

1 Christmas B

“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” John 1:3.

Feliz Navidad! Joyeux Noel! In this Christmas Season, we celebrate the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. John’s gospel is the principle passage of scripture that provides for us more than just words about a Savior being born in a stable in the city of David. The first 18 verses of John’s gospel acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Son of God, Savior. The symbol of the ICTHUS, the sign of the fish used by the early church to confess the faith of Christians is a way to understand John’s prologue. The Church was clever about helping people understand this beautiful passage. Further John writes about Jesus’ timeless beginning and that together with the Father, Jesus created all things. Many of you remember when the old mass ended with the prologue of John and some of you still speak of its power in your memory.

While this passage is indeed beautiful understanding the prologue of John is like unraveling shrink-wrap – It’s difficult to figure out where the storyline begins and ends. Why does he spend so much time writing about the Word? Never does he mention Jesus Christ until verse 17. John uses many subjects that shift from the Word, to the pronoun Him, to life, to light, to being and finally to Jesus Christ. The Word was with God and is God. The Word creates and shines light on people. John uses the Greek word *Logos* to weave the common philosophy of the Greeks with Hebrew scripture concerning the creation story. It is no mistake that John uses the same three words as Genesis to begin his gospel: “In the beginning.” Simply, to believe John’s testimony is to believe in one’s heart that Jesus is the Word of God who created all things. All things received life in Him. No other prophet, no other teacher, no other faith makes the claim that through the “pre-existent” Jesus all things came into being and brought us understanding of God.

These verses will probably not grab your heart on a cold morning in Wisconsin! So let us imagine a warm sun melting all this snow, people in bathing suits and shorts! Now I have your attention! We know that without sunlight there is no life. Right now, our part of the country is pointed far from the sun’s warmest rays. John compares the Word to this light. The light of all people had come into the world. The “light of all people” certainly is a metaphor for life in Jesus Christ. Like the symbol of the fish, the word “light” is a way to say that Jesus is the same life we receive from the center of our solar system – the sun. Jesus would overcome the darkness that destroys human life. Human life, when overcome by darkness is consumed by fear, violence, war and all manner of corruption. John, in the prologue to His gospel, says Jesus the Word became flesh to do battle with darkness, to destroy it and lead us by grace and truth back to the light. John writes that Jesus is the light and it enlightens everyone.

When I am driving at night I am grateful for the light of the moon. Particularly when there is a full moon, it enlightens every part of the road. "Enlightening" in John's prologue has the effect of exposing the darkness, of casting out ignorance, and uncovering secret things so they can be seen and understood. This light warms our hearts, our lives and drives us to live everyday as if it were a shorts and bathing suit day. The light that came with the Word of God was so powerful that light pierced and overshadowed whatever dark thinking could throw at it. Darkness lost the contest to the light. It could not understand why this light would be born in a stable, lie in a feeding crib for animals; practically unknown to the world. Yet, the property of light is that it goes into places nothing else will dare to go.

As Christians we believe that this life producing Word is Jesus Christ. He is the light that overcomes the darkness. If He is the light for everyone then what would prevent everyone from receiving Him? Remember, so few were looking for Him by the time Jesus was born. In this day, how many truly look to Him as their source of light? Sadly, John wrote that the world and what were His own people rejected Jesus. We read later in John's gospel that God so loved the world, yet also read that His promise of life is conditional on faith in John 3:16. We can reconcile what John is writing concerning the receiving of Christ.

John wrote his gospel principally to outline faith in the Son of God. John writes that Jesus was rejected as the light, not because it was God's will. In fact it was God's desire for all to receive life and the person of Christ and still is. John wrote that all who received Him did so because they "believed in his name." This prompts hard questions. What of those who did not receive Him? Are we not all born of God? John at length writes that one is born of God when Jesus is received. This does not happen because of blood ties, or because of human DNA, or because of human choice, but its God's choice to allow a person to be born again through faith.

Just believe in Jesus' name and God gives spiritual birth to a person. John wrote that to receive the life that we celebrate as born in Jesus Christ, one must be born of God. It is through believing in Him. It seems too easy! Yet it is more than an intellectual act of the mind. The word "believed" means "firmly relying faith" (Amplified Bible). The author of the book of Hebrews writes of this faith, "It is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." It is a belief that goes beyond the ability to know that Jesus is the Son of God. It is like putting faith in your doctor that surgery will heal and not harm. One must totally trust the doctor's ability and power to make whole.

To those who believe in Jesus' name, He gave them power to become God's children. We can argue that faith in a doctor's ability is irrelevant to patient's getting well. In the same way, John in his prologue writes that ultimately we must trust God who came to earth to seek all those willing to be born of Him. It is God's will to give new birth and that is all we can say about it. John later talks of God's love and mercy.

The incarnate Jesus was given power to become the Savior of all men. God in turn offer gives that power to humankind that all might become His children.

Irenaus, a teacher of the early church, once wrote, "For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." Later someone tried to simplify Irenaeus with a simple and bold statement, "God became man, that man might become God." It's a catchy phrase like the sign of the fish that has stayed with me. It helps me to understand what John is saying. For me, it tells the story of a loving Creator born on earth to make war on darkness, to begin a rescue operation and bring us back to God. John pieced it together for us: he took the creation story of Genesis and sowed it together with the Word who made all things. Then at Christmas the CREATOR is made flesh and is born in Bethlehem. He lived humbly among us first as a baby; to bring light into the world and to make the whole creation new! That light would go out for three days, only to rise again. The darkness could not overcome it! And it never will. The Word, Jesus Christ is the true light that shines and He will not be overcome as His mission continues on earth. Hallelujah, he came to be one of us. Amen.