

I thought I would preach a short series of sermons on parts of John 1 as an advent/Christmas series. Advent and Christmas is about the Son of God becoming a man – it is about the second person of the Trinity permanently becoming a human being while remaining fully divine. Advent tends to be about the themes of waiting for the coming of Christ – both his first and second comings and Christmas a celebration of the birth of Christ. John 1:1-18 is about the Word coming into the world – the Word becoming flesh - and so it fits into the theme of the incarnation – God becoming a man.

John's approach to this subject is somewhat different from the approach of the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The gospel according to John was written quite a bit later than the other gospels and John chose not just to repeat what the others had said, but to provide the church with the fruit of many years of Spirit-led reflection on this amazing truth that the Son of God became a human being. And so, what we have in these first 18 verses of John's gospel – the so-called prologue – is a unique and profound account of the incarnation and its meaning for us. John's account is consistent with that of the rest of the Bible, but it is different, and it gives us many edifying insights into the meaning of the incarnation of the Son of God.

John spends a lot of time on the divinity of Jesus. The one who came to save us from our sins was fully God and at his birth he became a being in which God and man were joined in one person. The one who was born in Bethlehem was a completely unique being. He as both God and man in one person. He is fully God and fully man. In some mysterious way the divine Son of God and a complete human being are united so that the result is a single being who is fully God and fully man. This is an amazing truth. It is amazing in all sorts of ways. It is amazing that the second person of the Trinity would agree to become a divine-human being. It is amazing that human beings were so important to him that he was willing to humble himself to become one of us. He came on a mission – a mission to save us from our sins. In John 1:29 John the Baptist introduces Jesus with these words "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Somehow, in order to accomplish that Jesus had to be a divine-human being – one person with two natures.

No mere human being could save us from our sins. Apparently, there was no way that God himself could save us without becoming a man. The saviour of the world needed to be divine and he needed to be a human being in order to accomplish the mission of defeating sin and defeating death.

Now John in this passage spends considerable time telling us about the divinity of the second person of the trinity – the person in the God-head who became flesh. He gives a lot of emphasis to this. He wants us to think deeply about Jesus' divinity. He wants us to have a clear understanding of what it means that Jesus is God. That is his focus in the first 5 verses of John 1.

And whenever the biblical authors describe God for us – it is a call to worship. It is never just about knowledge. The knowledge of God is for the worship of God. It is never appropriate to study God without at the same time worshipping him. To study him without worshipping him is greatly dishonoring to him. This belongs to the Godness of God and the creatureliness of human beings. It belongs to Godness to be worthy of

worship. And it belongs to creatures to give worship to their creator. And so, as we hear what John is saying about the divinity of Jesus, the expected response is not only growth in knowledge, but worship.

Verse 1 & 2, “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

The Word is both the second person of the Trinity and the God-man Jesus. It is necessary to distinguish between the Son of God before the incarnation and the God-man Jesus after the incarnation. The term “Word” can refer to both. Verse 14 says that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” That refers to the God-man Jesus. But in the first 5 verses the Word refers to the Son of God or the second person of the Trinity before he became flesh. And the point is that he was already there in the beginning. The words “in the beginning” are meant to remind us of the opening words of the Bible – “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” John is saying – at that beginning the Word already was. The Word was with God and he was God before the beginning of the creation.

Moses in Psalm 90 teaches that God was before the beginning. He connects this idea before the beginning with the fact that God is from everlasting to everlasting. Psalm 90:2 says, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” This is what John is saying about the Word when he says, “In the beginning was the Word” and “He was in the beginning with God.” If the Word was already there in the beginning that means that he had no beginning. If the Word ever had a beginning, that would be the beginning, but John is saying that in the beginning the Word was already there. He was always there. There never was a time when he was not there. There never was a time when the Word did not exist. He is from everlasting.

So, John is telling us that there was a time when there was only God and nothing else. There was a time before God had created anything – when the world did not exist – but only God existed. And the Word was there before anything else existed.

John goes on to say that the Word was with God. He says it twice. Verse 2 says, “He was in the beginning with God.” The Greek word that is translated “with” here is often used of people being with one another. In Mark 14:49 Jesus said to those who were arresting him, “Day after day I was **with** you in the temple.” In 2 Corinthians 5:8 Paul writes, “Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home **with** the Lord.” So what John is saying when he says that the Word was **with** God is that there were at least two persons together. We know from the rest of Scripture that there are three persons in the God-head, but from this passage two are explicitly mentioned – the Word and God and they are with one another. The Word was with God. And that with-ness implies a personal relationship. D.A. Carson writes, “that suggests that John may already be pointing out, rather subtly, that the ‘Word’ he is talking about is a person, with God and therefore distinguishable from God, and enjoying a personal relationship with him.”

