Scripture Reading: John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

[6] There was a man sent from God whose name was John. [7] He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. [8] He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

[9] The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. [12] Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — [13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

[14] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[15] (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") [16] Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

The Son Has Made Him Known

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, you have made yourself known through your one and only begotten Son. Please add the power of your Holy Spirit to bring your Word alive and plant it in our hearts and souls and minds, that we might know and serve you better day by day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Later in his gospel, John tells us why he has written down these things: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). John presents Jesus as the Son of God throughout the gospel. He wanted to make sure that he was not misunderstood by Jews who were expecting a human, not a divine Messiah – or by the Greeks whose "sons of gods" were supermen born of a union between a god and a human woman. Our scripture reading this morning is a famous prologue in which John makes it clear that the Sonship which Jesus claimed, and which we hold to be true, was precisely a matter of human deity and nothing less. The Church of England reads this passage annually as the Gospel lesson on Christmas Day. This is entirely appropriate, for "nowhere else in the New Testament is the nature and meaning of Jesus' divine Sonship so clearly explained as here."[1]

John does not even use the word "Son" until verse 14. Instead, he speaks of the Word. Old Testament readers would immediately recognize the Word as God's creative utterance, his power in action fulfilling his purpose. God's Word has the power in itself to create the thing purposed. In Genesis 1:3, God said, "Let there be . . . and there was." The Word of God is God at work. In this passage John tells us seven things about the divine Word.[2]

First, he is eternal. "In the beginning was the Word" (Genesis 1:1). He has no beginning; in the beginning, he was already there.

Second, he is a personal being. "And the Word was with God" (1:1). This is the distinct personality who fulfills God's purposes, the power of one who stands in eternal active fellowship with the Father.

Third, he is divine. “And the Word was God” (1:1). He is distinct from the Father, but not created – not a creature. Within the unity of the Godhead, we are confronted with the mystery of distinct personalities – both divine in and of themselves.

Fourth, he is creating. “Through him all things were made” (1:3). In every act of making that the Father has ever performed, the Word was the agent. Everything that was made was made through him.

Fifth, he is animating. “In Him was life” (1:4). In all its forms, life is given and maintained by the Word. All physical life in the realm of created things exists in and through him. Life is given and maintained by the Word.

Sixth, he is revealing. “And that life was the light of men” (1:4). In giving life, he gives light too. All people receive intimations of God because they are alive in God’s world. This is due to the work of the Word.

Seventh, he is incarnate. “The Word became flesh” (1:14). The baby in the manger at Bethlehem was the incarnate Word of God. The staggering fact of the Christmas message is that this child was *God*.

He was God made into a human being. He took manhood onto himself, so that he could feel what it was like to be a created human being. Our Lord who created the angel that became Satan was now in a position in which he could be tempted by Satan. He could not avoid this temptation. It was essential to the perfection of his human life that he enter into conflict with the devil. We read in Hebrews (2:17-18; 4:15-16) that he had to be made like this so that he could suffer when tempted, so that he could help those who are being tempted, so that he could be our high priest who could sympathize with our weakness. He was tempted in every way, yet remained without sin. Therefore we can approach the throne of grace with confidence to receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

Our fully human and fully divine Lord and Savior was born to die. Paul explains in Philippians (2:6-8) that in this great act of condescension and self-humbling, Jesus stripped himself of every advantage by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born a man. He humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience to the point of

death, and even more debasing, *the death of a common criminal*. We read in 2 Corinthians (8:9) that, although he was rich, he became poor for our sakes, so that we might become rich through his poverty. Truly his incarnation is a wonder of grace. In coming to earth in human form, Jesus laid aside divine glory and dignity, as he says in his great high priestly prayer in John (17:5), "the glory I had with you before the world began."

In the gospels we see that Jesus was content for much of the time to not draw on his divine knowledge and power, but drew on them intermittently, restraining his divine capacities. In this we see the entire submission of the Son to the Father's will. The Son is dependent on the Father and thinks and acts only and wholly as the Father directs, as he says in John 5:19, "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." And again in John 8:28-29, "I do nothing on my own . . . I always do what pleases him." This relationship between the Father and Son is eternal. Though coequal with the Father in eternity, power, and glory, the second person of the Trinity submits to the good pleasure of the first person, and finds all his joy in doing his Father's will. The Son's utter dependence on his Father's will was not just during the time of his incarnation on earth, but is a continuation of their eternal relationship in heaven. In this we can understand that it was the Father's will for the Son while he was incarnated on earth to have limitations of his knowledge.

Jesus emptied himself and became poor, laying aside his glory - accepting hardship, isolation, ill-treatment, malice, misunderstanding, and finally – a death of physical and spiritual agony that tested his resolve to the limit. This he did out of love for unlovely human beings like me and you – so that through his poverty we might become rich. Through him we have hope of pardon, hope of peace, and hope of glory. It is the most marvelous story ever told. In following our Master, we are called to also make ourselves poor – to spend and be spent – giving our time, trouble, care and concerns to enrich others by doing good to them: not just to our friends, but wherever we see need.

In our scripture reading today, John makes it clear at the beginning of his gospel that the Word was a person personally and eternally divine, the only Son of the Father. John knew that no one could understand the words and works of Jesus without knowing that Jesus is in fact God the Son. Later, in our Lord's last talk with his disciples, John reports that Jesus told his disciples that he would send them "another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth" (John14:16). The rich idea of this advocate is also translated as counselor, helper, and friend. Jesus names this advocate the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), indicating his divinity. "Having sent the eternal Son into the world, the Father now recalls him to glory and sends the Spirit to take his place."[3]

The Holy Spirit took a bunch of confused, timid disciples and opened their hearts to the truths that Jesus had been teaching them throughout his earthly ministry. The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of unbelievers, revealing, inspiring, illuminating the truth of Jesus, and the way of salvation. Without the Holy Spirit there would be no gospel, no faith, no church, no Christianity in the world at all. We can never prove the truth of Christianity to the unbelieving heart; only the Holy Spirit can reveal the way, the truth, and the life through his own almighty power to bring new life to the blinded heart.

Let us pray. Triune Father, Son and Holy Spirit God, thank you for inviting us into your loving arms with everlasting love - inviting us to surrender ourselves to your Lordship in humble dependence on you for strength in our weakness, courage in our fear, and rejoicing in our suffering. Thank you for being our consuming fire God who ignites and purifies us as you reveal your glory to us so that we might glorify you and enjoy you forever. May we therefore take heart, continue steadfastly in loving you with all our heart and soul and mind, love our neighbors as ourselves, and the brethren, obeying all your commandments and going and making disciples. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[1] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2023), 56.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 67.

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