

“The Word was God, Life, and Light”

John 1:1-5

Advent Midweek I

December 5, 2018

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We’ve grown accustomed to stories about a snowman who magically *becomes* ‘alive’ and a marionette doll that magically *becomes* a boy and a frog that magically *becomes* a prince. And, though there’s certainly nothing sinful about those stories, the idea of something ‘magically’ becoming something other than its nature sort of desensitizes us to the weighty truth that the Word *became* flesh. It perhaps doesn’t strike us or take our breath away as it should that ‘the Word became flesh.’

In my years of seminary, I took a course on the Gospel of John. Out of the 30 hours of lecture, I would estimate that about eight of them were just on *this phrase*! Certainly, there’s a lot to cover in the Gospel of John, but what does any of it mean if we don’t meditate upon and appreciate that ‘the Word became flesh.’

In order to even begin to comprehend the magnitude of the phrase, “The Word became flesh” (as we’d like to do in anticipation of celebrating the incarnation), we must first meditate upon what ‘the Word’ actually *is*. The Greek term is “logos”, and – borrowing

from philosophy - perhaps some would try and interpret as God's 'wisdom' or 'idea' or 'knowledge.' Our Christian children would probably sound the most accurate among our guesses in simply saying, "The Word? Oh, that's Jesus." But, back up a minute – *Jesus* is the name of the God-man born of Mary, and yet, in the mysterious incomprehensible nature of God, that same One existed from eternity without beginning, without birth, without human nature, without the name Jesus. So, to say that in John 1:1, 'the Word' is a reference to the God-*man* is not quite right. In order to think on this rightly, we have to remember there was a time in which the Word was *not* made flesh... in which the Logos was *not* flesh and blood and was not named Jesus.

So, what is this 'logos'? That's a question with which early heretics tried to create chaos in the Church– is this logos God?... a messenger of God?... a substance, characteristic, idea of God? The very first words of John's gospel give us direction: "*In the beginning* was the Logos." Doesn't that remind us of Genesis, "*In the beginning* God created the heavens and the earth." But, there's a stark difference between Genesis and John in using that phrase: Genesis uses it to begin a focused and detailed account of the first hours of creation. John uses it to – in a sense – look back before creation, look 'above time' and see that the Word (the Logos) already 'was' before the moment the beginning began. The reader knows in the very first phrase of John that the Word is eternal, that it 'was' before the

worlds began. John does not list the Word as being dependent on anything or anyone, not an offshoot of God, not an idea of God... simply, "In the beginning was the Word." The Word is to be seen and meditated upon by its own merit and in that merit is to be given the same glory as one would give of one's own Creator who alone existed and 'was' before the worlds.

And yet, "in the beginning was the Word," not as if in isolation or opposition to God – "the Word was *with* God." But, "with" is perhaps a weak translation; the word in the Greek is *pros* and it means 'toward,' face-to-face... a relationship of reciprocity. There's a communication and union between the Logos and God, even from the beginning, so that it makes sense when we read in Genesis 1, "Let us make man in our image..."

Now, in the English, we sometimes use the word 'with' to imply a relationship of one party 'with' the anchor or central party, for example, "Bobby with his mother." The 'with' there says nothing of origin, just of relationship. Perhaps this is the closest we can get to understanding the word 'begotten.' That word 'begotten' does not mean that the Word had a beginning in point of time, for "In the beginning was the Word," rather the Word is "begotten of the Father before all worlds," in that the Word is *with, face-to-face with, toward* the Source of all things before the foundation of the world – "Of the Father's love begotten e'er the worlds began to be."

So, the Word was with God – begotten of God. But, not ‘begotten’ in a way of being subservient or lesser or even different; rather, as the text continues, “the Word *was* God.” How can God be less than or different than God? In fact, in the Greek, the word order is reversed to emphasize the divine nature of the Word. It says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was toward God, and God was the Word.” The magnitude of that simply can’t be captured. For, we all know that ‘the Word’ is going to invade human history, be born of a virgin, suffer and die in our place, and yet “*God* was the Word.”

And, though that phrase seems to be weighty beyond measure, another phrase – perhaps less well-known – adds immeasurable weight upon immeasurable weight. For, in the first verse, we heard of three descriptions to define the Logos, but here we hear it all compressed into one simple but profound truth (verse 2): “This One *was* in the beginning face-to-face with God.”

