

The Nativity of our Lord

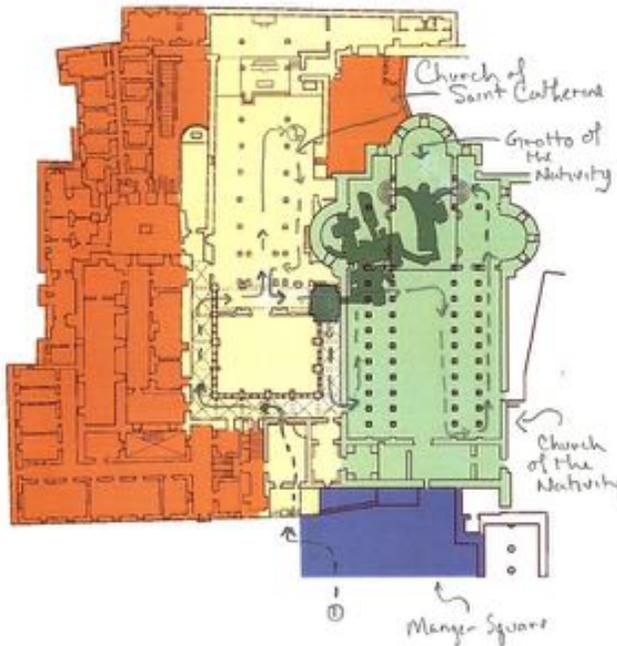


At the Threshold of the Grotto of the Nativity
The Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

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 were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁹The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.¹¹ He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God;¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.¹⁶ And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. (John 1:1-4, 9-14,16-18)



The Church of the Nativity Complex

contains the Manger Square, the Church of the Nativity, The Church of Saint Catherine, and the Franciscan Convent. Underneath this complex is a series of interconnected caves or grottos. Our first destination was the Church of Saint Catherine where we celebrated Mass; Jan and I had the privilege of lecturing together. After Mass we proceeded immediately to the Church of the Nativity. The entire complex was crowded with pilgrims and it was a challenge not to get separated from our group. An interconnected labyrinth of passageways also made it easy to get lost. I have included the schematic on the left which traces our journey through the complex to the best of my recollection. I wish we had this map with us when we arrived at the Complex.

The Church of Saint Catherine: Our journey began in Manger Square. Father Joel would be celebrating Mass at The Church of Saint Catherine so we had to proceed quickly to the

Church as every visit required that we stay on schedule. The Church of Saint Catherine sits upon the site where a small chapel, dedicated to Saint Catherine of Alexandria, was built in 1347 by the Franciscans. The Church incorporates some of the elements of the Crusader structures that existed during the time of the original chapel. Saint Catherine's has been renovated many times over the years so that it conforms to the liturgical trends of the Post-Vatican II Catholic Church.



The Pilgrims gathering at Manger Square,
Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem



The Jesse Tree Door near the entrance to
The Church of Saint Catherine



The Nave and the Shrine of The Church of Saint Catherine of Alexandria



Saint Catherine of Alexandria, who lived during the 4th century, was one of the most popular Roman Catholic saints during the Middle Ages. She was believed to have been the daughter of the governor of Alexandria (Egypt) during the reign of the Emperor Maximian. As a young girl Catherine was recognized to be of extraordinary scholarship, virtue, and beauty. At the age of fourteen she converted to Christianity, and through the eloquence of her arguments and virtue she brought many souls to Christ. Grieved by the persecution of her fellow Christians by the Emperor she traveled to meet with Maximian in the hope of his conversion. Maximian was struck by her intellect and summoned fifty of the best pagan philosophers and orators to dispute her, but Catherine won every debate and many of her opponents converted to the faith. Maximian had Catherine cruelly scourged and then thrown in prison where she left her to starve. Angels were said to minister her wounds with salves while doves brought her food. When Maximian had her released from prison twelve days later she appeared before him filled with the Holy Spirit and radiantly beautiful. Recognizing that he could not defeat her faith, Maximian proposed to her in marriage. Catherine refused,

telling him that she was already married to Jesus Christ. In a rage Maximian had Catherine beheaded. Angels later transported the body of Catherine to Mount Sinai (where the Law was given to Moses). The Byzantine emperor, Justinian, commissioned Saint Catherine's Monastery in Egypt to be build at the site where Catherine's body was believed to have been laid to rest by the angels. Saint Catherine is the patron saint of Philosophers and Scholars.

