

John 1:1-18 12-19-21

The Christmas Word

Our Christmas celebrations are so very much about music. You think of all the great music that has been written in celebration of advent. And we have enjoyed some of that today. The tradition of Christmas hymns is rich. But there are things we need to know that are difficult to convey through music. I would expect that this first chapter of John would be a bit hard to dramatize or sing about and so it has become the neglected version of Christmas. In Matthew we read about the wise men and Joseph, in Luke we read about the shepherds and Mary. But John doesn't include any of that stuff. Yet this chapter is the official Christmas text for the Church of England. This is John's version of Christmas. Let's read it 1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ⁶There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. ⁹There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' ¹⁶For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

That then is our Christmas story. You say, "This is a Christmas story?" Where are the shepherds and the wise men and the angels? Where is Joseph and Mary and the little baby?" Where is Jimmy Stewart, Will Ferrell or Santa Claus. No mention of them here. No, this is not the Christmas of the story-teller and the historian and the romanticists, this is Christmas for the philosopher and the theologian, but until you understand John 1, the virgin and the manger and the shepherds are just sentimental mush. So, join me to see what this chapter tells us about Christmas as we see what it tells us about Jesus, the Christ.

The name of Jesus is only used once in these verses but anyone familiar with the writings of John, or anyone familiar with just this gospel, will recognize Christ behind the title "the Word." See that? 1a *In the beginning was the Word*. The term "word" is capitalized isn't it? The editors of our Bibles understand that this is a title for a person, the Lord Jesus. We sing it in *O Come All Ye Faithful* -- "word of the Father, now in flesh appearing." Jesus is the Word of God with a capital W. But why would John give Him that rather odd title? I could go into a long discourse on the Greek philosophical roots of this concept, or the Hebraic significance of it, but I don't think that is necessary or helpful because you already know what a word is and what a word does. A word communicates, right? It is the expression of an idea or the representation of an object. We seldom think about what words do because we use them all the time either to communicate or to learn. But I think we all know what it's like to want to say something and not be able to remember the word to use. You have an idea but you have a hard time uh, uh.....uh con...conveying it, or getting it across because the word you want – uh uh - eludes you. Or, possibly, there is no word for what you want to say. Are you familiar with sniglets? Some years back a fella named Rich Hall started inventing words for things there were no words for before. His attempt led him into some very funny naming games. Let me share a few of his words that he calls sniglets. "Choconiverous" this is an adjective referring to the tendency when eating a chocolate Easter bunny to bite off the head first. *Choconiverous*. "Elbonics" a noun - the actions of two people maneuvering for one armrest in a theatre or an airplane, "elbonics." Here's a good one, "hozone" that is the mysterious place where one sock in every laundry load disappears to - the hozone. One more - *furnidents*. The indentations that appear in carpets after furniture is moved. You never knew what to call those before did you? You needed a word to communicate. That's what words are good for. So, what do we mean when we say that Jesus is the Word of God? We mean that He is the one who communicates to us what God is. Apart from Christ there is no knowledge of God. Oh, men say they are trying to find God. They look for God in their telescopes. They look for God inside themselves. But man will find God only one way and that is if God chooses to disclose Himself. A motion picture by Ingmar Bergman of Sweden speaks about this problem in the film called "The Silence." It portrays the plight of three characters who do not hear the voice of God and who believe that God is silent. What a horrible thought that would be. That God would make us, throw us into our existence on this planet and never speak to us, never tell us why we are here and never even let us know that He is there. You cry out

for God to speak but nobody's home or else He has chosen not to communicate. While I was waiting in line at Giant Eagle I noticed the headline in one of those funny magazines that said, "Dying planet sends message to earth." I was disturbed by that. I read four online news sites and they totally missed that story. I don't know about you but when a dying planet sends a message to earth I think that deserves a headline in my paper. Even more so, does it merit a headline when the living God sends a message to earth. And that is what Jesus is. Christmas, the incarnation of God, is a celestial telegram of immense importance. Now I don't know what the message from that dying planet was. I was in the express checkout you see. But the message from the living God was, "Here I am. This is what I am like." See John 1:18a *No one has seen God at any time.* That is true in the sense that no one has seen God the Father. 18 *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.* Jesus takes the guesswork out of our theology. We don't have to sit around wondering if God is caring or indifferent, holy or devious, mighty or weak. Jesus explains God to us. He is the Word. Hebrews 1:1-2a *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ²in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.* The coming of Jesus into the world is the communication of God with humanity about Himself. Now, in a sense, every human made in God's image tells us something about God. Every Christian who is born of God's Spirit reveals something of the divine character. But listen to Hebrews 1:3a *He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.* So, if you want to know what God is like look at Jesus. Why? Because He is the closest thing to God? No, He is the exact representation of His nature.

