



HAIL THE INCARNATE DEITY

SERIES: ADVENT 2014

John 1:1, 14

2nd Message

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I. Introduction

Good morning and Merry Christmas! The story goes that there was once a man who did not believe the Christmas story, and one Christmas Eve his family wanted to go to the Christmas Eve service at church. So he sent them on while he stayed at home. After the family left a surprise snow storm came, and it happened to be a severe one. The man enjoyed sitting at home looking out the window watching all the snow fall. As he was watching the snow, he noticed that the birds were now disoriented because it was a surprise snow storm. They began flying toward his house and crashing into the big picture window, trying to get to the light inside the house. So they would crash into the window, fall to the snow below, then struggle back up and do it over and over again. The man tried everything he could think of to save these little birds. He waved his hands and began yelling at them: “Don’t do it! Don’t do it!” He tried communicating in every possible way with these birds to keep them alive. Finally he decided to go out and open the garage door. The garage was unattached to the house. So, he went out, opened the garage door, turned on the light and began motioning to the birds to come to the garage, and yelling “Over here. Over here.” He tried everything once again to get them to safety. Nothing seemed to work. Finally the man said to himself, “The only way I can get these birds to understand me and live, is if I myself became a bird.” And at that moment on Christmas Eve the Christmas bells chimed. And finally he understood the Christmas story.

God wanted to save us and give us life, so He became one of us.

Recently we asked my 10-year old daughter what was special about our God, and her answer was, “Jesus was real.”

God became real, a real flesh and blood human being in Jesus. Doesn’t that give us such dignity, that God would become one of us? It’s amazing! This is the most wonderful good news, and we can never let it grow old or get watered down, that the God of the universe would take on human life!

Transition

Last week Bernard shared the incarnation from Matthew’s perspective. Next week John Hanneman is going to share the incarnation from Luke’s perspective. Today we get to look at the incarnation through the eyes of the apostle John.

What is John trying to get across with his telling of the Christmas story? Well, I do know one thing: for John, everything boils down to life.

In fact, John tells us that he wrote his Gospel in order that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, we may have eternal life in his name. (20:31) So, the significance of the incarnation to John can ultimately be summed up in one word: LIFE.

Life for you.

Life for me.

Life for eternity.

Hail the incarnate deity.

For our scripture reading today we read the entire prologue to John. Like a great symphony, the prologue introduces us to all the great themes that will be touched on in the rest of the Gospel. It also is very deep, and I would love to spend a few weeks talking about this prologue, but I only have one week. So, what I want to do this morning is to concentrate on just two verses, verse 1 and verse 14. Within them I want to focus on three key words, actually two key words and one phrase: WORD, GLORY and GRACE AND TRUTH.

II. The Word: The Contact Point

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . 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. (John 1:1, 14 ESV)

The Background

When Mark tells the story of Jesus, he begins on the banks of the Jordan River with Jesus getting ready to be baptized by John the Baptist. When Luke tells his story of Jesus, he says that it began even before that. He begins his story in the village of Nazareth when an angel Gabriel appears to Mary, telling her that she will conceive and bear a son. When Matthew tells his story of Jesus, he says it began even before that. He begins his story with genealogy that goes the whole way back to the promises made to Abraham some 2000 years before Jesus’ birth. Then John comes along and says the story begins way, way before that. John comes along and says the story began long before his baptism, long before his conception, long before the promises made to Abraham, long before even Noah, even Cain/Abel, even Adam and Eve, long before even the stars and the heavens and the mountains came into being. John says ‘In the beginning’. That is when the Jesus story begin. As God says through His prophet Micah, ‘*His goings forth are from long ago, his days from eternity.*’ So as you read Jesus’ birth story this Christmas, you know that this baby in a manger has been around a long, long, long time.

The Contact Point

In the beginning was the WORD (v.1)

Now, that’s a curious way to begin this book especially since John will not use this word “*logos*”—the Greek word for “word”—the rest of the book. Why does John begin with this word *logos*? Why doesn’t he say, “Son”? Son is used a lot throughout the rest of the book. Why doesn’t he say, “Lord”? That’s used a lot the rest of the book, too. Why begin here with this word, *logos*?

I think it’s because John is an evangelist. He is a gospelizer. He wants to share the Good News of Jesus with as many people as possible, and this word “*logos*” is the way to do it. *Logos* is a contact

point with all the surrounding cultures. It is a loaded word that gives him common ground to talk with all of his neighbors about Jesus. It means a whole lot of things to a whole lot of people. In fact, some commentators think we shouldn't even translate it into English because the English word, "word", doesn't get close to capturing what it means. Now, John is not going to affirm everything that his neighbors mean by *logos*, but it is a contact point. He's going to start there.

The Examples

As an example, to many Greeks of the day including many Greek philosophers, the *logos* is the rational principle of the universe. The *logos* is that which gives life its reasonableness. We would never use it in this way, but they did. However, *logos*, to them, would never be associated with presence and personhood.