Jan and I had the privilege of lecturing at the Church of Saint Catherine's, and although it was March we read the readings for Christmas Mass. I read the first reading which was from Isaiah chapter 52; Jan read the second reading which was from Hebrews chapter one. Father Joel read the Gospel of Saint John chapter one (which was quoted at the beginning of this photo-journal entry).



How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news, Announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, saying to Zion, "Your God is King!"⁸ Listen! Your sentinels raise a cry, together they shout for joy, For they see directly, before their eyes, the LORD's return to Zion.⁹ Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted his people, has redeemed Jerusalem.¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; All the ends of the earth can see the salvation of our God. (Isa 52:7-10)

¹ In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets;² in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe,³ who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word. When he had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say: "You are my son; this day I have begotten you"? Or again: "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me"?⁶ And again, when he leads the first-born into the world, he says: "Let all the angels of God worship him." (Heb 1:1-6)

Shortly after Mass was over we left Saint Catherine's through the rear of the church and proceeded to the Church of the Nativity.



View of the entrance of the Church of Saint Catherine from the nave of the Church.



Entrance door to the Church of the Nativity from The Church of Saint Catherine.



The Church of the Nativity

The Church of the Nativity: The grotto of Jesus' birth and the Church built upon it has a long and storied history. The Grotto of the Nativity is the oldest site of continuous Christian worship dating back to at least 70 AD. In response to the perceived threat of the Christian community by the Roman authorities the Emperor Hadrian constructed a pagan temple to Adonis, the Greek god of beauty and desire, above the Grotto in the hope that it would end the Christians interest in the site. Hadrian's action only served to guarantee the continued recognition that the grotto was in fact the site of the Messiah's birth.

locate the holy sites in the life of Jesus. The Grotto of the Nativity was identified, in part, because of Hadrian's temple to Adonis, and work on the construction of a basilica was completed in 333 AD. With the completion of the Basilica of the Nativity, Bethlehem became an important center of Christendom. Saint Jerome started a monastic community near the Basilica complex, and it is here that he translated the Bible into Latin as requested by Pope Damasus.

The Samaritans of Nablus conquered Bethlehem in 529 during a revolt against the Byzantine Empire, and destroyed the Church of the Nativity. Shortly thereafter the Byzantines regained control of the area the Church of the Nativity was rebuilt under the direction of the Emperor Justinian. About a hundred years later Palestine came under Arab-Muslim occupation. During the reign of Caliph Omar the Muslims and Christians shared the Church of the Nativity, and even a small mosque was built within its complex. Unfortunately, future caliphs were considerably less tolerant of Christians. Caliph al-Hakin ordered the destruction of all of the Holy Land Christian sites, but miraculously the Church of the Nativity was spared largely because Islam acknowledges Jesus (Issa in the Quran) as a prophet second only to Mohammed. It was the oppressive conditions under which the Christians lived during this time that prompted the Crusades and to liberate the Holy Land from the rule of its Muslim occupiers.



Sanctuary and Iconostasis of the original Byzantine church built by the Emperor Justinian.

When Tancred and his Crusader knights finally liberated Bethlehem, the rebuilding and restoring of the Church of the Nativity became the first priority. The Crusader architects and builders removed the roof of the old church, and added a second story. Both the Latin West and the Orthodox East supported these projects financially and with building materials and craftsmen. Interestingly, the Crusaders maintained the Eastern styles of religious decorations including the exquisite mosaics on the walls of the newly constructed second floor. During this time both the Western and Eastern Churches shared the Church of the Nativity.



