

John 1:1-18
In the Beginning
Third Sunday of Advent

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When did the story of Christmas begin? What is the starting place or origin of Christmas? If you ask a child, a child may say that Christmas starts in the North Pole with Santa Claus and elves and reindeer. The origin of Christmas is the workshop where gifts are made and reindeer trained so they can fly Santa's sleigh on Christmas Eve.

Or maybe if you ask a child when the story of Christmas begins, that child may say it all starts in a manger, in a smelly stable, in a little town called Bethlehem. Growing up in the church, this is certainly what I thought when I was a child. Christmas began over 2000 years ago with a little baby named Jesus, whose mother was Mary and earthly father was Joseph.

But the Bible seems to point us to a different starting place for the story of Christmas. It doesn't begin in a manger, in a smelly stable, in the little town of Bethlehem. It doesn't start with baby Jesus or shepherds or angels or magi. It doesn't even begin with the annunciation to Mary.

In the Bible, there are four individuals who each write a separate account of Jesus Christ. We call these the gospels – which means the account, the story of the good news of Jesus of Nazareth. When we open each of the gospel accounts of Jesus and read about the origin of Jesus Christ, when we read about the beginning of Jesus, when we read about the 'Christmas story' we should not be surprised, or concerned, that we read four different perspectives.

Matthew starts his gospel with a long genealogy. He tells us that Jesus' origin goes back 42 generations, going back to David then all the way to Abraham, the first patriarch of Israel. In writing about the birth of Jesus, Matthew also records for us the story of Mary and Joseph and

the visit of the magi. In the gospel of Mark, the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ happens at the Jordan river where Jesus is baptized. There is no story about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The story of Jesus Christ begins with his baptism. Then the historian and physician Luke tells us that the story of Jesus starts with the angel's annunciation to Mary. In his description of the birth of Jesus, Luke also writes about the shepherds and the angels.

Then we get to John's gospel. There are no stories about Mary and Joseph. No stories about the angels or shepherds or magi. The beginning of John's gospel, where we learn about the origin of Jesus, is poetry, a song.

And John goes back much farther than any of the other writers to tell us about the origin of Jesus. Before the baptism of Jesus, before conception in the womb in Mary, before David or Abraham. John says it is before Noah and Adam, before trees and animals, or land and water. He goes to the very beginning of the beginning. The opening words of his gospel says: "In the beginning". Before anything existed, before creation or even time itself, in the beginning Jesus already existed. When the beginning began, Jesus - the Word - was already there. The Word is not the beginning, but it is the beginning of the beginning.

"In the beginning was". The verb was is in the imperfect indicative tense. This means it is a continuous action in the past. In the beginning Jesus always was. In the beginning Jesus already was. In the beginning Jesus already always was. It means there was never a time when Jesus - the Word - was not existing.

“In the beginning was the Word.” In Greek, “Word” is translated as logos. Logos means reason, idea, or word. Our English words logic, logical, or logistics come from the Greek word logos. It means that the logical thing to do is in line with logos. It means that logic matches the logos.

Why does John use logos to refer to Jesus? After all, throughout his entire book, John refers to Jesus as the Son of God. Or John could use a different title that Jesus uses elsewhere to refer to himself: Son of Man, Messiah, or I Am. Instead, John chooses a word which he knows will grab the attention of his hearers. John lived in the first century in the Greco-Roman world so he speaks in language accessible to both Jews and Greeks. John basically says that for centuries, you’ve been talking, thinking and writing about the logos. Let me tell you who the Logos is. This word – Logos - was part of everyday speech for Jews and Greeks.

So what would the Jews and Greeks hear when John used the word logos? Well, Jews would be reminded of Genesis 1: the story of creation. God said let there be light. God said let there be sky. God said let there be water. God said. God said. God said. In Genesis 1, God creates by God speaking. So the logos is that through which the living God creates and communicates. Jews would also be reminded of the prophets. In the Old Testament, prophets often said “The word of the Lord came to me”. So the logos is the self-revelation of God. The logos is God revealing God. The logos is the self-expression of God. The logos is God expressing God.

