

## "We Are Not Alone"

Back in 1977 the film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" became a box office hit, and sort of a classic. It was about aliens landing on earth. The subtitle of the film was: "We are not alone." The special effects were dazzling for that time, and it won an Academy Award for the Best Cinematography. Close Encounters of the Third Kind. *We are not alone.*

Do you believe in UFO's? (Our government recently gave a new name for UFO's: UAP's "Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena"). Why keep it simple, huh!

Ever since the famous Roswell, NM incident in 1947, where some claim an alien spacecraft crashed, there have been thousands of reports of UFO sightings, including photographs and video footage. WHYY recently did a documentary on an incident that took place in 1994, where reportedly a UFO landed near a school in Zimbabwe, and 62 children encountered 2 non-earthly creatures. Over the years since, numerous interviews have been conducted with the children involved – interviewing them at the time, and later as adults. Many believe these children didn't just make this up.

Recently, there have been congressional hearings on UAP's. One so-called whistleblower, former Pentagon employee David Grusch, told Congress that UFO's are real, and the government has been withholding knowledge of non-human life on earth for nearly a century.

A new government office has been created to investigate UFO sightings (sorry, UAP sightings!): It's named the "All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office"! But our legislators seem to be taking this more seriously. However, NASA recently did a study and released a report that indicated they found no evidence that the objects sighted had an extra-terrestrial origin. But they also admitted that they didn't know what these things were! (Interesting).

It seems that no one will officially declare that there are alien aircraft or alien beings among us. Yet there are thousands of reports of people seeing *something* that seems not of this earth – pilots, law enforcement officers, ordinary citizens who don't appear to be mentally disturbed or off the deep end. I personally believe that *we are not alone*. Of course, you have a right to form your own opinion.

Whether or not you believe there are flying saucers, and 4-foot creatures with oval heads and huge eyes, *the Bible indicates that we have been visited by creatures not of this earth!* The Bible calls them.....*angels*. They appear in Old Testament times. They appear around the time of Jesus' birth. An angel appears to Joseph (Matthew 1:20). An angel appears to Mary (Luke 1:26ff).

But there's an extraterrestrial visitation that's even more breathtaking than that! John 1:14 describes it: "And the Word became flesh, and lived among us." The "Word" here is the Greek term "logos". It's a technical term. For 1<sup>st</sup> century Greeks it meant the "controlling reason of the universe", the reason behind the universe. They had many gods with many names, but the Supreme God, the Ultimate Intelligence of the Universe, they called the "logos". But the gospel writer John probably used the term "logos" as the *Jews of the Old Testament* used it. The "word"

the "logos" is God's word and message to us, God revealing Himself to us. The "Logos", was a pre-existent Being who embodied God's message and truth revealed to us.

*The Logos was Jesus!* John's gospel begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, was with God from the beginning of time. Jesus, who was with God, also *was* God, and took on human form, and lived among us for a while.

The Christmas story puts it another way: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us') (Matthew 1:23). You talk about the granddaddy of all extraterrestrial visitations! **God** visited this planet! *Close Encounters of the Third Kind. We are not alone!*

Do you believe this? Really? I think sometimes we're so used to hearing this in church that we don't think it through. That we don't comprehend the implications of this! Did *God...God...* really come here in human form, and reside with us for the 33 years of Jesus' life? If that's true, *everything else*, every other news story, every other historical event, pales in light of that incredible truth!

Theologians refer to this as the Incarnation. "Incarnation" means embodied in flesh, or taking on flesh. God came to us in human, fleshly form. Theologian, J. I. Packer, said: "The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation"

If this is *really true*, that God took on human flesh in the Person of Jesus...that God became one of us for a while...then this brings an incredible message of hope to a dark and frightening world. *For one thing, it means that God is invested in this world, that God cares about this planet and us on it.* It's so easy to ask, "Where is God?" when we look at all the horrible things that are happening in the world, how evil seems to rule the day. But the Incarnation assures us that God cares about His world, and will have the final say in how history plays out.

