

Beginning today, and over the next 4 weeks, my house will be a den of activity. This afternoon our Christmas Tree will be brought out and decorated, so too will the house. Naomi has already strung outside lights, Christmas baking will ensue, presents will be purchased and wrapped. Why? It’s a part of our Christmas tradition.

I want to encourage you to take a moment to turn someone next to you and share a Christmas that you enjoy—past or present.

As a Church community, we enter into the Advent Season with today marking the first of the 4 Sundays leading up to Christmas Day. If one were to ask why we celebrate this Advent Season, the simple answer is “tradition;” throughout her 2000 year history, the Church has set apart these four weeks to direct attention to that moment in time when God the Son became human and dwelled in our midst.

A theologian by the name of Jaroslav Pelikan once quipped, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.”¹ Tradition allows us to hold on to what is real and important, to what remains very much alive. But when traditionalism takes root, when we simply go through the motions, doing what we’ve always done because—well—we’ve always done it...rot creeps in, and a slow death is assured.

Christmas carols, Advent readings, a wreath, the lighting of candles; is this tradition or traditionalism? What happens insider mind and heart will be the determining factor. The word “advent” simply means *coming*—the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I trust that in

the weeks ahead, in mind, heart, and body, you will experience a growing anticipation. Christ has come, many years ago; He will come again, though we know not when; but for now we wait, with open hearts to receive and celebrate the Word who became flesh.

Over the next four weeks we will take a closer look at the prologue to John's Gospel. Sunday by Sunday, we are going to look at John 1 in order to explore and celebrate the mystery of God the Son becoming human. If you have your Bibles with you this morning I want to invite you to turn with me to John 1:1-5.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

The Gospel of John is an eyewitness account of the life, words, and work of Jesus. Likely, in the beginning, John was a neutral observer; John didn’t know Jesus very well when he first began to follow. But over time, John saw what Jesus did, heard what Jesus said, and he came to a number of conclusions. John’s prologue, vs. 1-18, provides a summary of his conclusions, and these conclusions will be repeated and expanded throughout the rest of his book.

Vs. 1: Matthew and Luke’s Gospel begin with the account of Jesus’ birth, and Mark’s Gospel begins with Jesus’ baptism and

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, 65.

subsequent preaching, but John's Gospel begins with the eternal purpose of God.

The first recorded words in the Bible are found in Genesis 1:1, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" John picks up on these words but directs our attention to a different beginning, to the time before time. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*"

Before there was something, anything, there was Someone. Before the Universe, before Sun, Moon, and stars, before oceans, land, plants, or animals, God existed. God doesn't have an origin. He didn't come from somewhere else. No one summoned Him, or created Him—He has always been, and will always be.

We might have expected John to say, "*In the beginning was God,*" but instead he introduces the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, referring to Him as "**the Word.**" And what does John tell us about this "**Word**"?

a) **First, the Word is pre-existent.** In other words, God the Son, the Word, has always been: there was never a time when He was not.²

b) **Second, John tell us that this Word was with God.** Sometimes there is great treasure to be found in a simple preposition. The Word was with God. If I were to ask you where you were last night, you might respond saying, "I was with my friends," or "with my family,"

or with my spouse," but none of you would say, "I was with myself"—you would say, "I was by myself." The word "with" implies the presence of another.

At times people ask why the early Church created the language "Trinity" to explain God; the short answer is that this language is implicit in Scripture. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **with** God*". There has always been multiplicity—not of gods, but—in God. The preposition "with" communicates distinction between Persons but it also communicates profound unity. Let me explain.

If we wanted to be more literal in translating John's words from the original Greek into English, instead of saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," we could say, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was towards God,*" or, "*and the Word was face to face with God.*"

It's not that the Word was with God, like you and I might be with 30 strangers in a crowded coffee shop. The Word was towards God, the Father and the Son were face to face. It's a description of the closest possible relationship: no competition, no inequality, nothing to separate them.³

c) **Third, vs. 1 concludes with five simple words: *and the Word was God.***

In these opening lines of his Gospel, John has not yet spoken the

² Colossians 1:15-20, and Hebrews 1:1-4 also speaks about His identity (pre-existence) and His work.

³ Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According To John (Revised)*, 67.

name of Jesus, but we know that this is who John is describing; his purpose in writing this Gospel is to persuade us to believe—as John does—that in Jesus, God has come, salvation has come to the world.

The doctrine of the incarnation is that God the Son—Co-Eternal, Co-Equal, with the Father and the Spirit—became human without ceasing to be God. There was a moment in time, when God the Son stepped into human history as a human being. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, within Mary's womb, gestated for 40 weeks (give or take), and was born in Bethlehem.

Jesus had five fingers and five toes, and given where He was born, He likely had a mop of dark brown or black hair, and beautiful brown skin. What I'm getting at is that while Jesus was as human as we are, but mysteriously, at the same time, He was fully God—eternal, without beginning or end, all-knowing, all-powerful, and as we shall soon see, Creator of all that is.

At the centre of Christian orthodoxy is the confession that in Jesus Christ we do not see God pretending to be a man, or God in a man, but God as a man. In Jesus Christ we have **One Person with Two Natures—God and human**.

If you have been a Christian for a long time, what I've just said is not new to you—you believe it implicitly. But let's pause for a moment to acknowledge just how odd this truth is. How could one person be both fully God and fully human? It doesn't make sense.

We live in the Information Age and we take it for granted that we

can find answers to every question. With Google—or Siri—at our beck and call we expect the mysteries of the universe to be made plain. *Hey Siri, how could Jesus be fully God and fully human?*

There are real limits to our knowledge. When it comes to the Incarnation, the Bible doesn't explain the how, it describes the Who. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.*

Now before we move on, I want to take a few moments to explain a term that John has been using. Why does John use the term "Word" for God the Son? The Greek word that John employs is the word "Logos;" it was a philosophical word that signified the outward form by which an inward thought is expressed. One author defines Logos in the following way, "Logos has the double meaning of thought and speech".⁴

Think of it in the following way. At any given moment there are thoughts firing in our brains that are unknown to the people around us. Until we speak, our thoughts—though real—remain hidden; our speech reveals our thoughts.

I think it's fair to say that there is an ontological gap between us and God. God's being is different than our being—He is higher, greater, beyond us. So how can we know a God who is above us, beyond us, and unlike us? It stands to reason that God must make Himself known. In Jesus we have the divine Logos: the thought of God has become speech; what was hidden has now been revealed.

⁴ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/logos.html>

Our words are a means by which we reveal ourselves, what we think, and what we are like.⁵ Jesus is God's Divine Word, the clearest possible revelation of who God is. Scottish theologian, Thomas Torrance, writes, "In Jesus Christ, the Son of God took our human nature upon himself and made it his own so completely that he came among us *as man*; and by what he was *as man*, he revealed to us what he was and is *as God*."⁶

"*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" This marks the beginning of Trinitarian thought in John's Gospel; the character, words, and actions of Jesus are the character, words, and actions of God.

Vs. 2 is a repetition verse 1. John wants to make sure that we understand what has already been said: the Word, who is God, was with God in the beginning.

In **vs. 3** John moves from describing the relationship between the Word and God—God the Son and God the Father—to describing the Word's relationship to creation. "**3** *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*"

The first thing to notice is that John's language is careful and specific. There is no mention of the *Word*—God the Son—being created first, and then taking part in the act of creating others. In the beginning, in the time before time, God the Son existed alongside the Father, and the Spirit.

⁵ Morris, 66.

⁶ T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 55.

John uses both positive and negative language to affirm that God the Son, the Word, was God's agent in creation. Speaking positively, John says, "through him **all** things were made." Speaking negatively, John says, "without him **nothing** was made that has been made."

The rest of the New Testament conveys this same truth. In Colossians 1:16 we read, "*For in him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him.*" And Hebrews 1:2 refers to God the Son as the One through whom God made the universe.

You may have noticed that John does not say that all things were made by the Son but by through the Son. In so doing, John differentiates between the work of the Father and the work of the Son; both were involved in the work of creation, as was the Holy Spirit. The being and work of God is inherently relational. Each member of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—participates in the essential being and work of the other.

Vs. 4: "*In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*"

Here in John's prologue we are given a foretaste of what will define Jesus' ministry—life and light; let's turn our attention for a moment to the word "life".