The Holy Land once again fell into the control of Muslims when Saladin defeated the Crusaders in 1187. The Crusaders continued to fight to regain control, and it was during one of these battles that two young monks crossed the battlefield to share the Gospel with the leader of the Muslim occupiers, Sultan Malek al-Kamil. This event would change the course of history for the Holy Land, but that's a story for another time. Let it suffice to say, for the sake of brevity, that several different occupying forces ruled Bethlehem until it was finally returned to the people and the nation to whom it was originally promised, Israel. Over the past decade the Church

of the Nativity has undergone extensive restoration including repair work on the original Byzantine structure and Crusader additions. During this process many of the beautiful Byzantine and Crusader era mosaics have been restored.



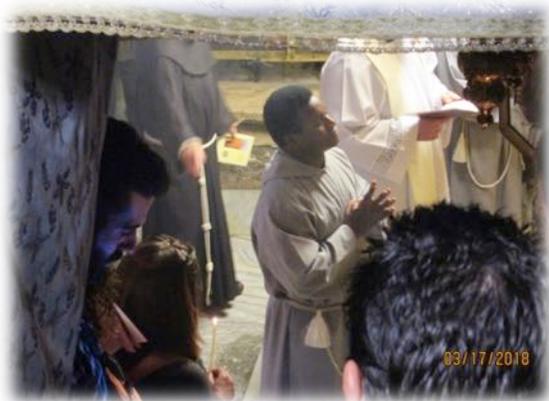
Our journey continued as we left the Church of Saint Catherine and brought us to a small doorway, which would lead us to the nave of the Church of the Nativity. This doorway is really far more than an entrance from one building to another, rather it is a passageway through space, time, culture, and theology. It is a corridor linking West and East, modernity and antiquity, the *fides et ratio* (faith and reason) of Western Christendom and the *fides et mysterium* (faith and mystery) of Eastern Christendom. To embrace these together is to experience the *Coincidentia Oppositorum*, the Coincidence of Opposites. It is, as John Paul II describes, the “Church breathing with both lungs.”

To those who have been inculcated in the minimalism of the modern Catholic Church and Protestantism in general the ornateness of the Byzantine Church of the Nativity seems, well, byzantine and maybe a bit garish. But, what comes to the mind of the Eastern Christian are the words chanted by the priest at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy: “Blessed be the Kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit now and forever!”

These words are an invitation for the faithful to lay aside all earthly concerns and enter into the time and space of the Kingdom of God, which their churches’ evoke mirroring the image of the New Jerusalem coming down from above:

⁹ One of the seven angels who held the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come here. I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰ He took me in spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It gleamed with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a massive, high wall, with twelve gates where twelve angels were stationed and on which names were inscribed, [the names] of the twelve tribes of the Israelites. (Rev 21:9-12)





And when we arrive at the threshold of our journey's end, we should ask ourselves, "Why did I make this journey to begin with? Have I found what I was looking for? And if I have, what will it mean in my life? Will I be different when I reach my journey's end?"

And when we arrive, we find not an “X marks the spot,” but a Star:

¹ When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet:



⁶ ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” ⁹ After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ They were overjoyed at seeing the star, ¹¹ and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matt 2:1-6; 9-10)

Like the Magi it is not enough just to arrive, we must touch the Mystery of the Incarnation and to do so we must get down on our knees and do Him homage. And what gifts do we bring to the Ancient of Days, our infant Lord? The only gifts that we can give Him are the ones He has given us, multiplied thirty, sixty, to a hundred fold by each and every “yes” that we have said to God’s will.

The Shepherds’ Field and Grotto:

Think of how many people over the millennia who have taken the journey to enter the space and time marked by this Star. Aside from the Holy Family, who were the first to make this pilgrimage? It was not the Magi, the Kings of the East, who were the first to make their way to the place of Jesus’ birth. No, it was to those to whom the angels announced the “the good news of great joy,” the shepherds who were abiding in the field.



