

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, November 29, 2020**

THE WORD WAS GOD

John 1:1-14

Throughout history – whether biblical history, world history, American history, or your personal history – there are pivotal moments that have long-lasting impact. At Pastor Chris’ installation service last Sunday afternoon, I spoke about “the year King Uzziah died” (Isaiah 6:1) and the pivotal event that took place that year in the life of Isaiah. It was in the year of King Uzziah’s death, after Uzziah’s long and prosperous reign as King of Judah, that Isaiah had a vision of God in the magnificence of His majesty and holiness and sovereignty and mercy. It was a life-changer for Isaiah. That vision, as I said last Sunday, resulted in both Isaiah’s conversion and his commission as a prophet, a messenger called and sent by God to speak for God

We could make a long list of pivotal events in biblical history, from the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, to the flood in Noah’s day; from God’s call to Abraham, to the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, to the conquest of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua; from the establishment of God’s covenant with David and his descendants, to the coming of Jesus a thousand years later; from the birth of the church on Pentecost, to the conversion of Paul and the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman empire; and more. Some of you may want to take some time at your dinner table to make a list and talk about some of the pivotal events in the Bible, in order to trace the hand of God in the history of redemption.

You could do the same in the history of the Christian faith or the history of America. There was that pivotal event that took place in 1492, when Columbus sailed the ocean blue and discovered a “new world.” There was a theological “shot heard ‘round the world” in 1517, when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses and lit the fire of the Protestant Reformation. Exactly 400 years ago this year – in 1620 – the Pilgrims, in a ship called the Mayflower, arrived in the New World at Plymouth, Massachusetts, to found a colony where they could freely live and worship according to their religious beliefs.

History is a fascinating study – at least to me. It always has been. Whether you find it fascinating or not, there is at least one historical event whose importance you must never minimize. The most pivotal event in the history of the whole creation was the coming to this world of Jesus Christ in flesh and blood. Nothing rivals it in terms of its earth-shaking significance. *Nothing. No one* rivals Him. The incarnation of Jesus Christ – from His conception and birth, to His life and ministry, His suffering, death, and resurrection – what you might call the “Jesus Event” constitutes the central turning point in all of history.

In the opening verses of his gospel, John describes the pivotal event of the coming to this world of the eternal Son of God to be our Savior by speaking of “the Word” becoming flesh. For the next few Sundays, during the season of Advent, I want to explore with you what John

says in the prologue to his gospel – in John 1:1-18 – about the identity and coming of Jesus, the incarnate Word, and the significance it holds – the significance *He* holds – for us.

John begins his gospel this way: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He [the Word] was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1-2). These are the first verses I ever translated in my Greek class in college:

En arche en ho logos, kai ho logos en pros ton Theon, kai Theos en ho logos. Houtos en en arche pros ton Theon.

“In the beginning was the Word ...” If John’s beginning reminds you of another passage in the Bible, there is a good reason. Most likely it is an intentional parallel to the opening words of the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, which begins: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

Genesis 1:1 introduces the story of creation. John 1:1 introduces the story of salvation, the story of God’s provision of salvation in the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ.

Eugene Peterson explains the connection in this way: “In Genesis ... God is presented as speaking the creation into existence. God speaks the word and it happens: heaven and earth, ocean and stream, birds and fish, animals and humans. Everything, seen and unseen, called into being by God’s spoken word.

“In deliberate parallel to the opening words of Genesis, John presents God as speaking salvation into existence. This time God’s word takes on human form and enters history in the person of Jesus. Jesus speaks the word and it happens: forgiveness and judgment, healing and illumination, mercy and grace, joy and love, freedom and resurrection. Everything broken and fallen, sinful and diseased, called into salvation by God’s spoken word.

“... Jesus, in this account, not only speaks the word of God; He *is* the Word of God” (Peterson, Introduction to the Gospel of John, *The Message*).

The Word. In Greek, it is *logos*, a term used by philosophers and theologians in a variety of ways. One biblical scholar defines *logos* as “an expression of personality in communication.” So, for John, the *logos* – the Word – is God’s expression or communication of Himself. It is not an abstract philosophical concept or an impersonal force. The Word is a *person*. The Word is *Jesus*. He is the perfect and complete expression of God.

Verses 1-5 tell us four foundational truths about Jesus.

1. THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

It tells us, first of all, of the eternal pre-existence of Christ. In the beginning, when the whole universe was brought into existence, when God created the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), the Word was already there. He was “with God” from eternity past – from before the beginning of time (which is a concept too big for our minds to comprehend).

To put it another way, what John is saying here about the Lord Jesus Christ is that there was never a time when He was not. From before the foundation of the world, from before the beginning of time, from everlasting to everlasting, the Son of God *is*.

Each one of us, like everything else in creation, had a beginning. There was a specific point in time at which each of us came into existence. For me, that particular point in time was roughly 9 months before I was born in October 1955. There was a time when you and I were not.

The house in which I grew up at Smith Corners, PA was built sometime around the year 1920. It is now about 100 years old. It was there before I was born. It has been there my entire life. But there was a time when it was not.

Hard as it may be to believe, especially for those of you under 30, there was a time when such “essentials” of life as the internet, iPhones, texting, and all our social media platforms didn’t exist. There was a time when they were not.

Everything in creation had a beginning. There was a time when it was not. But not so with Jesus. There was never a time when the Word was not. There was never a time when Jesus was not. From everlasting to everlasting, He is.

