

“The Word”
 December 25, 2016
 Christmas Day
 Text: John 1:1-14

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

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.

Words

Words. The smallest units of communication. They are labels, or names for specific thoughts. Words are conveyers of concepts. Million of words in thousands of languages are flying around us at all times. Words are used in countless ways to communicate a wide range of ideas and agendas. They are used lovingly to articulate heartfelt truths, but they can also used viciously to harm and destroy. But now in the opening of John's gospel we hear something unusual. As if telling his own creation narrative John writes,

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

The Word, or the *logos*, as the Greek translation says it. It's Jesus John is referring to; Jesus, an eternal member of the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. While we are celebrating his birth on this day, Jesus is eternal. He was before time began. Fully human, yes, but at the same time fully God; eternal God. How can this be? This is an unexplainable mystery; but still we ponder it. As the gospel tells it:

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.

And as John calls him, Jesus is the Word. The Word of God. The articulation of the essence of God. God is being revealed through Jesus.

John the Baptist

In his gospel John tells of another John, John the Baptist. Early in Advent we heard a lot about this firebrand in the wilderness, crying out and calling us to repent because the kingdom of God is at hand. John writes,

“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.”

The gospel writer wants to be very clear about this. In case there is any confusion about this, John the Baptist is not the long-awaited, it was the one who comes after him. “The true light” he calls him. This is the incarnation. This is God moving into our lives and revealing himself through the person of Jesus.

The Struggle

And yet, there is a sorrowful struggle between God and humanity. The story of Jesus is so unlikely from beginning to end that many simply miss it. John tells it,

“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.

Sometimes, Jesus will be right in front of us and we might miss him. That is why we have heard that there will come a day when Jesus says, “When I was thirsty you gave me a drink, when I was hungry you fed me, when I was in prison you visited me.”

“When did we do this Lord?” the people will ask.

“Whenever you did it to the least of these of these you did it to me.”

But he will turn to others and say, “When I was thirsty you gave me *no* drink, when I was hungry, you did *not* fed me, when I was in prison you did *not* visit me.”

“When did we not do these things”? they will ask.

“Whenever you did not do these things to the least of these, you did not do them to me.”

Now the incarnation of God into humanity, which is Jesus, is more inclusive than we have previously realized.

But then, John delivers today’s good news:

“To all who receive him, who believe in his name, he gives power to become children of God, who are born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

This is the gift of God’s grace. Ah, to be adopted as a child of God. If there is ever a time in the year when we can remember being a child, to actually be a kid again, it’s at Christmas. There’s an excitement in your stomach, a bouncing in your heart. This is the day to remember those wonderful and magical years. And this is the beautiful reminder of what God’s desire is for you; that you are like a child who is lovingly

adopted into the family, and given well thought-out gifts. All this from believing in the name of Jesus; the name of this mysterious God/Man.

Who is Jesus?

So, who is this one called Jesus? We will spend the rest of days looking into this question. Just as soon as we think we have Jesus figured out, we find some new revelation in Scripture or we witness a miracle that makes us rethink everything all over again. The mystery of Jesus being fully human and fully God keeps him above our attempts to mold him into the Jesus of our limited understanding. He is in everything and everything came into being through him. He will not be domesticated, he will not be scaled down to size, he will not be contorted into any one person's idea of who we think he is. The Word of God exists above all of that.

But it's Christmas day, and what a gift we have received. As John announces, *"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."*

Do you want to see God? Look at Jesus. Do you want to understand the heart of God? Watch what Jesus does when he encounters people who need food, or suffer from disease. Do you want to see how far God will be humbled? Look in the manger on Christmas morning, Do you want to know how desperately God wants to bring you into the family of God's kingdom? Watch what Jesus allows to happen on Good Friday. This is the Word of God being articulated from the deepest part of God's heart.

But do you want to see God today? Just watch who God puts in your path and how Jesus, the Word of God, shows up in their eyes. The Word of God, the *logos*, is being articulated as much today and in our lives as ever. Don't miss it. Today I encourage you to catch the Word of God. Amen.