Mural from the Sanctuary of the Shepherds’ Field

⁸ Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. ⁹ The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. ¹⁰ The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste

and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. (Luke 2:8-20)



After we left the Church of the Nativity Complex we walked a short distance to a restaurant that has been owned by the same Christian Palestinian family for two generations. We had a wonderful meal and then afterwards we were asked if we would like coffee. “Oh my God, yes,” I would have exclaimed, but before these words had a chance to leave my mouth I was presented with a platter with about 20 or more of the tiniest cups of coffee I have ever seen. They reminded me of those cups that nurses put pills in when they delivery them to patients. I took one cups of black, muddy liquid and downed it; it was good, but I knew it would be rude to ask for about twenty more. After this, Jan and I made it our pilgrimage mission to find a real cup of coffee, no matter what it cost us.

We left the restaurant and proceeded to walk through the town of Bethlehem to get to our tour bus. The bus drove us to the eastern suburbs of Bethlehem to a town called *Beit Sahur*, formerly known as the Village of the Shepherds. We exited the bus there and entered an area known as the “Shepherds’ Field and Grotto.”



Altar within the Grotto of the Shepherds



Fountain of the Shepherds



Altar within the Grotto of the Shepherds



Crèche within Grotto of the Shepherds

After a brief visit to the Grotto of the Shepherds we proceeded to the Sanctuary of the Field of the Shepherds. The Sanctuary is a relatively small chapel celebrating the announcement of the good news to the shepherds who were “abiding in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night.”



The sanctuary was completed in 1953. The laying of the foundation stone occurred on Christmas Day. The sanctuary was designed to resemble the tents used by shepherds. Light floods into the sanctuary through the cement ceiling which is perforated by many small glass windows bringing to mind the angelic light that appeared over the shepherds.

Just below the ceiling ten stucco angels appear to float above the sanctuary. The words they proclaimed that first Christmas night are inscribed below them, “*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.*” And after the angels left, the shepherds said to one another, “*Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.*” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child.²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.



All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

Kevin's Reflection:

At the beginning of this photo-journal entry, *The Nativity of our Lord*, I included a map of our pilgrims' journey through the Nativity Complex. Upon reflection, I could have included a map that included all of the entries thus far, The Church of Saint Anne, the Basilica of the Annunciation, the Church of Saint Joseph, the Church of Saint John the Baptist, and the Basilica of the Visitation. Why?—because all of these holy sites, and all of these holy people whom these sites commemorate are essential stepping stones which lead us to the Nativity of our Lord. Our pilgrimage presented us with an opportunity to not only visit these holy places, but also to participate in the “journey of faith” with these holy men and women of God, and in so doing travel with them on their pilgrimage to where the “word became flesh,” so that we too may say we “beheld His glory.”

As I reflect on this oft used phrase, “journey of faith,” I can't help but think that if this phrase was used in former times it meant something very different than what it means today. There is a certain amorphousness to our modern understanding of what it means to have a “journey of faith,” as if the path, and even the destination, is undefined and left to “believers” to sort out for themselves. In some respect, the phrase “journey of faith” suggests a form of relativism associated with the “spirituality of the individual” in contrast to the objectivism of the “religiosity of the Church.”

I have often heard people claim that they are “spiritual” as opposed to “religious.” Underlying this claim is a negative view of religion with its objective rules (the journey's path) and defined destination (the journey's end); an understanding that religion is constraining and oppressive to the individual. And that is exactly the intent—to restrain the “individuality” of the human will; that Frank Sinatra syndrome that celebrates “I did it my way.” The Church offers for our journey's path the “narrow way” of the Cross, and the death of individuality; and for our journey's goal, resurrection and transfiguration from individuality to personhood that bows before the will of the Father, and with Mary proclaims, “Be it done unto me according to Thy word.”

At some point in our lives we all stand at the threshold just outside of the Grotto of the Nativity, counting the cost of discipleship and deciding whether we turn back and do it our way, or cross the threshold and do it His way. To meet Him at the Star we will need to get down on our knees; there we will meet our Incarnate God in His *kenosis*, and here our “journey of faith” begins with our own self-emptying:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil 2:5-7)



This is our journey's path, and the heart of the Church's message, to have the mind of Christ, not to demand our own autonomy or even equality with one another, but like Christ emptying ourselves by taking the form of a servant to God and to humanity. And what of the journey's end? Saint John tells us this:

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1John 3:2)

“We shall be like Him.” What does that even mean and how does it relate to the Nativity of our Lord? Saint Irenaeus answers this question beautifully: “God became man so that man could become a god.” This is the whole point of the Incarnation and birth of the Messiah; it is not just to redeem humanity from the wages of sin, but also to restore man to his full potential in God, that is, to be *like* Him. This is our *raison d'être*, our reason for being, and the goal of our “journey of faith,” and our pilgrimage through life.

