

**The Word**

**John 1.1-3**

**Series: The Word Became Flesh**

**Advent 2020**

**November 29, 2020**

I. **John's Christmas**

- A. What is Christmas all about?
  - 1. What is the reason for the season as the slogan goes?
- B. Wait!
  - 1. It's premature to talk about Christmas!
    - a. You protest!
- C. Your protests have some merit
  - 1. They come from two sources
  - 2. One – you're disgusted with how early the commercialism of Christmas gets started
    - a. Our neighborhood – and Shell Point – was decorated for Christmas two weeks ago (even though they didn't turn on the lights)
    - b. Stores have been filled with Christmas stuff for weeks
    - c. And here we are, it's not even December, and the church is talking about Christmas!
    - d. And you just want to cry, "Stop it!"
  - 3. Second – those of you who are liturgical purists are saying, "It's not Christmas – it's Advent!"
    - a. Christmas doesn't really start until, well, Christmas!
  - 4. Ok, I get it
- D. This is **Advent**
  - 1. And Advent is not the same thing as Christmas
    - a. That is certainly true
    - b. But they are not unrelated
  - 2. Advent is the season of the church year that is about the **preparation and anticipation** of the coming of the Messiah
    - a. And we will certainly do justice to those themes
    - b. That's what we are doing with the lighting of the Advent candles
  - 3. But if Advent is the preparation and anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, Christmas is about the actual coming of Messiah
- E. And if that's the case, it's not inappropriate, in preparing for our celebration of the coming of Messiah, to ask, in advance, what is Christmas all about
  - 1. Why do we get exercised about the coming of Messiah?
- F. It's possible that a child's understanding of "What's Christmas all about?" is centered around many of the traditions of Christmas
  - 1. Decorations
  - 2. Family gatherings
  - 3. The tree
  - 4. Presents under the tree

- G. But once we get beyond those traditions, we begin to recall the events of Christmas – that’s what we think Christmas is all about
  - 1. Mary – virgin, betrothed to a Jewish carpenter named Joseph; pregnant though she has known no man
  - 2. The decree from Caesar Augustus to register, prompting the trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem
  - 3. No room in the inn – necessitating the manger, sharing with domesticated animals the birthplace of a baby
  - 4. Angelic visitations – to Mary, to Joseph, to cousin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, her husband Zacharias, to shepherds
  - 5. The journey and visitation of the magi from the east – though technically not happening till a bit later, but still part of our shared Christmas ethos
- H. But John includes none of that in his gospel
  - 1. Matthew and Luke go into great detail about, well, those great details
    - a. But John doesn’t say anything about those details that we most often think of when we think of Christmas
  - 2. So we might conclude that John is perhaps the least Christmasy of the gospels (though the same might be said about Mark)
- I. That would be a mistake
  - 1. Matthew and Luke – the sources for so much of our traditions – answer the question, “What is Christmas?”
  - 2. But it’s John who answers the question, “What is Christmas all about?”
- J. Because while John wastes no ink on the details of the birth of Jesus
  - 1. He focuses his attention on the meaning of those details
- K. The Prologue of the Gospel of John is said to be **the theology of Christmas**
  - 1. He answers the question, “What’s all the fuss about? Why should we be so exercised about the coming of Messiah?”
  - 2. During this Advent season we’ll be preparing for our Christmas celebration by exploring John’s answer to that question
- L. And in so doing, we will be properly exercised about Christmas!

## II. **The Scandal of Christianity**

- A. Christianity is, and always has been, a scandal
  - 1. It has always been controversial
    - a. Normally, in our day we tend to think that the scandal of Christianity is **the resurrection of Jesus Christ** from the dead
    - b. And indeed, that was a scandal
    - c. Everyone dies – at least eventually
    - d. But no one has ever seen a resurrection
    - e. And indeed, in the first century a resurrection was just as unthinkable as it is today
    - f. All kinds of conspiracy theories were proposed to try to account for, or to explain away, the empty tomb
    - g. So the resurrection is, and always was, a scandal
  - 2. But in the first century there was an even greater scandal

- a. And that scandal was **the incarnation**
  - b. That God would become a human being
  - c. That He, the Almighty Creator of all things
  - d. Would deign to take upon Himself human flesh
  - e. And enter our corrupt and disintegrating world
  - f. That was beyond the comprehension of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century mind
  - g. The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish mind, as well as the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greco-Roman mind
3. And that scandal was on the forefront of John's mind as the 1<sup>st</sup> Century began to wind down
- a. And that's why he wrote his gospel
  - b. And why he wrote his epistles
  - c. **1 John 4:2-3** (NKJV) — 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.
  - d. **2 John 7** (NKJV) — 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.
  - e. So for John, to reject the incarnation is tantamount to being in league with the antichrist!
- B. John's theology of Christmas is thus summed up in this classic text from his prologue
- 1. **John 1:14** (NKJV) — 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
  - 2. The essence of Christmas is the incarnation – God come in the flesh
  - 3. The essence of Advent is the preparation and anticipation of God coming in the flesh
- C. Begin with our text
- 1. **John 1:1-3** (NKJV) — 1 In 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 were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