John's Prologue opens with three words—*in the beginning*; his words

recall the first words in the Bible. If Genesis 1 speaks of God creating the world, John 1 tells us that before there was anything, there was God, and, as a result of God has becoming human—in the person of Jesus—new creation will take place.

Last week, Pastor Brendan walked us through John 5; vs. 26 says, “*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.*” Genesis paints a portrait of God breathing life into the first human beings; in John’s Gospel, Jesus brings life to spiritually dead people.

In John’s Gospel, “life” is one of the key themes; John uses this word 36 times. Leon Morris writes, “It is only because there is life in the *Logos* that there is life in anything on earth at all. Life does not exist in its own right.”⁷ From a Christian perspective, all life finds its source in the life of God.

Jesus came that people might have **abundant life** (John 10:10).

Jesus died so that people might have everlasting **life** (John 3:16).

Only those who come to Jesus find **life** (John 5:40).

Jesus claimed to have the power to lay down his **life** and to take it up again (John 10:18), and this is exactly what He did in His death and resurrection.

In fact, in John 11:25, Jesus said of himself, “*I am the resurrection and the **life**. Anyone who believes in me will **live**, even though he or she dies.*”

Jesus is the life-bringer; He is also the light-bearer.⁸

Vs. 4: “*In Him was life, and that life was the **light** of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*”

By describing Jesus as light, he awakens a world of meaning. What does it mean to say that Jesus is *the light of all mankind*? The light that *shines in the darkness*? The *inextinguishable light*?

Metaphors, by definition, are imprecise, but it’s this feature that gives metaphors such rhetorical power. Metaphors awaken our imagination. What does light do? It shines, brightens, illuminates, warms, and attracts attention. Jesus is like this, isn’t He? Light can have a gravitational effect; if you’ve ever been seated around a campfire, likely you’ve ended up mesmerized.

But light can also push back darkness, it can reveal and expose. A room that looks clean when the lights are off, rarely passes the test when the lights are turned on. Jesus is like this, isn’t He? In the light of His wholeness, His holiness, our need, our sin is exposed.

⁷ Morris, 73.

⁸ Morris, 74.

The language of light and darkness can be found throughout John's Gospel; Pastor Dave is going to talk more about this next week. But in light of our text this morning, it's important to note that John does not consider light and darkness to be equal and opposite forces.

Your Bible might contain translation note attached to verse 5; the final clause can be translated in two different ways—both are plausible and likely intended. "*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not **overcome** it;* or, "*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not **understood** it.*" This second reading anticipates what John will say later in verses 10 and 11; Jesus has come to bring revelation about God but what He says and does will be misunderstood and rejected.

Even in a bright room shadows exist. There will be those who ignore, refuse, and oppose the light and life that Jesus brings. But the darkness, though present, cannot bully, overwhelm, or quench His light; darkness cannot drown out His truth, or barricade His way. For this reason, John trumpets the triumph of light⁹: "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*"

These words find ultimate fulfillment at the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, it appeared as though the light of the world had been extinguished, but three days later Jesus rose from the grave.

Conclusion: In the remaining moments, let's move to application.

Through Jesus, everyone and everything has been given life. You are

not an accident or mistake; God willed you to be born, and His desire is that you would receive His love and join His family.

In Jesus we find life: the life **of** God, God's life **for** us, God's life **with** us, and for all who receive Him, God's life **in** us. Jesus is the life-bringer. If you are in need of a second chance at life, look no further than Jesus; He is, He has, what you need.

And Jesus is the light. If you've never invited Jesus to shine His searching light into your life, make today the day. His light exposes—yes—but never to embarrass or shame.

If you placed your life in Jesus hands a long time ago, let me ask you, *is there anything you are holding back from Him?* Let His light illuminate whatever darkness remains, don't hide in the shadows. His light purifies, heals, and sets us free. God is for us, not against us.

Pray: As I pray for you this morning, can I ask you to do something? If you are willing, I want to invite you to hold out your hands; this is a physical posture that indicates a desire to receive from Jesus. I'm going to invite Jesus to usher you into a new beginning, new creation, new life, new light.

Worship

Invitation To Prayer Ministry/Benediction

⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According To John*, 119.