

First Sunday After Christmas, December 27, 2020, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 1:1-18

***"A Very Good Beginning"***

The beginning of the Gospel of John tells us so much about what lies ahead before we even get to the main part of the Gospel. It is really my favorite book in all of the New Testament. This Gospel reading is important at Christmas time - even though it is not only about the birth of Jesus Christ, but about everything He was - is, and did. The more that we explore the Gospel of John, we will find out that today's Holy Gospel reading lays it all out of us. Right away it has a most familiar ring to it. *'In the beginning'*—let us face it – anyone who has ever opened a Bible recognizes this as being just like the start of the first book of the Torah, the first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis: *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'* God, through the Apostle John, wants us to see this book as the story of God and the world, and is much bigger than just the story of one person in one place and one time. This is all about the God, the Creator, acting in a very new way within His much-loved creation. It is about the way in which the long story which began in Genesis and continued up until these events, reached the culmination that God had always intended, and He will do this through *'the Word'*.

In Genesis chapter 1, the most significant part of creation is the sixth day – when God created humanity in His image. In John 1, it is the arrival of a human being, the 'Word' become 'flesh'. When you think about speaking a word, it is, in a sense, a part of you. It is a breath that comes from inside you, and is a sound made by your mouth and your tongue. When that word is heard, we hope they hear it just as you intended. 'But you said...', people might comment, if our actions do not match up to our words. We are responsible for the words we say, and when you think about it our words have a life which is independent of us. When people hear them, words can change the way they think and live. The words remain in their memory and go on affecting them. We should watch what we say and who we say it to. Simply put, our words carry weight and consequences – good or bad.

In the Old Testament, God acts by means of His 'Word'. What He says, happens in Genesis. *'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made'* says Psalm 33:6. God's Word is the one thing that will last, even though people and plants wither and die. *"The grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."* (Isaiah 40:7–8) God's Word will go out of his mouth and bring life, healing and hope to Israel and the whole creation. (Isaiah 55:10–11)

When I attended Trinity School for Ministry, in Ambridge, PA, at seminary for my Master of Divinity Degree, from 2002 until 2005, after living in Jacksonville for nine years, and then moving my family to Pittsburgh for three years – and I was one of the oldest people in my whole class. All of these 'kids' are walking around talking about the "logos" and I had to do some checking. I found that it is the Greek word for 'Word.' I never knew how important it would be to know Greek, since the language of the New Testament is Greek, the written word of that time period – as a result of Alexander the Great. In the first century, the 'Logos' or Word of God, the principle of divine reason and creative order, was identified in John's Gospel as the

second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. That is why John chose the 'Word' here, as a way of telling all of us who Jesus really is. John probably expects some readers to see about Jesus, what some writers had said about 'Sofia' or 'Wisdom' in the Old Testament.

In the time of Jesus, many Hebrew scholars discussed, 'how can the one true God be both different from the world and active within the world?' Some had already combined them within the belief that the one true God had promised to place His own 'Presence' in the Temple in Jerusalem. Others saw them enshrined in the Jewish law, the Torah. All of this, comes together when John writes of God's 'Word.' John is saying to all of the 'thinkers' that the 'Word' is not an abstract principle, it's a Person - and I'm going to introduce you to him. Listen to verses 1, 2, and 18: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*" Then verse 18 - "*No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*" This image that we are given of the 'Word' - is intimately close to God. John goes where no one ever went before - and it is because of Jesus that makes him do it; verse 14 says that "*the Word became flesh*" - He became human, became one of us. He came as a baby - dependent on others - if He wanted anything He had to cry like any other baby. His mother, Mary, had to change Him - and He became, in fact, the human being we know as Jesus of Nazareth, whose birth we just celebrated a few days ago on Christmas.

The theme and purpose of the Gospel of John is pretty clear: if you want to know who the true God is, take a long and hard look at one person - Jesus of Nazareth. The one that we know as Jesus is identical, is the 'Logos,' the 'Word,' who was there from the very start, the 'Word' through whom all things were made, the One who contained and contains life and light. The 'Word' challenged the darkness before creation and now challenges the darkness that is still found within the creation itself. The 'Word' is bringing into being the new creation, in which God says once more, '*Let there be light!*' But when God sends His 'Word' into the world, the world pretends it does not recognize Him. When God sends the 'Word' specifically to Israel, some of 'the chosen people' do not recognize Him. Jesus comes to God's people, and some of God's people do what the rest of the world do: they prefer darkness to light.

It is because of people's preference that new grace is needed, on top of the grace already given in the Law given to Moses, "*From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.* (John 1:16) Grace is something that we do not ask for - and we do not deserve - but God gives it to us anyway. How many of you love to receive presents? Remember two days ago? There was something under the tree for you. You opened it and may not have deserved it. Yet, you said wow! Think of that as something you got and did not ask for. God gives us grace abundantly, every day in every way. The 'Law' points people in the right direction, but, like Moses himself, it does not take us to the promised land. Moses, as wonderful as he was, disobeyed God by striking the rock instead of speaking to it for water at Meribah. God said to Moses I love you very much but you are not going into the Promised Land. So God took him to Mount Nebo, where he saw and Promised Land, and it was there that he died. Like David, because he disobeyed God with Bathsheba, he was not allowed to build the Temple, but his son Solomon did. You need the grace and truth that comes only through Jesus the Messiah, Yeshua

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Ha Mashiach, the son of God, who said on the night before He died *“I Am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.”* (John 14:6)

You know what is exciting? It is that in this first part of John’s Gospel - we are in it too: Listen to verses 12 and 13 *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”* That means anyone at all, way back then and right now! It means that you do not have to be born into a particular family or part of the world. God wants people from everywhere to be born in a new way, born into His family which He began through Jesus and which has since spread through the world. On Christmas Eve, I preached a message about what it would be like if Jesus had not been born, but He was born! Because of that, we are here today to celebrate that fact, to celebrate Him. Sometimes we need to recognize that anyone, and I mean anyone, can become a ‘child of God’, which goes beyond the fact that all humans are special in God’s sight. Something can happen to people in this life which causes them to become new people, or as Paul says, *“a new creation, people who (as verse 12 says) ‘believed in his name’.*

Throughout all of John’s Gospel, we can see the great drama of God and the world, of Jesus and Israel, of the ‘Word’ who reveals the glory of the unseen God –that this is for everyone, not just a chosen few, but you and I included. If you get the opportunity in the New Year, take some time to read a little bit of John’s Gospel each day. There is only 21 chapters and it goes pretty quick. It is full of the character of Jesus Christ, full of miracles and wonders, that you have already heard before but you will see in a new way. In the verses immediately following today’s Gospel, verses 19 and 20, we find out more about John the Baptist, *“Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ.”*” He tells that he is not the Chosen One, but his job is to point us to Him. He is *‘giving evidence about the light’*. If we are to meet the ‘Word’ of God, we can start by reading the Gospel of John – and start right at a very good beginning!