

Christmas 1      December 31, 2017      Rev Ken Wratten at St Luke's  
Isaiah 61:10 – 62:3  
Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7  
John 1:1-18

Today's Gospel lesson shows us why the Apostle John is also known as John the Theologian. In the prologue of his Gospel, John says that Jesus is 'the Word' and 'the Light'. These concepts are worthy of our time, because they explain why the birth of THIS baby on Christmas is life-changing for you and me.

In Jewish thought, the power of the spoken word is rooted in the personality of the person who speaks. Think about the power you give to words from a brother or sister, from a parent, a teacher, our President, a news anchor on TV, or someone interviewed on the street about their opinion on a political candidate.

Verses 1-5 of John's prologue tell us that God's Word (Logos) was the divine, creative essence that took the will of God and made everything that exists. The Word is the source of everything that was, is, and ever will be created. That creative work is on-going.

In verses 6-8, John explains that John the Baptist was sent to tell the world that Jesus is the true light, who brings enlightenment to everyone. So the one who was about to make himself known was not only the Word, but also the Light: Not only creative power, but also the one who brings awareness and understanding of the true personality of God. Some people did not recognize or receive Jesus to be the Light; but some believed and trusted; and Jesus gave those people the privilege of becoming children of God.

In verse 14 John summarizes his theology in a short sentence: "The Word became flesh and lived among us." John was saying that God chose to have the Word, that creative power, enter into human history; literally in Hebrew, 'to pitch his tent' among us. By this happening, we can now see God's true nature.

Verse 16: "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." This gift of grace applies to ALL people; not just the people who met Jesus, or all fellow Jews, or all who lived at that time, but ALL PEOPLE receive the benefit of this gift that God has sent.

Sister Joan Chittester is a Benedictine nun, writer, and speaker. She offers some deep thoughts for us to ponder about this 12-day long season of Christmastide. She said, "This one (who came) is both the God who reaches down to us and the human who raises us up to God. If there was no manger,

there would be no cross. If no cross, there would be no empty tomb. It is all of one piece.”

“Christmas is not meant to leave us with nothing more than a child’s perception of what it means to see a baby in a manger scene. Christmas is meant to take us to the level of spiritual maturity where we are capable of seeing in a manger the meaning of an empty tomb. It is meant to enable us to see through the dark days of life to the stars beyond them. If God is truly with us, accompanies us on our path, knows our pains and our hopes, then life is not a dark forest from which there is no exit. It is a darkness, however dark, that is always overcome by light.”

In Paul’s letter to the church in Galatia he said that through Jesus’ coming into the world, we have received a renewed faith; renewed because he brought to us a new understanding of what God’s expectation is for each of us. The LAW gives us the outline for what faithful people should be like; but Jesus taught us that our day to day living by faith, our working motive for all that we do, should simply be wanting to please God.

How can we honor our aging parents in a way that pleases the Father? How can we treat each other when we disagree on something, so that we please the Father? How can we hold confidences, offer prayers for each other, honor those who die, serve those who have less than we have, so that we can have some confidence that our actions are pleasing to the Father? We have been shown the answers by the God the Son, the Light, the Word.

Christmastide defines the 12-day season from Christmas Day to Epiphany (January 6<sup>th</sup>). It is a time for expanding our thoughts beyond the manger scene, to the full meaning of God deciding to send his Son, the King of Nations, the Lord of Creation, the human child, Jesus - to walk with us, to be one of us, and to lift us up to be ‘children of God’. Let’s take in and celebrate all that the Christmas event stands for.

Then, let’s make life-changing use of the new year just ahead of us. We can spend this year deepening our awareness of Jesus the Son, the Word, and the Light; we can create new ways to be engaged in the sacred work of pleasing God, and inviting more people to join us.

Amen.