John also says that the “Word was God.” Here we have one of the passages that contribute to the doctrine of the Trinity. The “Word was God.” The Word who became flesh was God. There are those like the Jehovah’s Witness who claim that the Greek should be translated “a god.” The Jehovah’s Witness do not believe that Jesus was equal with God. They claim that he was the first created being higher than the rest of the creation, but not fully God. But the Jehovah’s Witness’ translation is an eccentric translation. It is not justified by the grammar of the Greek language. Among NT and Greek scholars of all stripes there is a vast consensus that the proper translation of the Greek words here is “the Word was God.”

So, we have part of the Trinity doctrine here. The Word was God. And the Word was with God. There is one God and yet there are at least two persons in that one God. God and the Word can be distinguished. But they are both God. There are other texts that are needed for the complete Trinity doctrine, but this one teaches part of it. From this text alone we have 2 persons and one God.

John is going to tell us that the Word became flesh. He is going to tell us all about Jesus and his life, death and resurrection. But here in the opening verses of his account of Jesus, it makes it clear that the Word who became flesh was fully divine. He is not part of the creation in his divine nature. He was there before the beginning. He is not all that there is to God because he was with God, but he is fully God.

We look now at the significance of the term “Word” as a title for the second person of the Trinity. That title is not used often for the eternal Son of God, but it is very important and very significant. The eternal Son of God is the Word of God.

Now the idea of the word of God is a very significant idea in the OT. Because God is God, he is able to accomplish his will simply by speaking. The Genesis account of the creation reveals God speaking the world into existence. “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Psalm 33:6 says, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” So, God accomplishes whatever he wants to accomplish by his word. But words are also about communication. In the Genesis account of creation, as soon as he created man in his own image he spoke to them. And this continues throughout the rest of the Bible. God is a God who speaks. The importance of this cannot be over emphasized. The God who created us and who rules over all is a God who speaks and particularly he speaks to human beings.

And somehow the second person of the Trinity and after the incarnation, the God-man Jesus, is the speech of God. He is the Word that is spoken. There is much about this that we cannot understand, but we can understand a little at least of what this means. In some profound way the eternal Son of God is the Word by which God accomplishes his will and by which he communicates to human beings. We see something of this in verse 3 of John 1 which says, “All things were made through him and without him was not any thing that was made.” God made all things through speaking. He made all things through his Son. He made all things through the Word.

So, God created all things through his Son. God created all things through the Word. But God also speaks through his Son – the Word of God. We can think of all the times that God speaks in the OT – all the references to the Word of God. Our text is saying that the Son of God is that Word. What this means is that all that God says and does, he says and does through Jesus. We see hints of this relationship throughout John's gospel. 1:18, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." The only God, who is at the Father's side is the eternal Son of God. He has made God known. That is all through the OT as well as the NT. God makes himself known through his deeds and through his words and the Son of God is the Word through whom that happens.

We see this in John 5:19 where Jesus says, "For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise." And John 14:24 "And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." In all of these references we see how God acts and speaks through his Son and another way of saying the same thing is to say that God acts and speaks through his Word who is identified with the Son.

And one of the amazing things about this is that the eternal Son of God continues to be the Word of God after he becomes the God-man. Verse 14 says that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He continues to be the Word of God even after incarnation. In Hebrews 1:1-3 the author is speaking of the Son of God. He says that in the last days God has spoken to us by his Son and he goes on to say that "he [the Son] upholds the universe by the word of his power." This referring to Jesus the God-man. It is through him that the universe is being upheld by the word of his power.

So, all that God does and all that God says he says and does through his Son who after the incarnation is the God-man Jesus Christ.

Let's take a moment to think of how this applies to us. I said at the beginning that whenever the Bible speaks of God or of Jesus it is that we might know and worship him. One of the points that I want to highlight about these verses that we are looking at is that they come to us from God – they are God's Word – and they come to us through the eternal Son of God who is now the God-man Jesus. Behind all of this is the fact that God wants us to know and love and worship him. These verses give us some insight into God before the creation – God when there was nothing but God - but they speak about the creation and they speak about Jesus as the Word who created the world and who communicates with human beings. They reveal to us a God who created the world including human beings and a God who speaks to human beings. The eternal Son of God was always the Word of God, but John is speaking of him as a God who speaks us into existence and then speaks to us and therefore as a God who wants to interact with the human beings that he has made.

When we think about God as eternal – Jesus as existing before the beginning of the world and the one through whom God created all things and the Word being God and with God – we might wonder what all this has to do with us. We might wonder with David in Psalm 8, "what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?" But what we see in our text is that God through the Word created all things and

speaks to humans – he makes himself known to humans – so that we might know him and worship him. The fact that the Son of God is the Word and that the Word became flesh means that the God of the Bible highly values human beings and being in relationship with us.