To many other philosophers of John's day, the *logos* was the integrating principle of the universe. There's an ordering to the universe and the *logos* is behind it. It's a little bit like science today. All these natural laws fit together that bring order into the world. Once again, they would never associate *logos* with a person.

And to the Jews of his day, the *logos* is the way God communicates with humanity, or you could say the agent of creation, but it is not personal. It is simply the vehicle by which the personal God communicates with humanity. In the beginning, God said and God said and God said. Throughout the Old Testament, God speaks and God speaks and God speaks. So the *logos* is the means by which God creates, and God communicates with humanity. But, like I said, it's not personal.

What John is doing is starting with the word *logos* to connect with all these groups at the same time, and each one thinks he's speaking to them. It's brilliant!

If they were all in the same room and John begins speaking to them, here's how it might go:

In the Beginning was the "*logos*".
 And they all say, "YES".
 And the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was GOD.
 And they all say, "Well, ok, I guess I can live with that."
 And the *Logos* became flesh and dwelled among us.
 And they all say, "No, No, that's not how it works."

But now John has their attention, and he can now take them deeper and introduce them to the person of Jesus, which is to say, introduce them to life through Jesus. It's just masterful.

The Application

This is a great model for us. This prologue should make us think about what the contact points are in our culture today? If John was writing his Gospel today, what would his contact point be? What would he use to draw in his neighbors in, and then bring the truth of Jesus into the conversation?

In the beginning was the _____. What do you think?

Right now there is a lot of talk about the new Star Wars movie coming out next year, although they are beginning to run previews now. Crazy. But, what about this "In the beginning was the 'force'"? The force was with God and the force was God and the force became flesh and dwelled among us. That might work but maybe not, because the force is both good and evil. This highlights the tension John is dealing with here. It's a bold move on his part.

Maybe a better way to go would be "higher power"? In the beginning was the higher power and the higher power was with God and the higher power was God. And, the higher power became flesh and dwelled among us. Now, you wouldn't affirm everything that our surrounding cultures would, but it would give you a starting point.

One of my good friends just told me this week that he was talking to a non-Christian over Thanksgiving and their conversation turned to Jesus. My friend said almost without thinking, "Well, Jesus was the first humanitarian." This caught the man's attention and they didn't have time to finish the conversation but he told my friend, we need to talk more. He might not mean everything that our culture means by that word but it was a contact point and now he can go deeper the next time he talks with that man.

However you would fill in that blank, the important thing is to look for contact points, so that you can introduce people to the life that Jesus brings. This time of the year is one of the best times to think about this. It's the season when the spotlight is on Jesus. Chances are greater during this time of year that the conversation may just end up centered on Jesus, and so we need to look for these contact points so that we can bring life to our neighbors.

II. The Glory: The Character

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, (John 1:14)

Eugene Peterson in the Message translates this phrase like this: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes" (John 1:14 MSG). We have seen His glory.

The Definition

Glory. It's one of those key words in John. What does this word glory mean? Well, it has a few different meanings and nuances. The first is luminosity or brightness.

In Luke you get the phrase, "the glory of the Lord shone around them" (Luke 2:9). That's glory. Glory always shines.

Another common nuance is the honor or praise of someone. So when the angels announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, they praise God by saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth" (Luke 2:14).

But, the third nuance of this term is the most important to understand for the book of John. Glory in the 1st century world also meant the character or essence of someone or something. And in John this is the chief use of the word. Glory in John describes the revelation of the character of God in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

The Old Testament Background

This follows from the Old Testament use of the term glory. You remember the scene in Exodus 33, Moses prays that he may see the Glory of God, that God would reveal that which makes God be God. God, what makes you be God? God, pull back the curtain and show me who or what you are. And God responds with,

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, . . ." (Exodus 34:6-7).

This God reveals Himself to be all about grace and mercy and love and faithfulness and forgiveness. In two words, this God is all about Grace and Truth. And that's exactly where John goes next.

III. The Grace and Truth: The Catchphrase

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. (v. 14)

The Old Testament Background (continued)

The Word moves into the neighborhood and we have seen his glory full of grace and truth. Indeed, scholars recognize the phrase "grace and truth" as a rendering of the Exodus 34 phrase, "steadfast love and faithfulness". This is Jesus' catchphrase in the book of John: grace and truth. When this little baby moves into the neighborhood, the era of grace and truth has begun.

The Application

Catchphrases or slogans, ways to represent someone or something, are very popular in our culture. Here's a little test. Can you guess these?

Scrooge: When Scrooge moves into the neighborhood, what does he bring? He brings, "Bah humbug".

The White Witch from Narnia: When she moves into the neighborhood, she brings what? "It's always winter but never Christmas."

Olaf from Frozen: When he moves into the neighborhood, he brings what? Warm hugs.

When Jesus moves into the neighborhood, He brings "grace and truth".

Let me ask you this: what might your catchphrase be if you had one? When you moved into the neighborhood wherever you are living now, what would your neighbor say you brought with you? Remember you may be the only Jesus they will ever see. Would it be grace and truth?

