

The Nativity of Our Lord; Christmas Day; December 25, 2021
+ John 1:1-18 +
“Jesus Comes Speaking and Shining Light”

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testified about him. He cried out, “This is the one I spoke of about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’” For out his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is close to the Father's side, has made him know.

Like the thorough writer he is, St. John starts **in the beginning**. This is where John starts, because this is where the story of God and mankind starts. Before God started creating, there was no time, no one and nothing for God to interact with. He was there; nothing else. Then he started creating; there was beginning. **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** When God made the beginning by beginning his creation, the Word was already there. Not only was the Word already there, but the Word was **with God and the Word was God**. And so St. John begins his Gospel identifying Jesus Christ as the eternal God, with God and creating as God in the beginning. This language is already perfectly clear. But the Spirit inspires St. John to go the extra mile, and make sure we know: **He was with God in the beginning. Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made.**

John calls Jesus Christ **the Word**. Words reveal. They take what is hidden in the mind and unravel it for the world to understand. It is said that most of communication is made with body and face. Still, without words there is no possibility of communicating complex and intricate truth. Your body language may be able to say, “I'm bored.” Your face may be able to say, “I'm happy” or “I think that's funny.” But it takes words to say this: “You have sinned against God and deserve to perish in eternal condemnation. But God so loves you and the world that he sends me. He sends me to bless with eternal life and joy all who believe that I lived for them, died for them, and rose for them.” Try saying that with just your body or your face. You can't. You need words.

So God sent his Word, Jesus Christ. Jesus preached. Jesus taught. Jesus lived a perfect life, keeping all of God's commands in our place. Jesus died a bloody, violent death on the cross during which his heavenly Father abandoned him to hell in our place. He lived that perfect life and sacrificed it to take our sins away. Jesus rose from the grave on Easter. With the words he spoke, with his holy life, with his death and resurrection, Jesus the Word tells us: "Your sins are forgiven. You are right with God. And you will be with him in perfect joy forever."

Or, to put it another way, Jesus the Word communicates to us that we have life in him: **In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind.** Jesus comes as the Word proclaiming life in him. And that message of life in Christ shatters the darkness of this world. It shines into the hearts of all who believe and scatters the darkness there.

Before Jesus shines in a heart, there is nothing but darkness; the darkness of unforgiven sin, the darkness of fear about what's coming after death, the dark delusion that in order to escape eternal punishment that sinful person must somehow make amends for his own sins. Darkness. Pure darkness. All of it leading to eternal darkness.

And then the Word speaks and light shines and scatters the darkness: "Your sins are forgiven, fully and freely. Far from fearing what's coming after death, you may now embrace it and long for it. And rest easy because everything – everything! – necessary to save you is accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ!" Jesus the Word speaks; the light shines; the darkness of unbelief scatters.

But not for everyone. And here is the sad part. There is still so much darkness in this world. There is still so much of the darkness of unbelief and fear of what's to come and the proud human spirit that tries to earn its own way to God's side. And yet, even all the dark unbelief that remains in this world cannot extinguish the light of Christ's life. **The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

Does it ever seem like the darkness of unbelief is overcoming the light of Christ? There is so much of it, and Christ's light can seem so hard to find in this world. And yet, here we are. Baptized children of God worshipping Jesus Christ on the Christmas morning. Are there millions of us here? No. But there are millions in this world. **The darkness has not overcome [the light].** And it never will. Jesus promises the light of his life will shine in hearts until he returns. The Word continues to proclaim life. He does it through you and me, and will until the end of time. The light still shines, and will until the end.

Here is one example of the light shining, the Word speaking through is people: **There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.** John the Baptist was not the light. He was not the Word. But he came to speak the Word, to shine the light through what he said. You do not need to wear camel hair and eat locusts to do it. It's not about wardrobe or diet. It's not even about your style, power, or charisma. It's about Jesus. He's the Word; he's the light. Speak him; shine him into hearts.

Because he has come, and he has come for everyone. No human heart is beyond hope, because Jesus is real light, divine light, that forgives all and brings what is dead to life: **The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world.**

Here is story you may not believe. A Father had been away from his home for a while. And to call it “his home” is an understatement. Yes, the people who lived there were his people: his wife, his daughters and sons. But it wasn’t just that; it wasn’t just “his home” in the sense that he lived there and his people lived there. No, he actually built the place with his own two hands. He drew the blueprints, brought the materials, and built the whole thing with his own two hands. But when he came home for Christmas, his family answered the door and turned him way. “We’re not your people,” they said. “This isn’t your home.” **He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him.** This is the said irony of Jesus’ arrival in this world, the house he built. And it’s the sad irony of Jesus arriving among not just the human race he made but his own chose nation and being turned away.