### III. **The Word**

- A. First, in a text that echoes the very opening words of the Bible, we're introduced to the Word
  - 1. Recall – **Genesis 1.1**: In the beginning, God...
    - a. So John quite consciously wants us to think of the Word as God
    - b. "In the beginning was the Word"
- B. It is said that John wrote his gospel as a bridge from the Jewish world into the Greco-Roman world

1. He wrote it to include material that the other gospel writers had not included
    - a. And he wrote it for clearly evangelical purposes
    - b. **John 20:31** (NKJV) — ... 31 but these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.
  2. But he also wrote it when the gospel was spreading all through the Roman Empire
    - a. And so his overriding passion was to make a connection with the Greco-Roman mind
- C. **The Greek word for “Word” is *logos***
1. Logos is a critically important word in Greek philosophy
  2. One of the earliest Greek philosophers was Heraclitus who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.
    - a. He was concerned about the fact that, in our world, everything appears to be changing
    - b. He was one who said you can never step into the same river twice
    - c. The water you encountered the first time has long since disappeared, and the water you encounter the second time was nowhere to be found the first time you stepped into the river
    - d. Everything is constantly changing
  3. So what was it that generated order and coherence in our ever-changing world?
    - a. What held it all together?
  4. For Heraclitus and Greeks the answer was logos
    - a. Logos – the word – was the reason of God, the logic of God
  5. So the logos fascinated the Greeks ever since
    - a. The word, the logos, was what gave the universe purpose and design
    - b. The logos kept the stars in their places
    - c. The logos controlled the seasons
  6. It was Plato who said, “It may be that some day there will come forth from God a Word, a Logos, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain.”
- D. And now John comes along and says, “Ok, you Greeks. There very thing that has occupied your minds, and that has captured your imaginations, and that you have been writing about for centuries – the Logos...
1. ... has come to earth
  2. And He has come as a human being...
  3. And we have seen Him.”
- E. The meaning of Christmas is that in the coming of Christ, our world can now have meaning and purpose
1. Our world’s coherence can be plainly seen
  2. The reason for our existence is now revealed
  3. Where before, nothing made sense; now in the incarnation, everything

- makes sense
4. All of the answers to all of life's great questions are embodied in the baby born in a manger
    - a. Why do we exist?
    - b. What is love?
    - c. What is our destiny?
    - d. What is truth?
    - e. What is right?
    - f. What is good?
    - g. What is beautiful?
  5. All of these questions and more are yea and amen in Jesus Christ, God the Son, come in the flesh
- F. And perhaps the greatest question we face is our alienation from God
1. How can we, sinful humans that we are, be reconciled to a holy God?
    - a. Answer – Jesus came, lived a life we could not live – altogether righteous, sinless
    - b. He died on the cross, the just for the unjust – taking upon Himself the wrath of this holy God
    - c. So that if we trust in Him, we would be saved and have eternal life
  2. Only Jesus, only the Logos, has the answer to life's greatest questions
    - a. And the only answer to life's greatest question – how to be reconciled with God
- G. There are other aspects of the Logos that are described in these opening verses which John so succinctly displays
1. All of which we should think of as we prepare to celebrate God's coming in the flesh

#### IV. **The Eternal Word**

- A. The first thing we see about this Logos, this Word, is that He is the Eternal Word
  1. "In the beginning was the Word..."
- B. This distinguishes the Logos from the created realm
  1. When everything was created, the Logos already was
  2. Which means the Logos was not created
  3. He already is!
- C. This Logos must have been in eternal existence with God, or must actually be God
  1. John, in these opening verses, teaches both
  2. "... the Word was with God..."
  3. "... and the Word was God..."
- D. One of the earliest heresies that the church faced was the Arian heresy
  1. Arius was a monk who argued that Jesus, while god-like in many ways, was a created being
  2. John says no!
    - a. **John 1:1–2** (NKJV) — 1 In 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. The Arian heresy was what prompted the Council of Nicea – from which we receive the Nicene Creed (which we use from time to time in our services)
  - a. “We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all the world. Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made...”
- E. Christmas is about the coming of Word who is eternal
  1. He was in the beginning
- F. Recall Genesis 1 – the creation account
  1. Eight times the Bible says in Genesis 1, “And God said...”
    - a. God’s word was the agent of creation
    - b. All things exist because of the word of God
  2. And now in John we learn that the Word of God is a person!
    - a. A person who is eternal
    - b. Who was in the beginning with God

