

Christmas Day 2021 Sermon

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

In the beginning...

Those are the first 3 words of the Bible, the words with which the author of Genesis begins the story of God's creation of the world. In those first verses of the Bible, God speaks the Word, and the world comes into existence. God speaks the Word, "Let there be light," and there is light. God speaks the Word, "Let there be dry land, and oceans, and fish, and animals," and it happens.

And so, when John begins his *Gospel* with those **same** words, "In the beginning," he wants us to know that, as David Lose writes, "he is writing a *new* Genesis, a new story of God's interaction with humanity that is every bit as important, and perhaps more, than the original. For according to John, that's what Jesus is – God's reinvention and rebirth and renewal of the whole creation and, indeed, of God's own self, as God comes to make manifest God's enduring commitment to, and love for, the world..."¹

“In the beginning was the Word,” writes John, “and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

John is not speaking here of “life” in the sense that a person’s heart is still pumping, so he must be alive. Rather, “life” for John is *spirit*-filled, **divine** life, the sharing of God’s life. It is for this **divine** life that human beings were created in the beginning of Creation; and it is for the purpose of sharing this divine life that Jesus takes human flesh. As Jesus himself will later say, “I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.” (*Jn 10:10b, TEV*)

But, my friends, **we** dropped the ball, almost from the start. Our ancestors Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, a symbol of humanity choosing independence from God. And it only seems to have gone downhill from there. God gave his chosen people written laws; but we broke them. God sent prophets as messengers, but we did not heed their words, did not receive God’s Word spoken through them.

Then, God decided to send his only-begotten son; not to clean up the mess, not to whip the people into shape! God would **not** come as an *enforcer*, since God’s nature is not law, but love; and, as C.S. Lewis wrote, “To love at all is to be vulnerable.”² To love at all is to be vulnerable.

If we didn’t know the story already, my friends, we could never have predicted it: God takes human flesh as a vulnerable and helpless baby, totally dependent on its parents to meet its every need. The infant Jesus had to be fed, diapered, and comforted. Had to be taught to speak and read. “[E]ven *before* the Incarnation,” writes author Sarah Otto, “the eternal God... was vulnerably dependent on the courageous ‘yes’ of Mary and the kind reception of Joseph, to hospitably welcome God’s son into their hearts, and home, and world.”³ If, as C. S. Lewis said, “To love at all is to be vulnerable,” and if God *is* Love, as John writes in his First Epistle, then God the Almighty is also God the All-Vulnerable.”

God the all-vulnerable.

Episcopal priest and professor Joseph Pagano writes, “Our Bible is the story of God’s struggle to get God’s message of love across to humanity. God tried over and over again to reach us, but we kept turning deaf ears to God’s message of love. We ignored commandments, prophets, and sages...

“The message of Christmas is this: God found a new way to [communicate that message of divine Love.] The letter to the Hebrews says, ‘Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by a Son.’ (Hebrews 1:1-2) ...

“... The Son of God, the Word [that was] ...*with* God [and *was* God from the beginning,] ..., took on human flesh... God became one of us; and, like **us**, came into the world as a baby, ...an inarticulate infant.

“...What does a baby say? Actually, not much. Without the power of speech, they are, in fact, rather limited. But they do say two very important things: ‘Here I am,’ and, ‘I need you.’

“And God, in God’s love, as the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us as a baby, says this as well: ‘I am here. I need you.’

“Shocking, isn’t it? ...What we celebrate [today] is that this baby, the Word made flesh, was already a completely formed message of love, full of grace and truth toward us. Here I am. I am with you. I am for you. I am trusting myself to you. I need you.

“... How desperately God must love! Desperately enough to find a new way to say exactly the right thing, which, even in the cries and coos of an infant, turns out to be: ‘Here’s how much I love you.’”⁴

1 David Lose, “Christmas Beginnings,” *In the Meantime* blog,

<https://www.davidlose.net/2016/12/christmas-eveday-a-christmas-beginnings/>

2 from C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Risk_of_Love

3 Sarah Otto, “God Needs Us,” 4 Jan 2021, God In All Things,

<https://godinallthings.com/2021/01/04/god-needs-us/>

4 The Rev. Dr. Joseph S. Pagano, “Here’s How Much I Love You,” from *Sermons that Work*, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/heres-how-much-i-love-you-christmas-day-iii-2016/>