But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband’s will, but born of God. His own did not receive him. But now John, who loves to circle back to points already covered, reminds us that the darkness does not overcome the light. Into some hearts the Word speaks, the light shines, and scatters the darkness. But there is no space for us to take pride in the fact that we are those **who did receive him.** Because why have we? Is it because our hearts were easier to enter, more receptive to the Word of Christ, or had some light already in them ready to receive the light of Christ. Not in the least. **He gave [those who believe] the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband’s will, but born of God.** John pictures the Word entering our hearts, the light scattering the darkness of unbelief, as birth. How much say did you have in your physical birth? Did you decide when you would be born? Or to what parents? Or into what amount of wealth? You had no say in your physical birth at all. The light shines into our hearts, we hear and believe the Word of Christ, because God and God alone makes it happen.

And so we are **born of God.** He has given us **the right to become children of God.** We are God’s children by faith in Jesus. Children may approach their father with every and any concern, and they know their Father is eager to hear them. They know he will answer by giving them what is best. Children listen eagerly to their Father’s Word, especially when that Word is the light of life. Children also share in their Father’s inheritance. For us waits an inheritance in heaven that exceeds everything we could ever imagine. We are God’s children, and the benefits of being in his family run deep and long. He has given us birth into his family through faith in his Son. The Word has spoken his salvation to our hearts; his light shines in our hearts, and we are born of God.

Now watch again how John loves to circle back. If you’re ever reading John and wondering, “What’s really important here?” just keep reading and he’ll tell you by coming back to it. **The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.** On Christmas, the Word Jesus dwells among us in human flesh. When the virgin Mary sets him in the manger, she is laying down a message, a Word from God’s heart our ears. The message is **full...of truth.** Everything we hear Jesus say, everything we watch him do, is the pure truth of God. And that truth is **full of grace.** Hear what Jesus says when he preaches and teaches. Watch that perfect life he lives for you. Watch him sacrifice it for you and pick it up again. It’s all pure, divine truth. And it all adds up to his: God is full of grace, undeserved love, for you. And you find it in Jesus. That’s the fully true message that Jesus, the Word, comes into the world to deliver: God is full of grace for you.

Watch how John circles back again. Now he's back to John the Baptist: **John testified about him. He cried out, "This was the one I spoke about when I said, 'The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.'" But if Jesus' cousin John the Baptist was born before Jesus (and he was), then to what other truth is St. John now coming back around? Jesus is eternal. He is with God, and was with God in the beginning. Everything made was made through him. This our confidence that the Word, Jesus, is communicating with us directly from God's heart. This is our confidence that Jesus the light is shining divine light into our hearts. He is full of grace, and we know it's true, because the Word is God himself. For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.**

Without Jesus, we would not know God's love and grace. We would be able to tell that God is powerful, that he is wise, and that to a large degree God is kind. These things you can learn about God from walking through the woods or sitting in boat at sunrise. We would also be able to tell, without Jesus, that God has a standard of right and wrong. This we could tell from listening to our conscience. We could also tell that God cares about right and wrong, from the fact that our conscience congratulates us for doing good and scolds for doing wrong. We could also tell, without Jesus, that this world is fallen and broken and that there is some kind of problem between God and us. This you could tell from all the horrible things that happen in this world, including the fact that people die. In summary, without Jesus we'd know God is strong, smart, and generally kind. You'd also know God cares about what you do right and wrong, and that for what you do wrong you have a problem with God.

Without Jesus, you don't know the full truth of God. And what's missing? You don't know his grace. You don't know the way to heaven. And this is why Jesus comes on Christmas. He comes to speak the truth of God's grace to you, by what he says and what he does to save you. He comes to shine the light of God's salvation into your heart. **For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is close to the Father's side, has made him known.** Jesus has come to make the truth of God's grace known to you. Without him, you never would have known it. But now you do, because on Christmas the Word of God comes to speak to you, and the light of God comes to shine into your heart. Merry Christmas! Amen.