V. **The Personal Word**

- A. Second, we learn that this Logos is personal
  1. **John 1:1–2** (NKJV) — 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...
  2. To be with God is to be a distinct person
    - a. And to have a personal relationship with God
  3. We see this in spades in John
    - a. How Jesus spends time in prayer with His Father
    - b. Demonstrates His personal nature and distinction as a person from God the Father
  4. It may be difficult for our peon minds to understand the Triune nature of God – one God in three persons
    - a. But it is verses like this – and the gospels in general – which compel us to believe in the Trinity
  5. In John, Jesus prays to His Father
    - a. The One who was with God in the beginning
    - b. Who is God Himself
    - c. Speaks to His Father who is God
    - d. If it weren’t for faith, we’d have a headache
- B. And this idea of such a Triune God is not absent from the Jewish scriptures either
  1. Genesis 1
    - a. **Genesis 1:26** (NKJV) — 26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...”
  2. David, the great psalmist, understood something of the Triune nature of God
    - a. **Psalm 110:1** (NKJV) — 1 The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”
    - b. **Psalm 51:11** (NKJV) — 11 ... do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

- C. We may not understand it
  - 1. But the scriptures, OT and NT, clearly teach that God is one God in three persons
- D. To the Greeks the logos was a principle
  - 1. To John the Logos is a person

VI. **God the Word**

- A. **John 1:1** (NKJV) — 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- B. Modern day myths deny the deity of Jesus Christ
  - 1. Contemporary Arians – who like Arius, denied the full deity of Jesus
  - 2. Even some theologians and pastors deny the deity of Jesus
- C. Early in our marriage we were members of a presbyterian church
  - 1. I recall hearing from some of the elders of our church who had been members of presbytery – the regional representative governing body of that denomination
  - 2. Presbytery was charged with being the gate-keepers for orthodoxy in the denomination
    - a. They had the responsibility of examining candidates for ministry, questioning them about all matters of doctrine
  - 3. They described a situation when they were examining a candidate for ordination
    - a. And his answers seemed to be pretty “squishy” as my son might say
    - b. So one of our elders finally got tired of all the wishy-washing answers and said, simply, “Is Jesus Christ God?”
    - c. Whereupon the candidate replied, “No”
  - 4. Immediately, the presbytery called for the question, and went to a vote
    - a. It was clear to our elders in our church what the vote should be
    - b. But to their astonishment, the presbytery for that denomination voted to ordain the man by a margin of 2 to 1!
- D. Modern myths are popularized by novels like *The Davinci Code*, which asserts that the church hadn’t affirmed the deity of Jesus until the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.
  - 1. To be sure, the Council of Nicea did address the deity of Jesus in order to deal with the Arian heresy
  - 2. But here, in the very opening verses of the Gospel of John, we see **John 1:1** (NKJV) — 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
    - a. There is no uncertainty here
    - b. Jesus Christ, the Word, is God
    - c. His full deity is asserted
- E. Other contemporary sects which make a claim to Christianity also deny the deity of Jesus
  - 1. The Jehovah’s Witnesses are a case in point
    - a. He is said to be a god-like creature, but not God
  - 2. They do it by modifying the Greek in John 1.1 – trying to make is say, “and

the Word was a God...”

- a. In order to do that, they do violence to the Greek language
- F. John is clear – Jesus Christ, God the Son, the Word – is God
  - 1. Fully God
    - a. No ambiguity whatsoever
- G. Christmas is not about a baby born in unusual circumstances
  - 1. Christmas is about God coming in the flesh
    - a. God incarnate!
  - 2. The Word was God
    - a. The Word is God come in the flesh

## VII. **The Creator Word**

- A. Finally, the Word is the Creator of all things
  - 1. **John 1:3** (NKJV) — 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.
- B. Not only was this Logos with God in the beginning, when all things were created
  - 1. He was the very agent of creation
    - a. Not just a witness of creation
    - b. Not just a cheerleader for the Father when the Father created all things
  - 2. But He Himself, the Logos, created all things
- C. All things means – all things
  - 1. John, in exemplary philosophical fashion, establishes this both positively, and by negation
  - 2. Positively – all things were made through Him
  - 3. Negation – without Him nothing was made that was made
- D. Your very existence depended upon the creative act of this Logos
  - 1. As well as the very existence of every thing on which you rely to sustain your existence
- E. The Word, the Logos, is the Creator Word

## VIII. Summary

- A. Jesus Christ, come in the flesh, is the Logos
  - 1. The only means by which the world in which we live makes any sense
    - a. Has any coherence
    - b. Has any meaning
    - c. Has any purpose
  - 2. And that’s because
- B. The eternal Word
- C. The personal Word
- D. God the Word
- E. The Creator Word
- F. The details
  - 1. The parents – virgin and carpenter
  - 2. The baby in the manger



3. The angelic announcements
4. The wise men from the east
5. All are meant to hearken the Logos

#### Benediction

2 John 3 (NKJV) — 3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.