

Isaiah 9:6-7; John 1:9-14

“Power to become the children of God”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Christmas is the celebration of a holy mystery, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, who shares our humanity. As we anticipate Christmas, we remind ourselves that we are awaiting the advent of God’s Word, the *Logos*, in our lives.

Over the last two weeks we have meditated upon the nativity stories of God at work in Mary and Joseph as they faced their very human questions and fears. In the nativity accounts of Matthew and Luke, Mary and Joseph responded with faith to the promise of a son named Jesus, who would save people from their sins. Jesus is the promised Emmanuel, God with us.

Tonight, we meditate on John’s gospel and the announcement of God’s creative Word, the *Logos*, in Jesus Christ. Though John’s gospel doesn’t contain a nativity narrative, it contains a prologue about the incarnation of the *Logos* in the person of Jesus. John’s prologue about the incarnation helps us understand not only what early Christians thought about Jesus, but also how Jesus comes to dwell in our humanity.

Tonight’s Gathering Hymn, “What Child Is This,” helps us ask the question “Who is Jesus?” John’s gospel calls Jesus the *Logos*, which translated into English is “*the Word*.” What do we mean when we speak about “*the Word*” of God who is born of Mary?

In the Bible, the Word of God is usually understood as God speaking, either directly or through a chosen human voice, such as a prophet. And though Christians often refer to the Bible as the Word of God, it is worth bearing in mind that scripture generally reveals God’s voice directly or through the voices of messengers like prophets, and today through voices such as yours and mine.

In the Greek text of the New Testament, Jesus is described as speaking the word or *logos*. For example, in Mark 2:2, Jesus was “peaching the word (λόγον)” to a crowd gathered in his home, and in Luke 5:1 people came to Jesus to hear “the word of God” (λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ). Eventually in the Book of Acts 4:31, Jesus’ followers are described as boldly speaking “the word of God.” Early Christians understood Jesus as the Word, the *Logos*, and as the one who is at work in people, proclaiming God’s word through individual human voices.

Though we don’t have time to look at every example, scripture witnesses to God’s word as communicated through a living voice, and that word continues to be communicated by the living voices of people today. It bears repeating that though we call scripture “the word of God,” but we don’t worship the Bible. God’s word is much larger than a single book and this

is what the prologue of John's gospel is getting at. John is revealing the God who speaks the creative Word. John is revealing the Word as the creative voice of God.

The word "*logos*" had a long history prior to John's gospel. For example, the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus (c. 500 BCE), used *logos* to express a principle of impersonal reason that governs and gives stability to the world. In later Stoic philosophy, *logos* came to describe an impersonal reason giving order to the world and to human thought. The word *logos* was later used by Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, who sought to blend this Greek philosophical concept about the rational coherence of the cosmos with biblical accounts of creation by the spoken word of God.

This brief background helps us to meditate upon John's description of the *Logos*. As we prepare for Christmas, we might ask ourselves, "What do we expect the holy God to look like?" As the hymn, "What Child Is This" suggests, who is Jesus in whom we believe and for whom we wait? What significance does he have, not only us, but for the world?

The writer of John tells us that in the beginning, the *Logos*, the Word, existed with God and that all things were created through the Word. John writes that the Word is life and this life is the light of humanity. This Word is the light that darkness can never overcome.

In John's prologue we discover that the Word dwelt not only in one man named Jesus, but dwells in our humanity because the Word became fully human. In sharing our humanity, the Word helps recover a humanity originally created in the image of God. Because the Word created all things, we have been created to hear and respond to God's Word. As Paul writes in Colossians (1:17), "*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*"

As we sing, "What Child is This," John, in answer, writes, "*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's prologue introduces a new concept, the "incarnation" of the Word in our humanity, a concept different from Greek and Hellenized Jewish philosophical conceptions. The Word dwells in our humanity, in order that our lives may hold together in him – that we might see ourselves anew, and in the process, see what our humanity is truly capable of.

The world is an often dark place, and though we have been created a little lower than the angels, we are also part of the problem. We have been given an awesome intellect, yet we do fearful things, frequently choosing to do evil rather than good. The great hope of John's gospel is that the light of the Word shines in the world's darkness, overcoming our darkness, sin and death, with divine light. As the Word dwells in our humanity we are transformed to be light.

Jesus is born to give us light in the darkness, to share in our human sufferings, and to overcome death with life. What child is this? He is God's love made visible. In a few minutes,

we will sing the hymn, “Love Has Come,” which speaks of the meaning of Jesus’ birth. Jesus comes into this world so we might see love, know love, and become this love for others.

The words, “*And the Word became flesh and lived among us,*” have continuing significance for us. The Greek verb translated as “lived among us” literally means to “pitch one’s tent” among us. This idea is ancient: it is the Lord God dwelling in the tabernacle with Israel in the wilderness in Exodus (25:8). Yet now in Jesus, God is no longer confined to a single place or nation but has “pitched a tent” within our humanity. The *Logos* is God’s ongoing creative Word always continuing to pitch a tent among us in our humanity.

God is still speaking in Jesus. John writes, “*But to all who received him, and believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God.*” Through believing and trusting in him, the creative Word of God dwells in and speaks through you. This is what love looks like – the child born of Mary, who was crucified and raised, lives in you through faith, making all who believe in his name, in every nation and language, children of God.

John reveals the Word as creative and transforming. Though John’s gospel does not contain an account of Jesus’ Transfiguration on the holy mountain, John urges us to see the *Logos* as the creative Word of God who transforms and transfigures the world with light and love. Through faith, you are being transformed, transfigured, and recreated to radiate light and love as the Word dwells in you. During Advent, we await what John is most emphatic about: Jesus’ birth is about our birth. Jesus is born to dwell in us that we might be born as children of God.

In words, beloved in every language, John 3:16 speaks about the whole world, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*” Advent and Christmas are the Word of eternal life for you.

Christmas goes both ways, you are not only waiting for him, but he is also waiting for you to awake, allowing him to dwell in you, in your words and in your voice.

Christ, the *Logos*, is creating a new world in and through you, and through the voices of people in every nation and language who believe in him.

With his light you will never walk in darkness.

With his love you will overcome the darkness.

Amen.