

THE BIGNESS

John 1:1-18

Christmas Day

December 25, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 1, verses 1 through 18. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 1, beginning at verse #, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is a miracle. We talked about this some last night. The word "incarnation" is a fancy theological word that means "en-flesh-ment." The eternal and infinite Son of God took on finite and corruptible human flesh. And he did it in a miraculous way. Without the help of a man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. It was a true miracle.

Last night we talked about the smallness of the miracle. Part of the smallness of it is the size. There was a time, immediately after Jesus was conceived, when his human body consisted of only one cell. And in that one cell, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col. 1:19; 2:9). That's part of the smallness. The other part of the smallness is the humility of the thing. No one in Bethlehem, and here we're especially thinking of Joseph's relatives, no one in Bethlehem gave Mary a place to give birth to her child, so she "wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in

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a manger” (Luke 2:7). And remember that a manger is a feeding trough for animals. This is the other part of the smallness. “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). The humility of the manger set the pattern for the rest of his earthly life. “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Is. 53:3). The despising of him carried on from his birth, at which he was laid in a manger, all the way to his death, when he was nailed to a cross to suffer and die for the sins of the world. That’s the smallness of the thing.

And to fully appreciate the miracle of his incarnation, we need to recognize both the smallness and the bigness of this person. John teaches us the bigness of Jesus.

This passage is John’s Christmas story. Three of the four gospels, Matthew, Luke, and John record the miracle of Christmas. And this year, the calendar lines up such that we get to hear all three of them during our worship together. Last Sunday we heard Matthew’s account (1:18-25), which tells the story primarily from Joseph’s perspective. Last night, on Christmas Eve, we heard Luke’s account (2:1-20), which tells the story primarily from Mary’s perspective. And this morning we heard John’s account. John’s account is quite different. Instead of recording the historical details, he tells it more from a theological perspective. After hearing Joseph’s perspective and Mary’s perspective, this is more like hearing God’s perspective on the thing. So John highlights the bigness of the thing.

He does this by going all the way back to the beginning. He opens his Gospel with the very familiar words, “In the beginning” (1:1). Do these words remind you of any other books that start the same way? How about, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1)? When John says, “In the beginning,” he is drawing our attention back to creation, to Genesis.

Now imagine we are reading the Gospel of John for the very first time. When we hear the words, “In the beginning,” we might expect John to tell us a genesis story, an origin story. And if we know beforehand that John is writing about Jesus, we might expect him to tell us about the beginning of the Son of God. We might expect him to say something like, “In the beginning God created his Son.” But John doesn’t do that. Matthew and Luke, in their Christmas stories, go into great detail about how the Son of God became man. Now we expect John to tell us the story of how he became God, but he doesn’t. He can’t. Instead, he writes, “In the beginning was the Word.” And “Word,” with a capital “W,” refers to Jesus. We see that in verse 14. John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). John can’t tell us how Jesus became God, or how the Son of God was created, because he did not become God, and he was not created. When John talks about how the Son of God became man, he can tell us. He says, “The Word became flesh” (1:14). But he doesn’t say anything about the Word becoming God. He simply says, “And the Word was God.”

So notice the difference between the words “became” and “was.” And I know; this is a bit technical, but this is important. Notice the difference between the words “became” and “was.” “Became” has a definite historical starting point. Sometime around 5 or 2 BC, “The Word became flesh.” But the word “was” is timeless. There is no starting point. The eternal Word did not become God. The Word, with a capital “W,” was God. He just was. The Word was not created. The Son of God has always been. He is the eternal Word.

Now if we expected John to tell us how Jesus was created, we are in for another surprise. Not only was he not created, he is, himself, the Creator! “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (1:2-3). Jesus cannot be a created being, because nothing has ever been created without him. He is the Word by which the Father created all things.

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In the creed we confess that we “believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” But the Father was not working alone in creation. “In the beginning, God,” that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as the Trinity, “God created the heavens and the earth.” God the Father is the primary person responsible for creation, but he was not alone; he did the creating through the Son. The Son is the eternal Word through whom heaven and earth were created.

John calls him “the Word.” And he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John also calls Jesus “the true light” (1:9). This distinguishes Jesus from the created light, that of the sun, moon, and stars. Jesus is the *true* light. This is something greater than the physical light that we observe. This is a spiritual light. And spiritual does not mean “less.” It means “more.” He is a more powerful light, because he is the source of all created light. But this is a light that children of darkness often cannot see. Verse five says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Spiritual darkness is worse than physical darkness. Physical darkness is just the absence of light. But spiritual darkness is more than just the absence of God. It is hostility against God. Spiritual darkness is pure evil. Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “**The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed**” (3:19-20). The darkness in us hides from God. The darkness of sin hates God, fears God, and does not understand God. The darkness of sin hates and fears the light when God says, “Your works are evil.”

The darkness of sin also does not understand the light when God says, “Your sins are forgiven.” In our more honest moments we recognize that we are children of darkness. And if we are sinful and dark, then it just doesn’t make any sense that the light would want to have anything to do with us. We don’t understand the concept of forgiveness. And since we do not understand it, we remain in fear, because light destroys darkness, and we don’t want to be destroyed. We cannot grasp with our natural minds the idea that the light will drive away darkness without destroying the children of darkness.

So the darkness has not understood the light, but, glory to God, the darkness also cannot *overcome* the light. This is the thing about the battle between darkness and light: darkness never wins. Wherever darkness and light meet, light always wins. There are places where darkness reigns as a powerful and destructive force, but when a light comes into that dark place, the darkness vanishes. Darkness has no defense against light. Wherever darkness and light meet, darkness gives way and ceases to exist as if it were never really there.

Children of darkness still love the darkness, because it conceals our wickedness. So when the light comes, we hate it, we run from it, and we oppose it. This is what happened when the light came into the world. “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (1:9-11). This is the eternal Word by whom heaven and earth were created. And this is the true light who became flesh to be rejected by his own.

The eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us (1:14), but we rejected him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. How tragic it sounds. The light came to drive away the darkness, but the children of darkness did not recognize the light. They did not comprehend the light, so they tried to overcome him. And they thought they had, but their violence against the light turned out to be his victory over darkness.

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And this is his bigness. By becoming small, both in size and in the eyes of the world, he triumphed over darkness. And he is now exalted to the right hand of the Father.

The miracle of Jesus' incarnation is that he is both small and big at the same time. Paul writes about this in Colossians. "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (2:9). His bigness is so big and so powerful that it can conceal itself in the form of something small. And we heard it this morning in the epistle lesson from Hebrews: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3). All the bigness of God was and still is in his body. The bigness of God took up residence in the smallness of humanity in order to deliver us from darkness, forgive our sins, and raise us from death.

This is also the miracle of the real presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is not exactly like Christmas. There are differences, but there is also a similarity. In his incarnation, the eternal and infinite Son of God took for himself, for the rest of eternity, human flesh. Now, in the Lord's Supper, the eternal and infinite and human Son of God takes the form of bread and wine. And he comes again to us. His bigness comes to us in smallness so that we can receive him. The very body that was once broken for us takes the form of bread. And the very blood that was poured out for us takes the form of the cup. Everything that he won for us when he went to the cross, he delivers to us in his body and blood. As the world once received the Son of God. And as Mary once received the Son of God. So now we also receive the Son of God. He comes to deliver us from darkness, to forgive our sins, and to raise us from the dead. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.