicate balance of regularity and spontaneity in frost crystals on the windowpane. Those frost crystals were not just a stunning display of emergent complexity physics; they were a gifted outworking of God's Word for beauty.

And John says, *The Word became flesh and lived among us.* That same creative Word that drives everything, the Word that provides the patterns by which protons and neutrons and electrons come together to make atoms, the Word that makes the laws of gravity by which stars form and galaxies spin, the Word that drives the evolutionary process by which more and more complex forms emerge from combinations of simple predecessors, the Word that lures us out of nothingness and calls us into being and becoming and growth—that same Word, John says, became flesh, became human, and lived in our midst, lived our life, so that human life too could become consciously attuned to the universal creative power of God.

*The Word became flesh and lived among us.* Just as the Word drew together water molecules to make an amazing profusion of frost crystals, so the Word drew together the basic elements of being human—atoms and molecules and cells, tissues and organs and limbs, thoughts and feelings and memories, hopes and dreams and fears and ideals, family and history and culture and identity—the Word drew together the basic elements of being human, and made a human life in whom the divine life of God could shine forth and be revealed for everyone. When we celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas, we are not just celebrating the birth of a child—although that is certainly something worth celebrating—but we are celebrating how all the bits of being human were drawn together by the Word in Jesus so that all of us could see the human face of God. We celebrate how Jesus in his birth drew together Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and the wise men and the angels, to show how God’s Word draws all sorts of people together to make new beginnings possible. We celebrate how Jesus in his ministry drew together sinners and outcasts and the proud and the weak and the humble and the lost and the faithful, to show how God’s Word transcends all barriers and causes new communities and new communion to emerge. We celebrate how Jesus in his death and resurrection drew together the shreds and tatters and broken pieces of a life that had been torn apart by fear and jealousy and anger and violence, and how Jesus made them live again, to show how God’s Word can create anew when by human standards everything seems lost. At Christmas we celebrate how in Jesus all the bits of being human were drawn together in the Word to show us the human face of God.

*The Word became flesh and lived among us.* And the mystery of the Incarnation doesn’t end there. John says: *to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.* The mystery of the Incarnation that began in Jesus, the work of the Word in drawing together the bits of being human to reveal God’s creating love that began in Jesus, doesn’t just end there, but draws us in also, so that we too become part of the enfleshing of the Word. Just as the frost crystals on my window drew in more and more water molecules to make more and more complex and intricate growing patterns, so the Word of God draws us in to make more and more complex and intricate communions in the growing Body of Christ on Earth. The mystery of the Incarnation is not just that Jesus was born; but is also that we are born, we are called to come together with regularity and spontaneity, we are called to form among ourselves the patterns of God’s Word for peace and justice and right relationships and well-being and compassion and love.

And that’s why we gather together in church like this: because we are drawn here by the Word of God, who takes all our bits of being human and assembles us into a body, an assembly, a con-gregation. The mystery of the Incarnation takes shape among us in the ways our gifts and skills and talents and passions come together to reveal God’s mission working itself out for the world. Praying together in this Eucharist; working together to serve a meal at Noon Lunch; gathering together to study the Bible; taking counsel in the Vestry or committees or leadership groups of the church, to discern together where the Spirit is guiding us in the practical affairs of our congregation; coming to Sunday School together, in order to learn the stories and traditions and practices of our faith; innovating new ideas together, to carry the rich history of Trinity forward into new times and new possibilities—all of these are ways in which the Word of God draws us together, all of these are ways in which the Word of God gathers the simple bits of our lives into complex and beautiful patterns of action that incarnate Christ for the world.

All of these things are parts of the mystery of the Incarnation we celebrate today: God’s Word scattering hoarfrost like ashes; God’s Word becoming flesh and living with us in Jesus; God’s Word drawing us together to empower us with creativity and communion and love so that we too may be living members of the living Body of Christ. It is that mystery of the Incarnation that gives our Christmas celebration its depth, its mission, and its joy. Amen.