



Year C Christmas 2 HTK 2021

This week saw the United States launch the \$10b James Webb telescope from French Guiana. This space telescope is ten times bigger than Hubble and will provide observations that are significantly better. In the words of the NASA web page:

Webb's infrared telescope will explore a wide range of science questions to help us understand the origins of the universe and our place in it. Seeking Light from the First Galaxies in the Universe ...

In the words of one scientist, it will enable astronomers to peer back in time to the beginning of the universe.

In utter contrast to that we have the opening words of today's gospel, the extraordinary Prologue to St John's Gospel.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (v1)*

In his commentary of St John's gospel Leon Morris has this to say:

John's first words in the beginning are probably a conscious reminiscence of the first words of the Bible. The first book of the Hebrew Bible was named

“in the beginning” from the opening words, therefore the expression would be widely known. John is writing about a new beginning, a new creation and he uses words that recall the first creation. The term logos or word is applied to Christ in only these verses.

The Word was in the beginning which means he was before all else, but it probably means more. The term rendered “beginning” can also denote “origin” in the sense of basic cause. It probably combines both these meanings “in the beginning of history” and “at the root of the universe”.

So, for us as Christians Jesus as the Word is both the source of creation and the creator of time, and it's time that I really want to talk about today.

On New Year's Eve many people keep their eyes glued to the clock. But this gaze is different from the quick look we take at our wristwatch to see if we should get to an appointment on time or to see whether the tram or bus has already left. On this last night in New Year when we look at the clock we have a rather special and hard-to-define feeling. At other times we use the clock in order to move according to what it says, in order to be at such and such a place on time. But on New Year's Eve we do not move at

all, some sit in the company of friends or perhaps in a room by ourselves. Then, suddenly, it is time instead of us that moves. The last minutes of the old year have come. And for a moment we hear the stream of time, which is otherwise so noiseless, beginning to murmur aloud as it plunges over the weir of this out-of-the-ordinary midnight. One must be very blasé or very foolish if one does not feel a little shiver going down one's back when it happens. Why is it that on this night we have this completely different sense of time?

There is, I suggest, what may seem at first to be a rather surprising reason for this. The reason why we experience time so utterly differently in this midnight hour than we do at other times lies in the fact that our normal analogue clocks are round. Because our clocks are round, because the hands circle about and constantly return to their starting point, we acquire the illusion that if everything in life repeats itself then we can always make a fresh start. Even our digital clocks simply repeat themselves, endlessly starting at 1200 and finishing at 1159.

On the last night of the year, however, we experience time in a different way. Then all at once time no longer moves in a circle, but in a straight line. There are no such things as round "year- clocks" which begin afresh at number one

after the passage of 365 days. We should have to visualise such a yearly chronometer quite differently; it would have to be a straight line in which every elapsed year was marked off with a small segment. And all our life we would creep along that line of time. We leave behind this one segment after another. The hand never returns to where it was before. Once decisions are made, we can never cancel them out.

The circular line on the face of our clock, however, never comes to an end. That's why it lulls in the illusion that it would always keep on going. The ancient hourglasses with their running sands were more honest in this respect!

So, on New Year's Eve we sense this about time, we sense that every moment of our life is unique and unrepeatable, that it will never return again and that our time runs on and one day will run out. We sense that we are finite. Moreover, we always carry this knowledge of the end around with us, even when we are not conscious of it.

Clearly though there were hundreds of millions of people across the globe who saw the New Year where there were fireworks, bands, street parties and widespread excitement.

It may well be that many such noisy New Year's Eve sprees with their alcoholic dulling of the consciousness,

may not have their origin in the desire to drown out this sound of time which suddenly grows louder at the end of the year, and their efforts to get these signs of our finitude out of our sight. In other words, there is a kind of joking that covers up and represses a deeper anxiety or an unsolved problem in our life.

Some others on New Year's Eve seek a place of worship or even a service in which to worship, for they want to hear a Word that comes from eternity, and they are impelled to pray. The people whom New Year's Eve drives to reflection are seeking joy too, except they find it in another direction.

Where were you at midnight on New Years Eve? I must confess after a scorching day and a fairly busy week this year I took to bed at about 10 o'clock.

The Webb telescope continues its journey as we speak, seeking answers to questions for which there may be answers but not in language that the scientists accept.

For me, the opening verse of St John's gospel is still the best place to start, *In the beginning was the Word* and we may well add, in the end there will be the Word.

Albert Einstein the world-famous physicist had this to say, "the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious".

For us as Christians the mystery that is the Incarnation is wondrous beyond belief. God became man in order that we can share in the divine. Mystery is not a word we should be afraid of. For it simply acknowledges that that our humanity limits us in how much we understand about God's creation