If I asked your wife or friend or children, what would they say your catchphrase might be? Would they say grace and truth? This time of the year can be pretty hard to show grace right? We're typically out of time, and out of money. We're typically frazzled and frustrated. We're mostly exhausted from parties and shopping, etc. It can be hard to show it.

What's great about Jesus is that He moves into the neighborhood and brings grace and truth, and grace always come first.

The Grace and Truth

We sang Joy to the World this morning and I had Ben reverse the words in the fourth verse. He rules the world with not truth then grace. That's wrong! He rules the world with grace then truth. And isn't that good news! Grace always comes first. And we see this played out over and over again throughout the Gospel of John. Jesus moves into people's neighborhoods with the glory of God full of grace and truth:

1. When He loves the woman at the well, jumping over every possible social and cultural boundary, that's glory full of grace and truth.
2. When He feeds the 5000, that's glory full of grace and truth. He'll then, in the Bread of Life discourse, share the truth behind the mighty deed. But grace is first.

3. And then, right in the middle of the Gospel, a woman caught in adultery is brought before Him. Her life is on the line. Her gift of physical life is about to be taken from her in His name. What will He do? What is this God like? God, show us your glory. Do you remember His first words to her? "I do not condemn you! I do not condemn you!" His first words are not, "Wow, you really messed up this time." His first words are not, "You really should read the law." Or, "I really thought you would have figured this out by now." His first words are, "I do not condemn you." And you know what? Those are his first words to us. He became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood not to condemn you and me, but to save you and me and give us life! And aren't those words life-giving? Those are words I need to hear everyday! Maybe some of you may have needed to hear that this morning. That's what this God is like. That's what we have seen, glory full of grace and truth. Now there is truth. He then says, "Go and sin no more." Go now and live in the life that I have given you. But it begins with grace, which says that this God is for us! It says that this God in a manger is on our side!

4. If we keep going through the Gospel, He raises Lazarus from the dead, that's glory full of grace and truth.

5. He washes His disciples feet, that's glory, that's the character of God, full of grace and truth.

And on and on and on. The era of grace and truth had begun with this baby in a manger, and life was springing up everywhere!

In fact, the whole of John's Gospel could be titled, *We Beheld His Glory Full of Grace and Truth and We Lived!*

The Ultimate Glory

But, there is an even greater glory for John. There is a moment when the glory — the grace and truth of God — shines the brightest. And, amazingly it's not in some great show of power. It's not in some powerful display of force. It's not in a self-gratifying expression of strength. The glory, the grace and truth, of this God is finally manifested in the logos giving His life away! For John, *the cross is the moment of glory*.

This is where the character of this God is ultimately revealed. We sang this morning.

And wonders of His love

And wonders of His love

The wonder of this story is that the creator GOD loved us so much, He sent His Son, the logos, knowing the cross is coming! That's the wonder of this story! The *logos* is given human life so that He can give His life away for us. Good Friday is already implied in the birth at Bethlehem. The incarnation cannot be separated from the crucifixion, the glory of God.

Luci Shaw captures this well in her poem, *Mary's Song*, which is in your worship guide. She imagines Mary holding baby Jesus and saying,

. . . Breath, mouth, ears, eyes
he is curtailed who overflowed all skies,
all years. Older than eternity, now he is new.
Now native to earth as I am,
nailed to my poor planet,
caught that I might be free,
blind in my womb to know my darkness ended,
brought to this birth for me to be new-born,

and for him to see me mended
I must see him torn.¹

For me to be mended, for me to have life, I must behold Him torn. And when we behold his glory, the glory of a crucified God, and believe in this one lifted up, we have life. His self-giving life unleashes life in us.

What do we do with this life that has been unleashed in us? Here's what we do: We don't hold it in. We share it with others. We look for contact points to share this life with others. We move into people's neighborhoods, living out the character of this God with the catchphrase "grace and truth." Our speaker at the men's retreat this year, Ross Hastings, called this the Sending Gospel.

God sent Jesus (giving Him life)

Jesus sent the Spirit (bringing us life)

The Spirit sends us (sharing His life with others)

The Application

We are here to carry on the incarnation. Jesus became real, became human life, so that we may have life, and that we may unleash that life into our neighborhoods. So, this Christmas, what if the question we asked in every interaction—whether that be at the restaurant with the waiter/waitress, with the cashier, in the parking lot, in the mall, or in the kitchen with family or roommates— what if we ask the question, "Does this person feel more alive by being with me, by being in my neighborhood?" Is this person more alive with me around or not? Will this person come away from our interactions more alive than before we met?

IV. Conclusion

I think that's the question the apostle John would want us to ask, because according to him, everything boils down to this one thing: LIFE!

Life for you

Life for me

Life for eternity

Hail the incarnate deity

Amen

¹ Shaw, Luci, *The Crime of Living Cautiously: Hearing God's Call to Adventure*, (IVP, 2005). Pg 63-64.