Look with me at John 14. Jesus, you know, has to put up with a lot out of His disciples. He puts up with a lot of pride and stupidity out of me and we see Him dealing patiently in the Scriptures with his initial recruits. Here is Jesus near the end of His earthly life and ministry. He had been with his men almost three full years. 14:1 *Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.* 7-9 *If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."* ⁸*Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."* ⁹*Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Jesus says, "if you see me you see the Father."* John says that Jesus, the only begotten explains God. He is the Word, the living expression of all that God is.

So, that is why Jesus is called *the Word*. From here on I want to look at what John says about the word. And as we do I would have you think about the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. The term *Trinity*, despite its frequent usage among Biblical Christians, is not in the Bible. The concept was developed in the early centuries of the church to describe the relationship between God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit. Simply put, it affirms that there is one God who subsists in three distinct but united person: the Father, the Son who is Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. As you study John chapter one you will find that the Trinitarian idea fits nicely what we find here. **1a** *"In the beginning"* where have you read those words before? Why I believe the Bible begins that way. Genesis 1:1 says "In the beginning." John 1 says "In the beginning." According to Genesis what was in the beginning was God. According to John 1:1 the Word was in the beginning. **2,3a** *He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him.* How much came into being thru Him? **3** *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.* John goes out of his way there to emphasize that this is all inclusive. If it was created, Jesus was involved in it. So, what does that tell you about Jesus? For one thing, He was not created. Uh-uh. From the other Christmas stories, one might get the idea that Jesus had his beginning there in Bethlehem but John says He always has been. This is precisely what was prophesied by Micah many years before. Micah 5:**2** *But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.* That is what John says **2** *He was in the beginning with God.* Before you were born. Before Adam, before creation, before the angels, before anything Jesus is. Now that is beyond our grasp. It blows our circuits to think of Someone who has no beginning. And we wonder, what were God the Father and the Son doing before creation? They were together but they weren't fishing. We have no idea but whatever it was they did it for a long time. Whatever was going on, Jesus was there. He is eternal. **1ab** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.* So, this eternal Word was with God. Verse 18 says that He was in the bosom of the Father. Both verses describe an intimate connection between the two. The Word and the Father are very, very close but are they identical? Clearly, they are not. You cannot be with yourself. If you are with someone you are not alone are you? There has to be a distinct personality present with you. So, the Word and God are not identical. Some cults make the mistake of saying that Jesus is the Father and the Father is Jesus. That makes no sense of the

Scriptural record. Clearly there is some distinction between the Father and the Son. That's not too hard to understand until you get to the third affirmation of verse 1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Now you want to check your glasses. Did that say the Word was God? Yes it did. The language is not ambiguous. It says that this Word, this Jesus, is God which kind of helps us understand how He can be eternal and how He can be the Creator, but it leaves us wondering what it means to say that He was with God. The only explanation is that Jesus and His Father are distinct but united. That is what we mean to express by the idea of one God in three persons. It is a mystery to be sure but it is not a contradiction. And Trinitarian theology is the only way to explain John 1:1.

So, the Word is God, which explains all the other things we read about Him here. 3 *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.* He was the Creator of all things. Think about that as it applies to Scripture. My mother was 92 when she died eight years ago. But - she had told me when she turned 80 she was going to start counting her age backwards. That means she was, by her reckoning really 68 when she died and if she had live another five years I would have been older than my own mother. Now that's a mathematical trick but with Jesus and Mary it was really true. He created His mom. Later on Jesus told a crowd that He was older than Abraham too. Colossians 1:15-16 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.* He was the Creator of all, including His own body. Think about that? Talk about a self-made man. Jesus was the original and the One and Only. In John 1:14 it speaks of Jesus as the only begotten and then in John 1:18 *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.* The only begotten what? The only begotten God. You are probably familiar with John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.* It refers there and elsewhere to the fact that Jesus is God's only begotten Son. God begat Him. Question - what do zebras have that no other animal have? Baby zebras. What do aardvarks have that no other animals have? Baby aardvarks. Like begats like doesn't it? When you learn that a friend of yours just had a baby what do you ask? You ask, what did you have? And you mean, was it a boy or a girl. You don't mean, "Was it a skunk or a pelican?" You

know it will be human because like begets like. So, if God has a begotten Son what will that Son be? God. Just like the hymn you sang, "Very God, begotten not created."

