

5 Easter – Year C – May 19, 2019

Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35; Psalm 148

the Rev. Deborah Kempson-Thompson

In the 1950's, kids sat close and gaped
at tiny black and white television screens and
“were amazed that Superman
could travel faster than a speeding bullet.
We could even picture him,
chasing it down ...
his right arm outstretched, his cape rippling behind him.

If Superman traveled at half the bullet's speed,
the rate at which the bullet moved away from him would halve.
If he did indeed travel faster than the bullet,
he would overtake it and lead the way.
Go, Superman!

... Superman's aerial antics”
in this scenario obeyed
19th century laws of physics postulated by Isaac Newton.ⁱ

This Newtonian concept, known as frame of reference,

was overthrown

by Albert Einstein in the early 20th century

with his mathematical calculations called

the theory of special relativity.

Today sci-fi fans thrill to computer generated

hyper-leaps in and out of time and space

and plunge into worm holes,

by exceeding the speed of light instead of
speeding bullets.

But outsmarting the speed of light remains a fantasy.

According to Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity:

“if Superman were to chase a light beam
[instead of a speeding bullet]
at half the speed of light,
the beam would continue to move away
from him at exactly the same speed.”ⁱⁱ

In other words,

If an object tries to travel
186,000 miles per second,
its mass becomes infinite.ⁱⁱⁱ

In reality "the mass approaching infinity" means it is increasing without
any finite upper limit.^{iv}

What's fascinates me about this physical law is what

it might mean relative to Jesus' glorification—

means it is increasing without any finite upper limit.

Jesus tells his friends that he's about to be glorified and

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where he is going they cannot come.

I've always wondered, *Why not?*

The answer, I believe, is

Shekinah –

The majestic presence or manifestation of God which has descended to "dwell" among men. Like ... "word"; "logos" and "glory," the term was used by the Rabbis in place of "God" where the anthropomorphic expressions of the Bible were no longer regarded as proper^v

Anthropomorphism is alien to the contemporary mind

It is impossible in light of our scientific belief systems

to enter into thinking of the Creator as having

human characteristics—

We are people of science not myth.

Incarnation we accept because

Jesus is an historical figure

whom we believe was God pouring himself into

time and space as

one of us—human and divine.

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He was born of woman and lived as one of us
and died.

Here's where resurrection comes in.

Resurrection defies the laws of physics—

It is a supernatural manifestation of God's presence
in the natural world.

Jesus' body body mass, so to speak,
traveling at the speed of *Shekinah*
became infinite.

Shekinah is a rabbinical word that denotes God's presence.^{vi}

From the beginning when God walks in the Garden
looking for Adam and Eve

through the Red Sea Crossing

and subsequent journey to freedom

in the Promised Land,

where *Shekinah* dwells in the ark

To later when the presence of God dwells

in the Temple of Solomon within the Holy of Holies.^{vii}

The Hebrew scripture records that

God descends to earth ten times and is present in creation.

Shekinah!

In the time of Jesus,

Shekinah is represented as logos— (creative expression)

and light.

John begins his story of Jesus with *Shekinah*

In the beginning was Shekinah –
(the all creative, supreme, everlasting presence of God)
and *Shekinah* was made flesh (i.e. Jesus)
and dwelt among us.^{viii}

John portrays Jesus throughout his gospel as the presence of God:

*Then, while Jesus was teaching in the temple courtyard,
he said loudly ... I didn't decide to come on my own.
The one who sent me is true. He's the one you don't know.*

John comments on Jesus' declaration, saying:

*He was speaking about the Spirit,
whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.
For the Spirit had not yet been given,
because Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

The capstone revelation of Jesus as *Shekinah* comes to the disciples when Jesus says to them affectionately,

*Little children, yet a little while I am with you.
Ye shall seek me; and as I said unto the Jews,
Where I go, ye cannot come, so now I say to you.
A new commandment I give unto you,
That ye love one another;
as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.
By this shall everyone know that ye are my disciples...*

And when Mary finds the tomb empty but Jesus present:

*Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father;
but go to my brethren and say unto them,
I ascend unto my Father and your Father,
and to my God and your God.*
¹⁸ *Mary Magdalene came giving the news to the disciples,
... I have seen the Lord*

Jesus now is glorified.

We see the Lord in one another.

for *Shekinah* now is everlastingly
present in us at all times.

Jesus has left the world with a tangible, visible
means by which to recognize *Shekinah*—

God's presence on earth is found

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in our loving community—the church,
loving one another as Christ loves
with acceptance and forgiveness.

God no longer walks in the Garden at eventide

searching for humankind—

God no longer is confined to the shadows of an ark or temple

however ornate or holy.

God is with us – *Emmanuel*.

And others will know this by our our resurrection love.

Let us walk at the speed of *Shekinah*.

Amen

ⁱWhat if you traveled faster than the speed of light? by William Harris

ⁱⁱ<https://science.howstuffworks.com/science-vs-myth/what-if/what-if-faster-than-speed-of-light.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ*ibid*

^{iv}<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13537-shekinah>

^v<https://physics.stackexchange.com/questions/6946/what-does-it-mean-to-say-that-mass-approaches-infinity>

^{vi}<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13537-shekinah>

^{vii}*ibid*

^{viii}*op cit*

^{viii}Jn 1.1