This may be new to some, but I can assure you that it is and always has been the teaching the Church. In the Eastern Church this doctrine is known as *theosis*, and it is central to her theology. Pope John Paul II called the theology of *theosis* the “light of the East.” Although it is not as commonly taught in the Roman Catholic

Church, *theosis*, is essential to her belief and it is proclaimed by the priest when he prays during the Liturgy of the Eucharist at every Mass:

“By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ and he humbled Himself to share in our humanity.”

And where did this all begin? The Seed of our *theosis* began in the Grotto Annunciation, and was made manifest in the Grotto of the Nativity. Our participation begins at baptism and continues whenever we,

“have this mind among [ourselves], which is [ours] in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

Leaving the Star, the birthplace of our Lord, our pilgrimage will now follow the footsteps of our Lord from the Jordan to the Mount of the Ascension. We do not take this journey alone, but with other pilgrims, that is, the Church both Militant and Triumphant. In our pilgrimage we will witness the Lord reveal His *mind* to us both in Word and Deed, and the holy sites we visit have and will continue to manifest these realities to us through the Holy Spirit.

Jan’s Reflection:

The Grotto of the Nativity made me reflect on the humility and lowliness God chose for His Holy Family. Jesus was born of Mary in a cave and placed in a feeding trough. Nowhere in scripture does it mention Mary ever complaining about the cave or the circumstances surrounding her son’s birth. The shepherds, out in the fields, were heralded by angels telling them not to be afraid, announcing the birth of the Savior in the city of David. As Mary made haste to visit Elizabeth, the shepherds made haste to go to Bethlehem to encounter Mary and her newborn son. And after finding Jesus they go out to announce Him to the world. And what does Mary do with this encounter. She is strengthened by their Good News; keeping all these things in her heart...pondering them so Mary continues to receive the gift of God in the way He chose to manifest Himself. Again Mary teaches each believer how to walk humbly. She is truly showing us the way to receive her son. We must walk as Mary did if we want to be birthed into His likeness in all humility, in order to touch Him.



Kevin’s Reflection #2:

In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:1-3)

My first encounter with the first chapter of the Gospel of John was in my Saint Joseph Daily Missal and it read very much like the one quoted at the beginning of this photo-journal entry with one significant difference: *Logos*. I’m not sure why, but even as a youth I was fascinated by the term, *Logos*. Shortly after the Second Vatican Council arrived nearly all of the translation had replaced *Logos* term “the Word.” The new translation certainly made sense, Jesus is the incarnate Word; perhaps that’s why some bibles highlight the “words” of Jesus in red, not just because they are special, but because they *are* Him in a very real way for as He said, “The words I have spoken to your are spirit and life.” (John 6:63) The term *logos*, always held out a deeper meaning for me although I could not articulate it until much later in life.

In my early forties I had, like most men, one of those mid-life existential crises. Fortunately, it did not lead to fast cars and women, but rather the study of philosophy, religion, and an attempt to reconcile my faith with the reason of science. In my study of philosophy I began with the pre-Socratics and I learned that the early Greek philosophers asked one simple and seemingly obvious question: “Why is their plurality to reality?” And in

pursuing an answer to this question one of the first things they observed and concluded was that although there is an enormous diversity of being (things) they are all somehow interconnected. Once they had settled on this conclusion they began to search for the *Urstoff*, a German word meaning the primary or primordial essence of all things. For most of the early Greek philosophers the *urstoff* was material: water, fire, earth, air, etc., that is until Heraclitus who made the bold claim that the *urstoff* was immaterial, it was *logos*. For Heraclitus, *logos* was “reason” and it was the underlying principle governing and permeating the cosmos.