Author Philip Yancey shared a thoughtful reflection on this. "Scientists now believe that if you had unlimited vision, you could hold a sewing needle at arm's length toward the night sky and see 10,000 galaxies in the eye of the needle. Move it an inch to the left and you'd find 10,000 more. Same to the right, or no matter where else you moved it. There are approximately a trillion galaxies out there, each encompassing an average of 100 to 200 billion stars." Yancey continues, "I pause and wonder at the mystery of Incarnation. In an act of humility beyond comprehension, the God of a trillion galaxies chose to "condescend" — to descend to be with — the benighted humans on this one rebellious planet, out of billions in the universe. I falter at analogies, but it is akin to a human becoming an ant, perhaps, or an amoeba, or even a bacterium. Yet... that act of condescension proved to be a rescue mission that led to the healing of something broken in the universe...". Yancey concludes, "A God beyond the limits of space and time has a boundless capacity of love for his creations, no matter how small or rebellious they might be."

*The Incarnation also tells us that God is with us when we sin, and when we lose our way.* Jesus welcomed sinners, associated with sinners, and offered them forgiveness, and a new start. Keith Miller was an author, a counselor, who was very popular some years ago. In one of his teaching tapes for unmarried people he talked about sexual temptations. What about someone who gave in to sexual temptations – what do you say the next morning to Christ? His answer: "For heaven's sake, *say something!*" His point was not that we should take sin lightly. Rather, when we sin, when we fail, we can go to Christ, for Jesus is always willing to forgive those who are broken and humble, and realize their need for help. The Incarnation tells us that God is with us, even in our moral failures.

***The Incarnation assures us that God is with us when we suffer.*** Noted author and pastor Alan Redpath suffered a debilitating stroke soon after beginning a new ministry in a large congregation. He was not just physically affected, but also mentally: he couldn't concentrate, he couldn't think clearly. Spiritually he couldn't pray or read the Bible. He felt he was reduced to being a child again. Not only that, he was attacked by tremendous temptations: sinful thoughts, temptation to impurity, bad language. It was a dark and agonizing time for this great man of God. He felt isolated from God. Finally, he cried out for God to take him, rather than have him exist as he was. It was only then that God began to draw him out of the valley of despair. Looking back on that awful period of his life, he said, "It was then, the first time for months, that it seemed the Lord drew very near to me, though I'm sure he was very near all the time, even if I was unconscious of the fact."

The prophet Isaiah spoke of a "suffering servant of God" who would come to the people – a prophecy fulfilled by Jesus! "He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering, and acquainted with infirmity" (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus went through dark days of suffering for us. When Jesus was being rejected, God was being rejected. When Jesus was taunted and ridiculed, God was being taunted and ridiculed. When Jesus endured the pain and humiliation of the cross, God was hanging on that cross. The Incarnation assures us that God is with us when we suffer.

*The Incarnation tells us that God is with us in our loneliness.* A lot of people are lonely today. People living alone. People who've lost their husband or wife. People who've gone through a separation or divorce. People far from home. Parents whose children hardly ever get in touch. Teenagers who are being bullied, or who don't feel part of the in-group at school. I know of a church that started a group for widows, and the group keeps growing and growing because so many of the men in that church are dying. Jesus felt human loneliness. He said this to His disciples: "A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me" (John 16:32). The God of all creation wants to be with us, even when others leave us to be alone.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us') (Matthew 1:23). This Advent-Christmas season, which begins today, is a good time to celebrate the incredible news that we've been visited by One from another realm – the God of all creation! God is involved in His world, in our lives. God is with us!

One more thought that I believe is important: *If Jesus embodied the presence of God on earth, then Jesus' followers ought to in some ways embody the presence of God to others.* C. S. Lewis, in his classic book *Mere Christianity*, suggested that each Christian ought to be a "little Christ" in the world. That we should be a "God-presence" to others. That something of God's love and truth should be embodied in us, and flow out to others.

I can think of people I've come across over the years. Just being around them, you sense something of the love of God, the graciousness of God, the power of God! A man named Metropolitan Anthony was a monk and bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church. He once said, "We should try to live in such a way that if the Gospels were lost, they could be re-written by looking at us." Bryant Myers, Fuller Seminary Professor of Transformational Development called this "incarnational spirituality", and described what this can look like: "An incarnational spirituality is one that draws near and listens before it speaks, one that loves before it acts... This kind of spirituality is based on being present – present to God, present to the poor, and present to ourselves."

I hope and pray that people can sense something of the love and goodness and presence of God in us – in me!

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind. We are not alone.*

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.  
Community United Methodist Church  
December 3, 2023*