Then notice one other thing that shows you that Jesus is God. **14** *The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John says that the Word was glorious. They saw His glory, the glory of God. Look at John 17:5. Jesus there is praying to His Father and He says, **5** *Now, glorify Thou Me, together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.* Did you follow that? He calls upon the Father to restore to Him the glory which He ever had with Him before the world was. An amazing statement! Jesus shared with God eternal glory. And John says He saw it. At least he got a glimpse of it. You know, with people, the closer you get the less their glory appears to be. On stage, with shining lights and good makeup some folks can appear pretty wonderful; but the closer you get the more you see the blemishes and the faults and the ordinariness. But the closer you get to Jesus the more beautiful and glorious He seems to be. So the word was with God and He was or is God. Now we get to the heart of Christmas. Now you can understand it. **14, 14a** *The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. the Word became flesh.* Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing. Christ the Lord. This is what we call the incarnation. The Christmas story in Luke tells us how it happened but this is the story behind the story. This is what God was doing in all of that. He was becoming flesh. What does that mean? Did it mean that God took on a human body in appearance sort of like the old Greek gods would do when they invaded the body of a bull or a goose or something? No. Jesus actually became a man. He didn't just have the body of a man. He became a man. Hebrews 4:**15** *We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.* He is the second Adam. Whatever makes a man a man was true of Jesus. And yet He took it on without relinquishing His deity. He walked the earth as the God-man. On one occasion we read of how Jesus was asleep in a boat when a storm arose. His disciples were fearful and yet Jesus was so tired He slept thru the storm until they woke Him up. That is humanity. But when they woke Him up what did Jesus do? He calmed the winds and the waves. That is deity. I can't explain it but I am convinced it was so.

Several years back an open-air, preaching evangelist named Cliff Knechtle visited a college campus in our former community. Cliff carries on open air debates with all comers and this one year a leader of a Muslim group came out to argue with him. And this man was mocking the idea of the incarnation. He spoke of how ridiculous it is to think that God would become a baby. That God would actually be conceived inside a woman. The Muslim was a physician and he described what goes with a baby inside his mother and the man concluded quite confidently that God wouldn't do that. God wouldn't become a baby. God wouldn't do that. Think of it. Who is he, who are you, who am I to tell God what He would or would not do. Who is to say? We don't know why God created in the first place. We don't know God's purposes unless He tells us. Some of you are sitting here today thinking that this incarnation stuff is a little much. You like the Christmas ideals of giving and love but you've got too much grey matter to buy this business about Jesus being God. I know what you are thinking. I also know what you are feeling. You want to believe. You find this Jesus an attractive character. Something is persuasive here and I urge you to read this book until you meet the Lord and have all your doubts shattered by the love of Jesus Christ. The incredible love of Jesus shatters my doubts. It breaks down my pride and fills me with faith, not mindless credulity but a reasonable faith, a trust in things not seen, but still very real.

We've seen today what the concept of the Word is all about. We've seen that the word is God who became flesh in the person of Jesus. Behind it all is one grand question - why? Why would Jesus leave glory and become man? What was His motive? His motive was love. The reason He came is because He is full of grace. The Muslim yells that God is too great to become a baby. The Christian shouts back that God's love is so great He had to become a baby so that He could fulfill the law, teach us the way, and die for our sins. Yes, God's great holiness and power make it hard to understand but God's great love makes it impossible to deny. The hymn says, "Lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb." So great is His love for needy sinners that He not only endured the womb but He also endured the cross. To the worldly-wise that will always be foolishness, to the self-righteous that will always seem needless, but to Joseph and Mary, and Shepherds and wise men, and the people in this room and countless millions throughout the ages that is a life-changing reality that nobody has a right to ignore.