

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 12/25/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Christmas Day

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, December 25th

John 1:1-14

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The meaning of life

The Gospel lectionaries for the Christmas Eve and the Christmas Dawn services are taken from Luke's birth narrative and includes the account of Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem for the census and finding no guest rooms available. Mary gives birth to Jesus and places Him in a manger. An angel of the Lord accompanied by the heavenly host appears to the shepherds while they were watching their flocks that night. The shepherds then visit Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus (Luke 2:1-20). This is the quintessential Christmas story we are all familiar with. The Gospel lection for the Christmas Day service is from the prologue of the Gospel of John and adds a different flavor to Christmas. While having none of the typical Christmas Day trappings, this lectionary text describes the full cosmological significance of what happened on that first Christmas Day over two millennia ago. At this time of year, both believers and non-believers often have conversations about the true meaning of Christmas. While John's Gospel prologue is a bit awkward to make into a children's play, hymn or image for a Christmas card, it not only provides the meaning of Christmas, but it also gives us the real meaning and purpose of our lives.

John 1:1-14 Commentary

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 was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The significance of these verses is indicated by the very opening words, "*In the beginning...*" This is an allusion to the opening words of the entire Scripture corpus in Genesis 1.1: "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" In the first chapter of Genesis, we also read "*And God said, 'Let there be ...'*" and there was. God created through His spoken Word. The first significant word in the opening verse of John's prologue is actually "*Word*" from the Greek *Logos*. In the Gospel of John, the Word of God took on personal creative attributes and is identified as Jesus Christ. The Word is not only attributed divine functions such as creation (v.3) and giving life (v.4), but the Word is also identified as God: "*... and the Word was God.*" The coming of the *Logos* into the world (i.e., incarnation) is described as a light shining in the darkness.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

John introduces John the Baptist. Notice how John the Gospel writer is focused only on the function of John the Baptist and not his identity. Interestingly, two words used in these verses take on broader meaning. The first is "sent" (v.6), a combination of two Greek words: "apo" and "stello" (set apart, sent). This is origin of the word *apostle*. Bear witness (v.8) is from the Greek "martus" (to be a witness), the origin of *martyr*.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

These verses continue to outline the purpose of Christ. Christ was the true Light (where John the Baptist was a witness to the Light). In just one short verse, John references incarnation, creation, and rejection (v.10). While His own people (Israel) rejected Him, there are those who received Him and continue to receive Him today. The heart of the Gospel is introduced in vv.12-13.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is the ultimate statement on incarnation. John loops back to v.1 and picks up the theme of the *Logos* and how the *Logos* took on human nature and lived ("tabernacled") among us. This is a clear allusion to the function of the tabernacle in the wilderness as a place where God dwelt among the people.

Reflections

The theological and cosmological importance of the nativity is explained by John in these verses: The Creator and the Redeemer are the same God. The divine agent of creation who has continually been attempting to communicate with His creation through general and special revelation, with little success, took on human flesh. The written Word became the spoken Word. The Word became flesh and offers a new birth to all those who believe.

While the idea of the *Logos* is grounded in the Wisdom tradition of ancient Judaism, the concept of *logos* is also found in early Greek philosophy. The concept was originated by Heraclitus who was active around 500 B.C. in Ephesus (the same place the Gospel of John is believed to have been written some 600 years later). The ancient Greeks believed in a kind divine *logos* or logic at work in the universe. The *logos* was an eternal and unchanging truth present at creation and available to everyone who seeks it. The *logos* was, in essence, the reason for life. Only when one finds one's *logos*, or reason for life, can one be complete and able to achieve one's full potential. Not surprisingly, there was disagreement among the Greeks as to what exactly comprised the *logos* and thus there was no single unified idea of the meaning of life. John's opening to his Gospel is a drop-the-mic moment. The *Logos* is defined, and His name is Jesus.

The realities of the secular, retail Christmas season with all the worldly pressures can often leave people with a feeling that their lives are nothing more than a hollow, superficial existence. Many realize that their lives lack real meaning and purpose and are nothing more than a constant series of displacement activities seeking to escape a broken existence. At a time when there is pressure to be happy and to conform to worldly expectations, the realization that we live in brokenness is never clearer.

To those still living in brokenness, the best Christmas Gift this year will not be found under the tree in an elegantly wrapped box. It did, however, come by way of being hung on a tree. Unlike the gift that you convinced yourself you could not do without this Christmas; this Gift is one you really cannot live without. This Gift will not cost you anything (although it did cost someone everything). This Gift is yours for the taking but you must accept it - unlike an Amazon delivery left on your doorstep, you must open the door when the Giver is knocking.

Our lives are indeed incomplete and directionless without the *Logos* - Jesus Christ, the Living Word. It is only when we enter into a relationship with Him, living to serve Him and not ourselves, that we become complete and whole. It is only then do our lives take on an eternal significance. It is through living in Christ that we can live in authentic community with one another and where our lives take on real meaning and purpose. This is the true Gift of Christmas - a Gift that keeps on giving.

Merry Christmas!

Application

- What in your mind constitutes a meaningful Christmas?
- What is still missing in your experience of Christmas of this year?
- Where might you be experiencing a sense of emptiness in your life right now?
- What are you still searching for this Christmas?
- How do you define your logos, the meaning and purpose of your life?
- How faithful are you at living out the meaning and purpose you espouse?



Sources

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