This is a most amazing truth. It is so basic to biblical teaching that it is easy to overlook it, but God creating and God speaking is about him desiring relationships with human beings. It is interesting to contrast this with most other worldviews. In the very influential worldview in our society - the belief that there is nothing beyond the physical material world – the universe is impersonal. There is no one beyond the physical world who cares about us as human beings. In the eastern religions that believe that the universe itself is god, god is impersonal a force rather than a person.

The Bible reveals a God who speaks – a personal God who spoke the world into existence and who speaks to the human beings that he has made. The Bible reveals that the Son of God is the Word of God so that speaking and thus relationship is at the heart of who God is and it is at the heart of who Jesus is. And the Word becoming flesh is a further indication of the value that God places on human beings and relationships with us.

Verse 4 continues, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” In him was life. Later on, John will record Jesus saying, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.” Jesus has life in himself. That means that his life is not dependent upon anything else. It means that Jesus’ existence is not dependent upon anything else. This is one of the essential characteristics of God. He is absolutely independent. He exists eternally. He is uncreated. This is the answer to the question, “Who made God?” Nobody made God because God’s life and his being are in himself. This is part of what it means to be God. He has always existed. His life is in himself. He did not depend on anything outside of himself.

And this is true of the Word – the eternal Son of God – the one who became flesh. He has life in himself. And one of the great facts of creation is that he has given that life to human beings. John continues, “and the life was the light of men.” Here again we see how God and the Word are related to human beings. God did not have to create anything, but he obviously decided to create the universe including mankind and there is in that a sharing of existence and life and light. There was a time when only the triune God existed. The three persons of the Trinity existed together as one God in fullness of life and the decision to create was a decision to share the riches of life and light. It belongs to divinity not to need anything and so creation is about sharing existence and life especially with human beings. “In him was life and the life was the light of men.”

The Word has life in himself and he has shared that life with men and the life is the light of men. Life and light are closely connected here. “[T]he life is the light of men.” He is speaking about human life here. There is the life of plants and the life of animals but here John is speaking about the life of human beings which is of a different order. It is life in the image of God – the life of the Word given to us – intelligent life – spiritual life – moral life – purposeful life. And light is associated with knowledge and holiness and the glory of God.

So far John is talking about before the fall. Light and life here are pre-fall light and life. These terms refer to God's original intention for human beings. Light is about seeing things as they really are – seeing things in the light of the truth about God and the creation. Darkness and death go together. Light and life go together. Here John is reminding us that life and light come to us from the Word who has life in himself. Psalm 36:9 says something similar speaking about God. "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light."

So far there is no sign of the fall. Verse 5 gives us the first hint of sin. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Light is about life and truth and goodness. Darkness is about death and falsehood and evil. So, John mentions the post-fall situation for the first time. But this is not only about the post-fall situation. It is also an allusion to the way in which the light overcame the darkness at the creation.

In Genesis 1 we are told that "darkness was over the face of the deep." And then we are told in 1:3, "And God said, Let there be light and there was light." Verse 4, "And God saw that the light was good." The text does not say that darkness was evil at this point, but the John is going to use that imagery to describe the mission of Jesus as the light of life and goodness and truth overcoming the darkness of sin and death and the lie.

So John is using the image of the light overcoming the darkness in the creation to describe Jesus' mission. Originally the darkness was not evil, but after the fall it becomes a symbol of sin and death and evil and the picture that John is painting for us here is of the light of life that was in the Word and given to man continuing to shine into the darkness of sin and the darkness not overcoming the light.

These words imply that the darkness was trying to overcome the light. The history of the world since the fall is the kingdom of darkness seeking to overcome the kingdom of light. This verse is saying that in spite of opposition, the light of the Word continues to shine and the darkness has not overcome it. This sets the scene for the mission of the Word who becomes flesh. What the Word who becomes flesh is going to do is overcome the darkness.

Later on, John will write, 3:19, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world; and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." And Jesus says in John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." And then in 12:46 Jesus says, "I am come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."

So, John is anticipating the mission of Jesus in these opening verses of his gospel. The eternal Son of God is the Word – God and with God. He made all things. In him was life and the life was the light of men. But the darkness has come. And John hints that the light of the creating Word is going to overcome the darkness.

These verses give us the reason that Jesus is able to overcome the darkness. These verses tell us the reason that Jesus is able to grant the light of life to those who follow him. He is able to overcome the darkness in the world and in our lives because he is the one who overcame the darkness at the time of creation and he is the one who has life in himself and who has shared the light of life with men at the beginning. He will do that

again in the new creation. Just as in the original creation the Word overcame the darkness and gave the light of life to men, so in the new creation he is going to overcome the darkness and give the light of life to men.

These verses make clear to us how it is possible for Jesus to be our Saviour. As the original creator, he is able to recreate. As the one who has life in himself he is able to grant the light of life to those who follow him.

Jesus came to bring abundant life to those who follow him. These verses show us why he is able to do that.