

**Sermon given at Service of Worship led by Jay Robinson,
at Knox Church Ōtepoti Dunedin New Zealand.
Sunday 5 January 2025 Christmas 2 “Made Known”**

Reading: John 1:(1-9)10-18

Let us pray:

Lord, before this world's days even began,
your Word was in the beginning,
and it was with you and it was you.

The story of that brings us to our knees.

Yet today you allow us to open your Word and know you better.

So we ask that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

Give us hearts open to your Spirit as we seek you.

Amen.

Today's Gospel text is the Prologue to John, which is John chapter 1, verses 1-18. "The Word became flesh," v.14, is the foundational text describing the incarnation of God in Christ. We remember and celebrate this incarnation every year at Christmas. Now the "God-with-us," Immanuel, is really *with* us. If the Nativity is *what* happened at Christmas, then the Incarnation is what it *means*.

"We have come to together to study Christ, God's Word." To introduce this sermon today, I am quoting extensively from German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's introduction to his lectures on Christology, given in 1933.

He said, "Christology is a peculiar discipline, because its subject is Christ himself, the Word, the Logos. Christology is the science of the Word of God. Christology is *logology*. Christology is *the* science, because it is concerned with the Logos. Were this Logos our Logos, then Christology would be a matter of the Logos reflecting upon itself. But this Logos is the Logos of God, whose transcendence makes Christology the crown of learning. ... The subject remains transcendent and yet the Logos with whom we are concerned here is a person. This man is transcendent."

Bonhoeffer continues, "The Christological question can be put scientifically only in the context of the church. It can only be put where the basic presupposition, Christ's claim to be the Logos of God, has been accepted. It can only be put where God is sought because men already know him. ... Here a man can only seek what has already been found."

He concludes, "Here, then, is the place at which Christology must begin. In the church, in which Christ has revealed himself as the Word of God, the *human* Logos puts the question: Who are you, Jesus Christ, Word of God, Logos of God? The answer is given, the church receives it new every day. The human Logos seeks to understand it, to ponder it, to explain it."

By way of explanation, let's zoom in now on the Prologue, on the Logos of God: in particular, looking at vv. 14, 18, and 12. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." This verse 14 is the capstone of John's Gospel: incarnation is the key to the following 21 chapters in John, which seek to explain its meaning and importance. Hence John had to write a Gospel different to

those of the three synoptic Gospels: his Gospel was meant to convince readers of the truth of v. 14.

So the Greek phrase, *o logos sarc egeneto*, “and the Word became flesh,” are the keywords here, being the decisive point of the whole Gospel.

The first keyword is *logos*, “the Word.” The Word is nothing less than God: “the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God” (v.1). All things were created through the Word, including life and light (vv. 2-4).

The second keyword is *egeneto*, from the verb “to become.” This denotes action occurring at a point in time. This moment was fixed in history, at the birth of Jesus.

The third keyword is *sarc*, “flesh.” A baby is born of the mother Mary. Whose child is this? It is a child born of the flesh. “Flesh” is a strong, blunt term used to refer to the physical nature of human beings.

What John’s Gospel is conveying here is very clear, both on the *deity* of the *Word*, and on the *genuineness* of his *humanity*. The disciples and other early Christians witnessed Jesus Christ in the flesh, and they experienced his grace and truth.

Moving on to v. 18, which says, “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” Jesus is literally “in the bosom” of the Father, in complete communion. Christ Jesus has revealed the unseen God, definitively. As Jesus said in 14:9, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

The closest anyone had ever gotten to seeing God previously was Moses. As recounted in Exodus chapters 33 and 34, Moses saw the glory of the Lord, from behind God as God passed in front of him and said his name. This is the same glory the early disciples saw in the Word-made-flesh. It’s only that Moses (and anyone else described in the Hebrew scriptures) could not look upon God’s face, or they would *die*. Jesus brought God’s face to the people as the Incarnation himself, that they might *live*.

Verse 12 says, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” Or, as the New International Version of the Bible puts it, “he gave the *right* to become children of God.” That is, *authority* was granted to receive this gift, rather than by taking it by an exercise of *power*.

“To believe in his name” is to accept the whole personality, the person of Jesus Christ, as true and worthy of faith. “Children of God” in the Greek here is *tekna theou*, which is distinct from Jesus who is *huios*, “the only-Begotten Son.” The expression “children of God” still indicates an exalted position, however, but it is not equal to being the one-and-only begotten Son, who is the Word, present at Creation.