2. THE DEITY OF CHRIST

The second thing this passage teaches is the full deity of Christ. In the same way that there was never a time when He was not, there was never a time when He was not God. There was never a time when Jesus was not fully God.

It is not just that He was there in the beginning. It is not just that Jesus was “with God.” John says that “the Word was God.” Literally, what John says is: “And God was the Word” (John 1:1c). Which means, as James Montgomery Boice has written: “And fully divine in all respects was Jesus.” In *all* respects.

From all eternity, Jesus was and is Himself fully God. There was never a time when He was not God.

Throughout its history, the church has had to guard against the twin heresies of Arianism and Docetism. Arianism takes its name from a 4th-century church leader named Arius who denied that Jesus was fully God. Docetism (from the Greek verb *dokeo*, which means “to seem”) involves the belief that Jesus was not really human. He looked like a man. He walked like a man. He talked like a man. He ate and drank like a real man. But He wasn’t really a man. That was the view of the Docetists.

The Council of Nicea answered these heresies in 325 AD with the Nicene Creed, which declared unambiguously both the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus.

From all eternity, the Word was and is God. From all eternity, God the Son has existed in perfect unity and perfect fellowship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

3. THE CREATIVE POWER OF THE WORD

The third thing this passage teaches about Jesus is His role in the work of creation. “through Him,” says John, “all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made” (1:3).

You see the creative power of God’s word in Genesis 1, where again and again it says: “And God said: ‘Let there be ...’ And it was so.”

Psalm 33 speaks of the power of God’s word. Listen to verses 6-9:

“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made,
 their starry host by the breath of His mouth.
 He gathers the waters of the sea into jars,
 He puts the deep into storehouses.
 Let all the earth fear the LORD;
 let all the people of the world revere Him.
 For He spoke, and it came to be;
 He commanded, and it stood firm.”

In the Gospel, John asserts the creative power of Jesus the Word and His involvement in the work of creation. “Though Him,” John says in verse 3, “all things were made.”

And John is not alone. Here is Paul in Colossians 1:16-17: “For by Him (Jesus) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

And here is what it says in the opening verses of the Letter to the Hebrews: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Put these verses from John, Colossians, and Hebrews together and the picture that develops shows Jesus to be the perfect and complete expression of God. He is before all things. All things – *all things* – were created by Him and for Him. He holds all things together. He sustains all things. He keeps it all together and keeps it all going by the power of His word.

The creative power of God is expressed through the Word – the *Logos*. And the Word is Jesus.

4. THE GIVER OF LIFE AND LIGHT

The fourth thing John tells us about Jesus in these verses is that Jesus is the source and giver of life and light. Verse 4: “In Him was life, and that life was the light of humankind.” The Gospel of John begins and ends with a message of life. At the beginning: “In Him [Jesus] was life.” At the end, or near the end, in John 20:31, John says his purpose in writing this gospel is “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing (in Him) you may have life in His name.”

The life He gives, the life found in Him, is more than mere existence. It is more than having a beating heart or a functioning brain. It is life in a loving relationship with God. It is life in fellowship with God. It is eternal life with God, the life that is received through faith in Him. To impart this life is the reason Jesus came. It is the reason the eternal Son of God entered human history and took on our flesh and blood: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The life Jesus lived – and the life He gives to those who believe in Him – is a light to live by. It is a light that shines in the darkness of a world gone bad, where evil abounds, where lies and deception and confusion and fear and greed so often seem to reign.

The light of His life shines in and through the darkness, revealing things as they truly are, and showing the way to true and eternal life.

We need that light. We need the light of Jesus in our lives. In our world. Without it, we are never more than an inch from disaster.

Some of you have probably read Jon Krakauer’s book *Into Thin Air*, which tells of his harrowing experience climbing Mount Everest. Reeling from the effects of oxygen depletion, he reached the top of Everest in the early afternoon of May 10, 1996. He paused only a few minutes before heading back down, exhausted, freezing, oxygen deprived. As he descended, some clouds drifted up and enveloped him. A thunder, lightning, and snow storm threatened to disorient him, but he was close enough to base camp 4 to reach the shelter before the full force of the storm hit.

Four other climbers reached the summit shortly after Krakauer, but didn’t have time to make it to the camp before dark. In the storm they lost their way. Exhausted and disoriented, they decided to lie down to wait out the night. When they awoke in the morning, they discovered that they had lain down just a single step from the 4,000-foot precipice of the South Wall of Everest. They had spent the night on the edge of a cliff in the middle of a snowstorm, without knowing how close to disaster they were.

Does that describe the condition of our world today? The condition of millions and millions of people in our own country and around the world? Because of the blinding power of sin, because of the lies they believe, or because of their unwillingness to believe the truth of the gospel, they just don’t know how close to disaster they are.

How about you? Are you living on the edge of disaster? Do you need to be rescued by Jesus?

Jesus, the Word of God who took on our flesh and blood and came to live among us, is the light that shows us the way things really are, and leads us, as we trust in Him and follow Him, to safety. To life.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God.” The Word *is* God. In the eternal plan of God, the Word became incarnate. It is the central, pivotal event in all of history. The eternal Son of God made the journey from heaven to earth, from eternity to time, from glory to humility, fully God and fully man, to pay for our sins, to give us life, to bring us into the light. Which only He could do.

Thank God He did. And walk in the light He gives.

Lord, let it be so in us, now and always. Amen.