The concept of a *logos* was transferred from the Greeks to Judaism after Israel’s conquest by the Macedonians. “In Hellenistic Judaism the Logos as an independent hypostasis was further developed, and came to be associated with Wisdom (Sophia). Philo of Alexandria combined Greek terms of philosophy and biblical concepts saying that the Logos is the divine pattern from which the material world is copied, the divine power in the cosmos, the divine purpose or agent in creation and an intermediary between God and man. Saint John, having a knowledge of the ideas of the ancient world, identified the Logos with the Messiah in an entirely new way.” (The Evangelistarion, 2000 p.469)

Jesus is the *Logos*; the eternally begotten Son Who was with God and was God (and we must understand that “was” is not meant as “past tense” as it would if it was referring to mortal humans, but as past, present, and future tense with respect to God who is eternal). Jesus is the divine power of the cosmos, the agent of creation:



Christ the Logos
Creator and Sustainer of the Universe

“All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that hath come to be.”

And as Paul tells us in Colossians,

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15-17)

In regards to my on going search for the reconciliation of faith and science, I offer the first chapter of the Gospel of John as the answer *par excellence* to the question cosmologist, Stephen Hawking, asked:

“What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?”

The answer to that question is not “what,” but “Who.” Jesus, the *Logos*, is the One who *breathed fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe*; He is the one who holds this universe together. He is the one who

made us in His *image (logos)* so that we could wonder and seek to understand the hidden order of the universe, which is the very heart of science. And yet so many scientists, though they marvel at nature, have not found her creator:

⁵*For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen. ⁶But yet, for these the blame is less; For they have gone astray perhaps, though they seek God and wish to find him. ⁷For they search busily among his works, but are distracted by what they see, because the things seen are fair. ⁸But again, not even these are pardonable. ⁹For if they so far succeeded in knowledge that they could speculate about the world, how did they not more quickly find its Lord? (Wisdom 13:5-9)*

May I suggest to them that they take a journey through time and space, and stoop to enter that cave in Bethlehem where shepherds made homage and Mary pondered for there they will find the Author and Lord of Creation.

Prayers to Saint Catherine of Alexandria

Catholic Prayer to Saint Catherine

O God, Who didst distinguish Thy holy virgin and martyr Catherine by the gift of great wisdom and virtue, and a victorious combat with the enemies of the Faith; grant us, we beseech Thee, through her intercession, constancy in the Faith and the wisdom of the saints, that we may devote all the powers of our mind and heart to Thy service. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. Catherine, glorious virgin and martyr, resplendent in the luster of wisdom and purity; thy wisdom refuted the adversaries of divine truth and covered them with confusion; thy immaculate purity made thee a spouse of Christ, so that after thy glorious martyrdom angels carried thy body to Mount Sinai. Implore for me progress in the science of the saints and the virtue of holy purity, that vanquishing the enemies of my soul, I may be victorious in my last combat and after death be conducted by the angels into the eternal beatitude of heaven. Amen.



Reliquary of Saint Catherine of Alexandria
Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai

Orthodox Prayer to Saint Katherine

Let us praise the most auspicious bride of Christ, the divine Katherine, protectress of Sinai, our aid and our help. For, she brilliantly silenced the eloquence of the impious by the sword of the spirit, and now, crowned as a martyr, she asks great mercy for all.

O friends of martyrs, now divinely raise up a renewed chorus, praising the all-wise Catherine. For, she proclaimed Christ in the arena, trampled on the serpent, and spat upon the knowledge of the orators.

Prayers for the Nativity of our Lord

Nativity Prayer of St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Let Your goodness Lord appear to us, that we
made in your image, conform ourselves to it.
In our own strength
we cannot imitate Your majesty, power, and wonder
nor is it fitting for us to try.
But Your mercy reaches from the heavens
through the clouds to the earth below.
You have come to us as a small child,
but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts,
the gift of eternal love
Caress us with Your tiny hands,
embrace us with Your tiny arms
and pierce our hearts with Your soft, sweet cries.
St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)