

Join the Family

John 1:(1-9) 10-18

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵(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.'") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ 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.

In his painting "Holy Family," Rembrandt (1606-1669) portrays the nativity as if it were an event taking place in the seventeenth century. The attire and furnishings are what one would find in a typical Dutch home from Rembrandt's own day. Mary is seated with an opened, well-thumbed book, presumably the Scriptures, held open by her left hand. Her right hand, on the top of a rocking cradle, has pulled aside a covering to reveal a soundly sleeping Jesus. Mary's head is turned from the book to gaze upon the infant. Immediately behind her and in much fainter light is Joseph, bending over and planing a piece of wood. Above him we see in the upper left corner young cherubim hovering with outstretched wings.

Whether or not Rembrandt intended it, the painting is an icon of different ways to encounter and understand the word of God. On the one hand, there is the Bible, the book that Mary has been reading as Jesus sleeps and Joseph works in the background. The Word of God is to be found in the Scriptures. We read the words and find we are

addressed by the Word of God. We read them again and again. That is why the book is well thumbed. Rembrandt pictures Mary as one who knows well the word of God and who ponders it in her heart.

She does not ponder the page alone. She also ponders the infant beside her, "the Word made flesh," rather than the Word made paper and ink. The Word is a blood-warmed, breath-enlivened creature sleeping beside his mother.

When Mary returns to her reading, she will understand what she reads at a greater depth because she has encountered the Word through the Word made flesh. When she tends to the child, she will understand the child at a greater depth because she has encountered the Word through the words in the book. Back and forth between Word made flesh and Word through words. **Thomas H. Troeger**

We also encounter the Word made flesh as we continue in the season of Christmas when we celebrate God's coming into the world as one of us to show us God's love and save us from the power of sin. Many people describe the Gospels as having only two birth narratives, those of Matthew and Luke. This Johannine text, however, presents a birth narrative unique for the ways in which it speaks in poetic language about God, creation, Word, light and darkness, and Jesus Christ. Unlike the Matthean and Lukan narratives, John reworks the categories of time, space, and matter to mean something quite different from the specific geographical and human realities of the other Gospel accounts. John's birth narrative offers us a very different way to consider the doctrine of the incarnation, God with us.

Otherwise termed the prologue, these eighteen verses, a form of hymn to Jesus Christ, which helps us reflect on the existence, nature, works, and presence of "the Word." The hymn powerful affirmations who Jesus is and who He is to us.

The hymn is about God and "the Word." The hymn asserts not only the Word's presence with God, but the Word as participant from the very beginning. The hymn is not speaking of the earthly birth of Jesus, but ties the presence of Jesus Christ to God

and as God from all eternity. This preexistence of Jesus Christ is breathtaking and helps us understand the “Babe in the Manger” was and is God with us.

Everything that is created originates in this Word of life. Apart from the Word, nothing has an existence. Unlike those who believe we are a cosmic accident, creation is not simply a matter of form, but is filled with the animating reality of *God's* life. The life of God displays itself to all people as it is “light” and cannot be “darkness.” The nature of God's Word is life, and is light and is salvation.

John’s text tells us that God’s act of love and care did not meet with the response we would expect of the world's responses to the coming of the true light. The sad truth is that the world “did not know him” and even “his own people” failed to recognize him. You and I have the same choice today, the “true light” can be either be accepted and recognized or rejected and unrecognized. What compels such human responses to God's light-filled Word has been human pride, arrogance, self-sufficiency, education, wealth...maybe it like my two grandchildren, Remii and Jacob, both are two and truly believe they know what is best for themselves! They believe they don’t need any help! Over the years all kinds of people have historically, personally, spiritually made decisions to accept or reject Jesus, based on their perceived needs and beliefs.

Those who receive the Word affirm that through belief we receive the power of kinship and become “children of God.” We join the family! This is the consequences of belief in Christ the Word of God. A new set of relationships is established, revolutionary in that it has nothing to do with kinship, human choice, or physical birth. God becomes the parent in response to those who believe. Belief in Jesus Christ serves as the catalyst for a new birth for each of us!

We join as members of God’s family like John the Baptizer who witnessed to the light. Despite his powers and work, is *not* the Christ, but is “a witness ... to testify to the light.” Your witness and my witness is of crucial importance of God's relentless gift of the creative Word in two ways. First, human beings, such as John, can recognize God's life; second, as members of the family we have a role in proclaiming its presence.

John's witness names the characteristic of God's life-giving presence as "true light," that certainly continues into the Gospel itself, and in our lives of mission and witness.

Our witness is to tell that God has come in the flesh to our home (the Greek describes God as pitching a tent) in Jesus Christ. Eugene Peterson, in his contemporary rendering of the Bible, *The Message*, has given us an alternative version of the text:

The Word was made flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

When the Word moved in, he had a kind of glory that we all could see—a one-of-a-kind glory like God. God's glory in Jesus had two aspects:

- —"Generous inside and out": Generous from the center of himself, not trying to impress anyone or curry political favors. Not generous for what he could get, but generous for what he could give. Jesus did not appear to be generous on the outside, but inside was another reality. There is no difference between inside and out. The Word did the right thing for the right reason because he was generous inside and out.
- —"True from start to finish": True is the adjectival form of the word "truth." The Word is the truth and has integrity, honesty, and wholeness. Jesus lives in fidelity, good faith, honor, and sincerity. The Word has no break, impurity, or alloy. The Word is complete and undivided. The Word is true from beginning to end, from start to finish. The Word is a great neighbor. The most beautiful part of this text, what impresses me the most about God, is God's love. Some people are impressed by the power of almighty God, that God could bring something out of nothing in creation. Others are impressed by the omniscience of God, the fact that God knows everything at the same time. I am most impressed with the love of God, because it is love that brings God to the neighborhood. Love and compassion bring God next door. It is this love that gives me great joy as I celebrate that the Word moved into my neighborhood and yours.

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John 1: 1-18

Join the Family

In this new relationship we understand God as human, among us as a parent and the center of all that is meaningful. Believers, you and I, children of God, members of the family, are given grace...more than we can manage! As children of God and members of God's family we have been given the gift of vision. This vision allows us through Christ to see into the "Father's heart." You and I, like John the Baptist, are to speak to the world of a passionate love story. God comes intimately into creation from beyond time to offer in the flesh, and in words as well, the very gift of life and an invitation for all to join the family! **Susan Hedahl**

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