

## ***He Came To Us That We Might Come To Him***

John 1:1-18

December 31, 2006

### **I.**

Two books in the Bible open with the words "in the beginning." They are the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, and the last Gospel in the New Testament, John. Both books treat the beginning in similar ways. Neither refers to a specific event in time as we understand it, but rather both treat the beginning as something beyond time and space.

We all know that the Book of Genesis describes the beginning in the context of creation of the universe. John's Gospel starts even before creation. He viewed the beginning as eternity in the past. Just as eternity can stretch indefinitely forward, it also can stretch endlessly back.

John told us that God has existed eternally, and that the Word also has existed eternally with God. He then moved into our time and space, and explained how this eternal Word came into the world through the man Jesus Christ, who was both fully human and fully divine.

This means that, according to John, the powerful and sovereign God who was universally revealed to all people in the Book of Genesis is the very same loving and merciful God who has been revealed to us now in Jesus Christ.

### **II.**

Now, that's quite a statement. As a result, it might be useful to briefly look at John's Gospel from a big picture perspective before we go into the details.

You might have noticed during the last few weeks that there are two versions of Christmas stories in the Gospels. One is from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which we heard earlier this month. The other is from the Gospel of John, which we heard today.

The first version, from Matthew and Luke, probably is more familiar. We can see these stories in our minds. We see them on Christmas cards. There are pictures of the manger, and the shepherds, and the star of Bethlehem. The crèche with baby Jesus could come from the Gospels of Matthew or Luke. Most of our Christmas carols are based on stories from Matthew or Luke.

Today we heard a very different version. John's Gospel is more cosmic and mystical, more philosophical and abstract. It is harder to visualize. If we were artists, how would we draw a picture of today's reading for a Christmas card?

And why is John's Gospel so different? Well, it was the last to be written, and John had time to reflect. In addition, as Christianity spread, other religious groups started to arise claiming to be followers of Jesus. However, they proclaimed false doctrine in the name of false prophets and deceptive teachers, and John probably felt a need to set the record straight.

There also might be another reason. We know that after Jesus' death John took Mary, Jesus' mother, into his home and cared for her, probably for the rest of her life.

Think about their time together. Can you imagine what they talked about in their private moments? What kind of stories could Mary have told? Mary certainly had a special understanding of Jesus that no one else in the world could have had. She knew things that no one else knew, and she would have been able to share all that with John as they remembered their time with Jesus.

John must have been amazed by the things she shared with him. No wonder his Gospel is different. Part of his research came from the mother of our Lord herself.

### **III.**

With that background, let's look at the reading. First, what do these many references to the "Word" mean? The New Testament was written in Greek because that was the literary language of the time, and sometimes reference the original text helps to explain the translation.

The early Greek manuscripts use the word "logos" to mean "word," and Jesus was described as the "Logos of God." The English translation is "Word of God," but the Greek has a richer and deeper connotation than its English counterpart.

For English speakers our "word" can be something we say, or a promise we make. For us, the "Word" also can mean the entirety of Scripture. The Bible is the Word.

In the Greek of John's Gospel, however, the Word meant something different. For John, the Word was the second person of the Trinity. We describe the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. John might have said Father, Word, and Holy Spirit. This is the basis of Jesus' divinity.

Let me read again a part of today's Gospel. "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. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory."

What a statement! It is a large part of the very doctrine of God. At first glance we might be tempted to skip over it because it seems so abstract. It might not really speak to the practical aspects of our lives as some parts of the Bible do.

I would like to suggest, however, that it is nothing less than the foundation of the New Testament. John's Gospel tells about the greatest drama ever to happen—God coming to earth. And John explains exactly who that baby in the manger was.

The Christmas story in the Gospels of Mathew and Luke tells us that Jesus was born of Mary to be the savior of the world. And those stories explain that the little baby in the manger was fully human. He had all the same characteristics as any other baby.

John's Gospel takes this further and proclaims that this fully human baby also was fully God because he became manifest from the Word as the earthly expression of God. In short, Jesus was the way in which God actually revealed himself and his character to us.

### **IV.**

This revelation is at the heart of John's Gospel. Jesus Christ came to us to bring us to him. In Christ we meet God as God wants us to see him. When we look at Jesus we see that his entire ministry, and his life and death, was characterized by love for humanity and the redemption of sinners. To see this in Jesus is to see it in God.