You may be able to think of it in terms of a selfie. When I take a selfie, who is in the picture? Me. The selfie is a self-expression of myself. When you take a selfie, you are the selfie. The selfie is a revelation of yourself. So when God expresses Himself, it is Himself being expressed.

When God reveals Himself, it is none other than God being revealed. When God speaks, God is revealing God. When God creates, God is expressing God. In the beginning was the Logos. To the Jews, they would hear: In the beginning was the self-expression of God. In the beginning was the self-revelation of God.

What did the Greeks hear when John used the word “logos”? Well, 500 years before Jesus Christ was born, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said logos was the power that established sense into the world; logos was the energy that controlled the world; logos was that power which made the world orderly and kept the world going in an orderly fashion. All things happened because of logos. The Stoics believed that the logos was the ‘ultimate reason’ which controlled everything. So the Greeks believed logos is the rational energy of the universe, the source of the universe, the integrating principles that deal with the laws of nature and the source of creation.

John uses Logos right at the very beginning to tell us about Jesus because Logos is the word that will grab his hearers attention. A word that would perhaps get people’s attention in 2018 in Whitehorse might be good energy or higher power. In the beginning was the good energy. In the beginning was the higher power.

“In the beginning was the Logos. And the Logos became flesh and made his dwelling among us”. What John is saying to his hearers is that this force of power and energy is not impersonal – Logos is flesh and blood, incarnate, human. This Logos – this Word, is a personal entity who lived and taught among His own creation.

“In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God”. Here, John tells us what the Logos was doing. John tells us what Jesus was doing before the manger, the smelly stable in Bethlehem. The Logos was with God. Here we encounter one of those great mysteries of God. Logos – the Word - is God and is also distinct from God and is in fellowship with God.

So we are reminded that the first home of Jesus is not in a manger. The first home is not on earth. The first home is not with Mary and Joseph. The first home of Jesus Christ was with God the Father. And all throughout John’s gospel account, he makes it clear that though Jesus came to earth, he never left his first home. Throughout his entire life on earth, with the exception of three hours at his death, he never stopped being with His Father.

“The Logos was God”. This means that everything about God the Father is true about God the Son. In Jesus is all the wisdom, glory, power, love, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth of God the Father. In Jesus, God the Father is known because Jesus Himself is God yet also distinct from God.

“In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He was with God in the beginning”. Now the Greek word we translate as “with” can also be translated as to or towards. In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was toward God. In the beginning, the Logos was face to face toward the Father. The Logos was toward God in the beginning. Jesus was face to face with God the Father. Jesus was toward the Father in the beginning of the beginning.

This relationship, this posture of being towards God finds connection to Jesus' prayer in John 17, something we considered two weeks ago. In John 17:24, Jesus prays "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

What was Jesus – the Logos – doing before the creation of the world? What was Jesus' – the Logos' – relationship to God the Father before the creation of the world? Before the creation of the world, Jesus was with God, Jesus was towards God, Jesus was face to face with God.

So what does this mean for us? It seems then that glory – to manifest the very essence of God – happens when we are with God, when we are towards God, when we are face to face with God.

"In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He was with God in the beginning". The disciple John tells us that the Logos became flesh and blood so that we may know how to live logically. The disciple John tells us that to live logically means to live towards God in every relationship, in every event, in every situation, in every interaction.

The disciple John tells us that the logical way to live is to live our lives in sync with the Logos – the one who has given us life. Thus, the only logical way to live our lives is face to face with God Himself, is to live with God, is to live a life that is towards God.

And thanks be to God, He has shown us how to do that in Jesus Christ himself. Jesus Christ – who became flesh and dwelt among us – has shown us how to live a life towards God, how to live a life that is with God.

“In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He was towards God in the beginning.” May this be our posture this Advent season and always.

Let us pray.

Eternal God, Three-in-One,

We praise you that before the creation of the world, before the beginning of the beginning, you always existed. We thank you, Father, for sending your Son, into the world so that we may know you. We thank you that while Jesus was on earth, He remained wholly with you, towards you so that your glory would be revealed to us. Forgive us for how we have lived illogically, and turned ourselves away from you. We ask that the Holy Spirit would enable us to live logically, to live a life that is turned towards you. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.