One commentator says it this way:

“Now the three foregoing sentences are joined into one... Just as we read “the Word,” “the Word,” “the Word,” three times, like the peals of a heavenly bell, like a golden chord on an organ-not-of-earth sounding again and again, so the three rays of heavenly light in the three separate sentences fuse into one – a sun of such brightness that human eyes cannot take in all its effulgence.”

The commentator implies the brilliance of this great truth of the Logos should blind our mind’s eye; perhaps we would respond,

“Well, it’s sort of hard to ‘think about’ on a cold Wednesday night after a long day’s work... the ears and the mind are sort of numb to this penetrating truth of this ‘fused-together effulgence.’

But, if we need to simplify and yet still understand the importance of it all, John does this for us when he points us to a more well-known description of the Logos. “In him was life...”

Everybody knows the magnitude of that word, *life*. We all know – even from a tender age of 4 or 5, what *death* is and how universal it is. Indeed, from that tender age, we watch animated films that depict magical life-giving roses or science-fiction movies that imagine some life-giving crystal. And around this special crystal or around this life-giving rose, all is green and lush and beautiful... but far enough from the glow of that life-giving source is nothing but death and dying and hopelessness decaying into despair.

To have the assurance of life, the certainty of life, the *source* of life, that is a great comfort for us because we all know that in *us* is not life, but ‘in us is death.’ **But**, “in *him* was life.” In this Logos, this mysterious Word, is the source of life. It doesn’t say, “In him was living,” or, “in him was an improved or better life” or “in him was temporal life,” or even “in him was spiritual life.” No, in him was life – life for the soul, life for the body, not just for today or tomorrow, but for eternity.

What else in all the world can you chase after that can say that of itself? Money may give you happiness; it may ‘improve’ your life, but it is not “life.” Food may keep you full and, for a time anyway, sustain temporal life, but it is not “life.” And certainly, when thinking of money, food, or anything else we’re thinking merely of *temporal* life – where is the answer for *eternal* life? And yet, for both flesh and soul, temporal and eternal, **“in Him was life”**... so that, all around him, the sick are healed, the lame walk, the blind receive sight, the dead are raised, *and the sinner is declared righteous*, and the mortal is made immortal, and death gives way to life eternally.

That very idea – that in this One, this Word, this Logos – all of life has its source and hope, that shakes the cosmos to the core and makes all the other ideas about what to consider ‘holiday cheer’ and how to celebrate the ‘holy days’... that cosmos-shaking truth makes all those other things seem rather irrelevant, trite, plastic, as fake as the artificial tree with the artificial star and the artificial lights that now stand in my living room. As beautiful and fun as they are, how trite – even had we chopped down the noblest of the noble firs and topped with a star from heaven itself... still, how trite in comparison to the Logos, in whom is *life*.

And, if in this Logos who is with God and is God, if in this Logos is **life**, then there’s **light**, a ray of hope for those who sit in darkness, warmth for those who sit in the iciness of isolation. To sing “Jesus Christ is the light of the world,” is to sing not just of a physical

light, but of that one and only illumination to shatter all darkness. Imagine how quickly darkness flees when one little light breaks its dominance, when one little candle glows. How much more so when that one light of which we speak is not a little candle to brighten the gloom of a room, but the divine Logos whose effulgence shatters the darkness of death. Where that news fills our ears, we have a ray of hope, we have light, we have the promise of life... *if...*

“... if only,” the eager one pleads, “if only, that light, that life, that Logos would make himself known to the world... if only that One would invade the world... if only that one would descend into the world specifically to battle the darkness of the world... *then* there would be hope.”

Thus, how comforting it will be next week to hear anew these words of John’s gospel: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” Ah! *There’s* hope.

But, before we can speak of such hope coming into the world, we must be sure we know what this hope is... so that we do not pass by so quickly John’s magnificent introduction with which, (though it sounds so epic) we have become so comfortable: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” **So** important is this One, this Word, this Logos, that we hear of it not only in the beginning of the Gospel, but also in the images of the End of Time. When we know the promises of John 1 and the magnificent gospel enshrouded in the incarnation, then the

words of *Revelation* are *not* dark and frightening, but are light and hope-inducing, when we hear this description: “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns... He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is “The Logos of God.”

There He is... the Word of God: our hope, our life, our light. And so, how eager we are in this Advent season to hear that this Word became flesh... how eager for next Wednesday, to hear that this “true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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