That aspect of Jesus and his revelation of God is a central part of the Gospel reading for today. It describes Jesus is this way: "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. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

What is the purpose of a light? Normally we don't have lights just so we can sit and look at the lights. Our Christmas trees might be an exception. But typically we have lights to illuminate the things around us. We have lights so that we can see other things more clearly.

Jesus was the light in two ways. Because he was both God and man, he also was both the divine light and the worldly light. As the divine light he revealed God to us. In this way he showed us who God is, how God feels, and how God loves us. Jesus could do this because he was divine himself.

But as the worldly light he also shined in the other direction. He represented us to God. Through his life here God could know how we think, how we feel, and how we long for love. Jesus could do this because he also was human and knew us intimately.

And as the light he also offers hope, for John proclaimed that "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

That applies to us. We are given the opportunity, through Christ's revelation of God, to share in the heavenly kingdom that is God's promise to those who believe. But faith does not impose itself. It exists among alternatives from which we can choose. God came to offer a relationship, but he makes it our choice.

## V.

There is a story that proves this point most powerfully. I don't know where it came from, and I have seen it speak directly to the heart. It is a story about God and the geese, and it goes like this.

There was a man who didn't believe in God, and he didn't hesitate to let others know how he felt about religion. His wife, however, did believe, and she raised their children to also have faith.

One snowy Christmas Eve, his wife was preparing to take their children to services in the farm community in which they lived. She asked him to come and hear the story of Jesus' birth, but he refused. "That story is nonsense!" he said. "If God exists as you say he does, why would he lower himself to come to Earth as a man? That's ridiculous!"

So they left, and he stayed home. A while later, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blizzard. As the man looked out the window, all he saw was a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax before the fire for the evening.

Then he heard a loud thump. Something had hit the window; then another thump. He looked out, but couldn't see more than a few feet. When the snow let up a little, he ventured outside to see what could have been beating on his window.

In the field near his house he saw a flock of wild geese. Apparently they had been flying south for the winter when they got caught in the snowstorm and couldn't continue. They were lost and stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter. They just flapped their wings and flew around the field in low circles, blindly and aimlessly. A couple of them had flown into his window, it seemed.

The man felt sorry for the geese and wanted to help them. The barn would be a great place for them to stay, he thought. It's warm and safe; surely they could spend the night and wait out the storm.

So he walked over to the barn and opened the doors wide, then watched and waited, hoping they would notice the open barn and go inside. But the geese just fluttered around futilely and didn't seem to notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them.

The man tried to get their attention, but that just seemed to scare them, and they moved further away. He went into the house and returned with some bread, broke it up, and made a bread crumb trail leading to the barn. They still didn't catch on.

Now he was getting frustrated. He got behind them and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered in every direction except toward the barn. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where they would be warm and safe.

"Why don't they follow me?!" he exclaimed. "Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm?" He thought for a moment and realized that they just wouldn't follow a human. "If only I were a goose, then I could save them," he said out loud.

Then he had an idea. He went into barn, got one of his own geese, and carried it in his arms as he circled around behind the flock of wild geese. He then released it. His goose flew straight through the flock and right back into the barn – and one-by-one, the other geese saw and followed it to safety.

He stood silently for a moment as the words he had spoken a few minutes earlier replayed in his mind: "If only I were a goose, then I could save them!" Then he thought about what he had said to his wife earlier. "Why would God want to be like us? That's ridiculous!"

Suddenly it all made sense. That is exactly what God had done. We were like the geese—blind, lost, perishing. God had Jesus Christ to become like us so he could show us the way and save us.

As the winds and blinding snow died down, his soul became quiet and pondered this wonderful thought. Suddenly he understood why Christ had come. Years of doubt and disbelief vanished with the passing storm. He fell to his knees in the snow, and prayed his first prayer. "Thank You, God, for coming in human form to get me out of the storm!"

## **VI.**

We think that Christmas is over, but it never really is. Christmas is God's gift of a great new day and the beginning of his kingdom. John tells us that light and truth win out, and that the darkness cannot prevail. But this is a message we must hear with the ears of faith, and we must act on it in that same faith.

Like the geese in the snowstorm, God in Christ calls us to follow him through the storms of this life to the safe haven he has prepared for us. He wants us to believe in him the way that he believes in us, because he came to us so that we might come to him. *Amen.*