Though the verb used in the following v.13, “are born,” does offer a bold image of a father bearing children, of being “born again” to a new parent. What power is strong enough to cause such a second birth? It is the power that created the world. It is the power that raises the dead. As the theologian Cornelius Plantinga has put it, “the regeneration of a hard human will *is* a resurrection of the dead, into a whole new creation where all things have been made new.”

Now, here’s to summarise our main scriptural points. Verses 14, 18, and 12 all point to the main goal of John’s Gospel, as described by New Testament scholar D. Moody Smith. He says,

“John ... conceives of the man Jesus (as the Word) working alongside God in creation ... (making) the essential theological point about the unity of creation, revelation, and redemption in Christ. The God who creates through his Word also reveals himself and saves through the same Word.”

God chose to make God’s own self *known* in a real, historical man. That man was like us, human, but without sin. God “dwelt,” had “pitched his tent,” with us. How magnificently extraordinary is that!

The purpose of today’s text, the Prologue, is to say who Jesus is, and, complementarily, to announce who you can become, though belief in him. The purpose of John’s Gospel, as per pastor and educator Lamar Williamson, “is to lead readers to believe the Word, to come to the light, and by believing become children of God.” John 1:12 and 20:31 bookend this Gospel with that central message.

So far in this sermon I have given you an exegesis, my considered explanation, for what today’s Gospel text means. It is very much worth noting that the verb concluding v.18 is *exēgēsato*, meaning “has made [Him] known.”

Jesus “exegeted” God.

Christ has made God known.

But how have I considered the incarnation, *theologically*-speaking?

The phenomenal occurrence of God breaking through to humanity, as a human situated in history, is nothing short of breathtakingly glorious. How God does that exactly is veiled in mystery, but nevertheless it does happen.

The incarnation is the starting point to studying Christology. As Bonhoeffer noted, Christology can be understood within the context of the church, where the presupposition that Christ is the Logos of God is accepted. Bonhoeffer can thus refer to this study as a “science,” in that context. For me, on a linear scale of “science to mystery,” in this field I probably land closer to the “mystery” end!

Nonetheless, I can say, that ever since my seminary days (30 years ago), I have had for myself a specific and clear understanding of the threefold-nature of God, the holy Trinity:

“God” is the *Creator*, the formative force who has ultimately generated and is constantly regenerating all the spiritual and physical content in the universe.

“The Holy Spirit” is the *Comforter*, the gift of Spirit given to all believers to guide and strengthen us on our journey, constantly sustaining us.

“Jesus the Word” is the *Christ*, the driving passion that leads me to express my love for God, for people, and for Creation.

All three of these facets of God, Creator, Comforter, and Christ, are in fact one God, I believe.

My *Christology* thus is this:

- Jesus Christ was born in the flesh, and he died in pain.
- In Christ’s passion, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us, to redeem us from our broken and wrongful selves.
- Then he was raised up in Power, in new life.

- It is this Power of Christ that restores us, creating a new community in a renewed world.
- The Christ we carry within us is a driving force for our lives.
- This passionate force motivates us to look up, and to take care of one another.
- Just as when these days, it is so easy rather to look down, and to just ignore one another.

For myself, it is the whispered reminder I often give myself, “Keep moving!” This I do especially at times when I feel I’m losing heart or I’m getting bogged-down. Especially at those times, I allow myself to accept the gift, the grace of God, that sustains my spirit and that motivates my loving-kindness. I therein find some rescue, and some restoration.

What is *your* Christology?

Or, to put it more simply, are you *hungry* to know God? If so, how do you satisfy that hunger? How is God *made known*, to you?

As a community gathered in faith, we can say that when we believe in the Word, we are given the right be children of God. When we accept that right, that grace, we become God’s own sons and daughters. We are given abundant grace, “grace upon grace.” How do we share that grace with others? Do we let the Power of Christ move within us, to rescue us and restore us? Do we unleash God’s love into this world, to thereby help rescue and restore others?

How do we, as God’s family, as Christ’s body, *make God known*?

Let us pray:

Dear God,

Thank you for shining your face upon us,
by coming to us as Christ Jesus.

Help us to know you always,
and to help make you known.

Amen.

Knox Presbyterian Church, Ōtepoti Dunedin

Our vision is to see the reign of God, made known in Jesus, have a transformative effect on people’s lives and on the world in which we live.



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