



## “An Unimaginable Intimacy” from *Only Wonder Comprehends*, by John Garvey, 2018

THE FULLNESS OF WHAT INCARNATION MEANS IS CLOSED TO US, AND OUR MINDS ARE INCAPABLE OF TAKING IT ALL IN. In Jesus an unknowable God (being unknowable is essential to what and who God is) is with us as brother, companion, fellow-sufferer, one who praises John the Baptist and tells a scribe he is close to the Kingdom, gives us saving stories, sits at the well with the Samaritan woman and even jokes with her ... This is a shocking level of intimacy that ends in a shameful death, a death not all noble by the standards of the ancient world.

I BELIEVE THAT THIS INTIMACY (AND THIS UPSETTING OF WHAT WE EXPECT GOD AND OUR salvation to be like) is so close to what it would take to bring our tragically wounded world close to God’s love, and what it can mean in our lives, that it makes more sense to me than any other story, much more than the notion that, as beautiful as the cosmos is, it is finally without any meaning other than the awe it inspires.

BUT WHAT INCARNATION MEANS GOES SO DEEP THAT OUR FIRST STUMBLING INTERPRETATIONS are crude. Matter itself matters here, not just its fleshy human dimension, but any created thing. We identify with sentient beings, being sentient ourselves, and if we are Christians, we believe that God in his compassion in some way suffers with us all – but God is also in some way intimate with silicon, with gravity itself, with dark matter. Dante’s love that moves the sun and the other stars is encountered in flesh: but how does it encounter water? It does, because water is.

IN SOME WAY BEYOND OUR CAPACITY TO IMAGINE IT, WHAT JESUS DID ON THE CROSS AND IN the Resurrection has to do with crystals and large gas planets. How do they come into the love and kenosis involved there? I have no clue, but that love and glory and God’s own joy participate in being at every level is basic to our faith. When I say the name of Jesus in prayer I am not only naming the one named after Joshua who saved us on the Cross by his death and Resurrection, but a universal event that transforms a universe in which flesh and matter itself mean death into a universe aimed at transformation and life, in which flesh and all forms of matter reflect only God’s love for all of creation, which is because he loves it. (August 12, 2011)

John Garvey was an Orthodox priest and, for 40 years, a columnist for *Commonweal Magazine*. After his death in 2015 his essays were published in the collection *Only Wonder Comprehends*.