

Christmas 1, Year B

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.

Prayer:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
AMEN

Sermon:

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

The 1st few lines, of our Gospel, raise interesting questions.

- Who was the “Word”?
- What does it mean to be “with God”, and
- If the Word was “with God”, How could the “Word” also be God?

A lot of seminarians, over the past zillion years have spilled
a lot of ink and coffee trying to figure that stuff out.
It’s work-in-progress for every generation.

To sort this out we have to look at the Bible as a whole.
We don’t get to pick and choose,
and take things out of context.

To understand what it meant for Jesus to be The Word,
We have to look at John’s Gospel,
But that is just a beginning.
Let’s look at Matthew’s Gospel, too.

Most scholars date John’s Gospel to around 100 CE.
Long after Jesus’ earthy ministry.
Mathew was probably a few decades earlier.

John's Gospel, is more like a theological treatise,
then a biography, like Matthew, Mark and Luke's.ⁱⁱ

John's Gospel was probably written for early Greek Christians.
His Gospel seems to speak to that ancient,
complex and nuanced cultureⁱⁱⁱ.

Through John's Gospel we get a hint of
both his purpose and his world view.^{iv}

John wasn't telling Jesus's earthly story^v,
So his Gospel doesn't offer a nativity story,
Unlike Matthew and Luke.

John's goal^{vi} was to show how we
"may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...."^{vii}

He didn't use the miracles to prove that Jesus' was the Son of God,
Like the synoptic Gospels do.^{viii}
Instead, John assumed that Jesus was the Messiah^{ix}.

Through Jesus, John wrote, *heaven came to earth*.
To know Jesus, is to know God.^x

John wanted to show us that Jesus came to heal and to save.^{xi}
And so, he skipped the Nativity and
Went straight to the incarnation.^{xii}

And this is John's Truth: ^{xiii}
That Jesus lived and breathed and sweated, and
ate and drank, and baked in the sizzling summer sun,
like any other person.

And that, every moment Jesus was with us,
on this fragile blue and green globe,
he was also wholly and utterly God.

We know that Jesus is our role model –
A hard act to follow, don't you think?
We all fall short. And that's OK.
We are all a work-in-progress and we will always be.

John's Gospel shows that Jesus is the Son of God,
But he skips the details on how Jesus got here.
He skips the Nativity and Jesus' genealogy.
He leaves that to Matthew^{xiv}.

Genealogy's, back then especially, focused on the Fathers.
One guy begat another guy, who begat another guy,
and another, and another, ... *etc., etc.*
It's all about the guys!

But Matthew's genealogy of Jesus mentions women!
One person's mother and someone else's grandmother.^{xv}

When it comes to making babies,
women have always done all the hard work.
But they still were hardly ever mentioned. Until Matthew!

Matthew's woman-friendly genealogy of Jesus,
Is straight from the heart of God.
He gives us a big hint about Jesus's message –
Don't use lists to keep folks apart.

Lists are helpful. For grocery shopping. For setting goals.
They tell us who is in and who is out.
Who has been naughty and who has been nice.

Lists can call us together.
They can give us certainty and an identity.
But they also set us apart.
They can put us in one camp, or another.

That's why Matthew's^{xvi} woman-friendly list is so important.
It reminds us that *everyone God creates, matters.*
Nobody is an accident.

But there's more!

Matthew's mentions women who were on the naughty list:^{xvii}
Maybe, some were naughty in bed or, maybe,
–even worse back then- weren't Jewish at all!

Growing-up, I knew that if Santa kept a list
of whom was naughty and nice, Jesus probably kept one too.
As a good Catholic boy, I knew I was doomed!

Humans are natural list makers.
We are all asked to make our lists. To choose sides.
To decide who's naughty and who's nice.

Somewhere – somehow -- I learned that even if Santa made lists,
that wasn't and isn't Jesus' way.

Jesus was and is the Word, but he isn't a list maker.

We may be. But he isn't. Thank you, God!

I'm not doomed after all.

And so this Christmas,

we can learn from John *and* from Matthew.

They both tell us, in one way or another,
that we can at least try to be list free.

And if we aren't going to be list-free,

We can at least use our lists to bring people in,
instead of keeping people out.

We *are* called, in this Christmastide and

in every season of our lives,

to know and to live and to speak the Truth.

That God is real, that God was here and is here.

In the beginning was the Word, ... and the Word was God....

... the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness,

and the darkness did not overcome it.

When it comes to lists, as our Christmas gift to the world,
Let's remember Nancy Reagan,
Let's "*Just Say No*". xviii

-AMEN

ⁱ See, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-Word-God.html>

ⁱⁱ In fact, Luke plainly says that his intent is to write what we would call a biography.

ⁱⁱⁱ In John's Gospel, Jesus spends a lot of time discussing theology. One might wonder how such theology could be so complex, so early in the Christian era?

^{iv} Ostensibly written by John, "the beloved disciple", no one can be completely confident of that. The theology of the Gospel nominally attributed to John is very well developed ... and that takes time. Moreover, the Greek writing style appears to be later than that of the 3 Synoptic Gospels. Perhaps John's Gospel was written by a third-party unknown, sometime after John's life, but based on John's teaching. In the ancient days it was common for a letter or a document to be written pseudonymously, attributed to a third party, if it was said to be in line with that person's philosophy and/or theology. Several of the letters popularly attributed to Paul are arguably pseudonymous, including Ephesians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, and Titus.

^v Like the synoptic Gospel's do.

^{vi} i.e., its *raison d'être*

^{vii} And how we may have [eternal] life in his name. See, John 20:30.

^{viii} For example, while the feeding of the 5,000 appears in all four Gospels, in John 6: 1–15, that miracle is "explained as symbolic of a deeper spiritual truth ("I am the bread of life; . . ."). John's Gospel does not merely narrate a series of events but offers details to support an orderly theological interpretation of those events. See, <http://otgenesis.blogspot.com/2012/03/parallels-between-genesis-1-and-john-1.html>

^{ix} By the time John was written, the miracle stories in the synoptics had already proved Jesus' Messiahship.

^x "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." There are several apparent parallel themes and images in John 1 and Genesis 1, e.g., creation, light, life. Matthew and Luke start the story with the nativity; John goes back to the beginning! To many Christians, John 1 seems to be informed by Genesis, with which John's author was quite familiar.

^{xi} Not so much our perishable human bodies, but our eternal souls, for the life to come.

^{xii} See, e.g., doubting Thomas's final confession, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

^{xiii} “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”. John 1: 10-11.

^{xiv} See, Matthew 1:1–17.

^{xv} Rahab. Tamar. Ruth. Bathsheba. Mary. See, *A Brief Blog: A Christmas Challenge to Line-Drawing Judgmentalism*, Baker, Mark, Ph.D., FPU Seminary.

^{xvi} John didn’t write such a list.

^{xvii} They were on the wrong side of the ancient Jewish purity codes. See, *A Brief Blog*, supra.

^{xviii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Just_Say_No