

The last time the Hale-Bopp comet raced past planet earth was the year 2213 B.C. That's still a few hundred years before Abraham entered the covenant with God. The comet last visited here before the beginning of Bible history. People were just learning to grow cotton, to go skiing, and to domesticate chickens. It's older than fruitcake, even older than the trial of O. J. Simpson. Think about it--the entire history of Judaism and Christianity has taken place since anyone before us stood upon the face of the earth and beheld this comet in the skies. How much we have to tell it. How much it must have to tell us: Where has it been? What has it seen? Two years ago nobody even knew it was there.

The reappearance of this comet proclaims the majesty of God. It has traveled patiently through the expanse of outer space. Its return has united our entire globe in a common experience of wonder. But get this: The God whose mighty muscle flung Hale-Bopp hurtling through the heavens at 99,000 miles per hour is the same God who made you and that person next to you. What a show-off God is. God scattered the stars through endless space but takes endless interest in each of us.

Tonight that God is making things again. Easter celebrates the springtime of nature, the rising of Jesus, the baptism of catechumens, and the rebirth of every Christian. We celebrate Easter each year on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring. When is it time to baptize? Not just when the catechumen is ready, not just when the parish is ready, but when the earth is ready, when the sun and the moon are ready. This year God even tossed in a comet for good measure. Baptism is a cosmic event. The rising of Christ affects all creation; it blesses the oceans, it consecrates the stars, it beautifies plants and animals, and it brings hope to human beings. God is making things again as we turn from darkness to light, from resentment to understanding, from isolation to communication, from ignorance to insight, from selfishness to patience.

Let us put our former lives behind us and make this Easter a new beginning. If you've tried before and failed, do not despair. God has not given up on you. God is patient. God has waited 4,210 years to send this comet back. God has time to wait for you. God waits for all of us to orbit through the darkness of our bad habits and basic immaturity, so we can return with a bright tail of blazing light. This Easter let's resolve to start anew, to be bringers of peace. Let us affirm our faith in the God whose mighty arms stretched those spangled heavens yet holds us each in the palm of a gentle hand.