

“Christmas at John’s House”

Mary Henderson Bowman

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As we step into John’s¹ house, we hear these words echoing . . .

“In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God.”²

We hear these wonderful words almost every Advent. They are familiar. They are beloved.

But perhaps these words have become too familiar so we no longer register the shocking, stunning surprise that they hold.

You see, it really is the most remarkable thing *ever* that this Word became flesh and lived among us.

But if we don’t have a sense of what John means by the Word then we may not find this such a remarkable thing after all.

So what is John trying to capture?

Our American dictionaries describe a “word” as “an element of speech or writing.”³

It doesn’t take us long to figure out that this is not the kind of word that John is describing.

Putting flesh on an element of speech or writing is not going to get us there.

We have to go back to the time that John was writing, back to a world of Jewish influence and Greek influence. Let’s begin with the Jewish understanding of word.

You see, “to an Old Testament Jew, a word was far more than a mere sound — a word was something that had a separate existence and [a word was something] which actually did things.

As Professor John Patterson has put it: “The spoken word to the Hebrew was fearfully alive . . . it was a unit of energy charged with power.”⁴ and with a mission.

It is no coincidence that John begins his Gospel with the same words as the Book of Genesis . . . “in the beginning.” John wants us to remember the way God’s word brought life and light in the beginning..

The Book of Genesis describes God’s first creative action this way: “Then God said, “Let there be light,” . . . and there was light.”⁵

¹ The author of the Gospel of John

² John 1:1

³ Definition from [Oxford Languages](#) online

⁴ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John (Volume 1)*, 27.

⁵ Genesis 1:3

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Similarly, if you were here for the Advent Service this past week, you heard these words from the Book of Isaiah in which God reminds God’s people that: “my word . . . shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”⁶

To a Jewish person in John’s time, a word was not a mere unit of communication — it was energy . . . active and purposeful.

And what about the non-Jews — or the Greeks — of John’s time?

The New Testament is written in Ancient Greek and John uses the word “logos” for the Word that came bringing light and life.

It was the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who first infused divine meaning with the word “logos.” Heraclitus is perhaps best known as the philosopher who identified change as the constant in human life. It was Heraclitus who explained the reality of change in his famous comment that “we can never step into the same river twice.”

When people asked Heraclitus how to deal with the chaos of the constant change of life, Heraclitus explained that the flux and change of life was not haphazard, but that it was controlled and ordered by the reason of God, something also called the “logos” of God.

You see, Heraclitus understood “logos” as the ordered wisdom of God, as that which carries out the plan and purposes of God.⁷

John knows his Greek audience and when he uses the word “logos”, John is shockingly asserting that this wisdom of God became a person.

Another way to say it . . . the Cosmos Christ became a wee human babe.

I hope that this never becomes less than mind-blowing to all of us.

We sometimes forget that contained within this small fragile, vulnerable child is the God who created all things and who holds all things together.

Our first Scripture reading reminds us that when we look at Jesus we are looking at the Almighty God:

⁶ Isaiah 55:11

⁷ William Barclay

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We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created . . . everything got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together

When we look at Jesus, we also see God.

There are some who argue that Jesus came in order to appease an angry, wrathful God.

John’s Gospel tells us something different.

John’s Gospel tells us that Jesus came in love to a world in darkness in order to bring light and life to the children of God.

The fact that Jesus has always been God means that God has always been like Jesus.

Let’s hear that again . . . Jesus has always been God and so when we see Jesus as vulnerable love that has come all the way down to meet us, we see the God of creation who created us, has always loved us, and who made a bold, shocking move to express that loving solidarity.

Jesus is an expression of God’s ongoing, unchanging love that began “in the beginning.”

Finally, we can’t miss that God’s truest Word has come on a mission and that Word will not return with His mission unfulfilled.

Part of that fulfillment is that we would glimpse just how far God will come for all of us and for each of us to see God’s tender and vulnerable love by coming as a human baby.

God has come all the way down.

Just for us.

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If we wonder how John might have decorated his house . . . I think he would have used lights and lights, and more lights to decorate.

Because my friends — The Word became flesh and lived among us — full of grace and truth.. “What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can not overtake it”.⁸

Amen!

⁸ John 1:3a-5