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Last year, drawing on the wisdom of the late Jesuit theologian Fr. Karl Rahner, I [argued](#) for "an ecological approach to Holy Week." This year, I want to return again to that theme, inspired by the quickly approaching celebration of Earth Day on the Tuesday after Easter, and following my own argument that we need a theology of abundance, which I [wrote](#) about in my last column.

What I'm thinking about in particular is a concept in theology and ecospirituality known as "deep resurrection." The renowned Catholic theologian St. Joseph Sr. [Elizabeth Johnson](#) is best known for developing the idea, first in her 2014 book [Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love](#) and later in a 2023 article titled "[Deep Resurrection](#)" and in a chapter in her latest book, [Come, Have Breakfast: Meditations on God and Earth](#).

The notion of "deep resurrection" begins with theological reflection on the significance of the incarnation of the Word for the whole of creation, and not just humanity. This line of thought traces back to the prologue of the Gospel of John and its affirmation that God did not become merely human but "flesh" (*sarx* in the Greek original). It includes all creatures and affirms that what we [celebrate](#) at Christmas is not just a meaningful event for human history, but also for all of creation.

As I noted in my [2019 Christmas column](#), the theological term for this emphasis on the significance of Christmas for all creation is known as "deep incarnation," a description first coined by the Danish theologian Niels Henrik Gregersen in a 2001 academic [article](#). Gregersen explains, "The incarnation of God in Christ can be understood as a radical or 'deep' incarnation, that is, an incarnation into the very tissue of biological existence and the system of nature."

Everything in the created world, those things visible and invisible, known and yet to be discovered, is implicated in God's decision to become flesh; all of God's creatures are touched by and benefit from God's gift of love and life in the Incarnation.

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By becoming flesh, the Eternal Word entered into an interdependent relationship of mutuality with the rest of creation. As Johnson notes, "Jesus Christ is at the center of Christian faith. Unless we can see that his life, death and resurrection have an intrinsic connection with the natural world, that world will remain peripheral to the good news." Jesus of Nazareth ate food that was once other living creatures and breathed air produced by the photosynthesis of plants.

The Word's incarnation as a human creature reveals divine solidarity with both the human and the more-than-human world. And just as this insight is consequential for our understanding of Christmas, so too does it have profound implications for our understanding of Easter and the Resurrection event.

Johnson explains:

The logic of deep resurrection sets out from the insight that Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh, was a genuine part of the community of life on Earth. His body existed in a network of relationships drawn from the whole physical universe. As a child of Earth he died; the earth claimed him back in a grave. Risen from the dead by the creative power of God, he has been reborn not as a pure spirit but as a whole historical person, a member of the Earth community, radically transformed. One with the flesh [sarx] of the earth, his risen humanity bears the hope that the future final transformation of the world will be the salvation of everything, including the groaning community of life, brought into a blessed future by the holy God of love.

Like the scriptural roots of deep incarnation, the notion of deep resurrection is anticipated in some key New Testament texts. Johnson points to the letter to the Colossians as one important illustration. "An early hymn sings that Christ is the 'firstborn from the dead' (Col 1:18)."

She adds, "The firstborn, yes, but not the onlyborn. Christian faith trusts that 'the power of God who raised him from the dead' (Col 2:12) will be with human beings also in our suffering and dying and speak a new word of life over our completed lives."

Johnson also reminds us that the same Christological hymn in the Letter to the Colossians that proclaims him "the firstborn from the dead" actually begins "by naming him 'the firstborn of all creation' (Col. 1:15)." This further suggests a greater cosmic significance to Christ's resurrection than our typical anthropocentric perspective would allow.

We can see this play out liturgically in the solemn celebration of the great Easter Vigil. Essential earthen elements of fire and water anchor our visceral experience of the commemoration of the risen Christ's triumph over death. The recounting of salvation history opens with the reading of the first creation narrative in Genesis and continues with Psalm 104 beckoning the Spirit to "renew the face of the earth."

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The proclamation of the [Exsultet](#) also opens with an address to the whole earth: "Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King, let all corners of the earth be glad, knowing an end to gloom and darkness."

The sacramental presence of Christ in the Eucharist highlights the ongoing manner of divine presence precisely in the "fruit of the earth" we consume in communion.

From the perspective of spirituality, expanding our reflection on the significance of Christ's resurrection beyond our own individual, familial or even species interests to include the whole of God's creation invites us to see the world more like God sees it, and challenges us to behave as better members of the single family of creation.

Pope Francis, in his 2015 encyclical letter, "[Laudato Si', on Care for our Common Home](#)," emphasized this point of our participation in one family of creation, noting that nonhuman creatures do not merely serve as the background to our human drama. The pope explicitly ties this reflection to the Resurrection, writing: "The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ."

Francis adds: "The final purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward, with us and through us, towards a common point of arrival, which is God."

As we begin our celebration of the Holy Triduum this evening, may we renew our understanding of the paschal mystery so as to see not just the eschatological hope the Resurrection provides for us humans but also the hope extended to the whole of God's vast creation included in this cosmic journey of salvation.

As we move from betrayal to crucifixion to silence and then to the glory of new life this weekend, let us not forget the rest of our creaturely kin. For, as Johnson reminds us, "Amid a fractured world, awash in violence, struggling against injustice, dark with daily death, every Easter is a celebration of the whole of creation promised transformation by the presence of the risen Christ."