

**Sunday, December 25, 2022**

**Christmas Day**

John 1.1-14

*The Rev. Michael K. Fincher*

*Service Live Streamed at:*

<https://www.facebook.com/stgregorystlongbeach/videos/437359208470151>

*(Sermon begins at about 19:35)*

### **“And the Word Became Flesh”**

Perhaps it’s an occupational hazard—whether of my current vocation as priest, or of my previous career as an engineer, it’s hard to say—but I can’t help getting wrapped up in analyzing the similarities and differences between the two versions of the Christmas story. The birth narrative from Luke’s Gospel that is customarily read on Christmas Eve, and the Prologue to John’s Gospel that is customarily read on Christmas Day. Two very different versions of the same event.

Setting aside for a moment that we know these two stories are differing versions of the same event, someone unfamiliar with the story of our faith would most likely see these as two completely different and unrelated stories. Not just because of the very different tones. While both speak of birth, in some sense—one being about the birth of a messianic child and the other describing the incarnation of the Divine—neither mention Jesus’ name. So, one could be forgiven for not knowing these stories speak of the same event, only from different perspectives.

One, the Lukan birth narrative, has all the makings of a “human interest story.” Of course, the actual story as presented in Scripture does not contain a lot of detail. Yet, over time we have developed a very vivid image of what occurred, thanks to artwork and song providing beautiful interpretations of the events conveyed in Luke’s Gospel. The account of a couple forced to travel from their hometown of Nazareth to fulfill an imperial edict. A heart-wrenching tale of the couple needing a place to stay, particularly as the time for the woman to give birth draws near. The only place available in all of Bethlehem being a stable in which to shelter for the night; in which to bring a new life into the world. The story of angels appearing to shepherds in the nearby fields, announcing this otherwise seemingly ordinary birth: “Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord . . . And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’” And the shepherds going in search of the child to pay homage and offer praise for the fulfillment of ancient prophecies about the coming of a messiah to liberate the people. All resulting in a lovely tableau of a baby lying in a manger, surrounded by his adoring parents, shepherds and other strangers looking on, along with the attendant cattle and sheep and other denizens of the stable. An image filled with warmth and light, with joy and love.

And then we have the Johanne Prologue, beginning with the much colder, more sterile pronouncement: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” Language that is purposefully intended to recall the Creation story in Genesis: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep” (Gen 1.1-2). I don’t know how others imagine this text, but in my mind’s eye, I see images that could have been taken by the James Webb Space Telescope. Images of the Big Bang, resulting in the vast cosmos of interstellar space, galaxies, nebulae, stars, and planets. The coldness of space, not quite as warm and cozy as the scene in Bethlehem.

John may or may not have had such images in mind when he wrote “In the beginning was the Word.” Primarily because the ancients did not have as expansive an understanding of the universe as we do today. But John was seeking, nonetheless, to paint a picture of the cosmic nature of what happened with the birth of Jesus. Not only by calling to mind the Creation story, but also by invoking a well-known philosophical concept of the day. The Word, or Logos in the original Greek. In the philosophy of the ancient Greeks, the intellectual elites of the day, Logos was the term to describe “the universal Law, or the principle that inherently ordered the cosmos and regulated its phenomena.”<sup>1</sup> Which John equates to God. The One who created and orders all that is. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

And then John drops the real bombshell: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” The Word, God, creator of all that is, became flesh and lived among us. When we really stop to think about it, that is virtually incomprehensible and absolutely mind-blowing. That the all-powerful, omnipotent, omnipresent God, Creator of all that is, chose to take on the limits of a human being. That God chose to take on the fragility, the vulnerability, of becoming a baby. That the One who created and cares for all of Creation, chose to become dependent on the care of others for his very life and survival.

What is perhaps even more mind-blowing is why God should choose to undertake such a seemingly foolish venture. “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” That God being incarnate in human form, that the Word becoming flesh, was for a very specific purpose. That God did this for us. Out of love for us. God came in the flesh to be with us, to live among us, to truly experience life as we do, to be able to relate to us on our level, and to invite us into relationship with him in a more intimate way. All out of love.

We know the story. We know the two versions of the story. Not even two versions. Really just two parts. John’s Prologue, providing the overarching, cosmic, philosophical and theological understanding of just what happened in the Incarnation, in the birth of Jesus. The incomprehensible reality that the Word, that Godself, came in the flesh to be among us and with us. And Luke’s birth narrative, providing the infinitely more relatable account of just how that came about. How the one who we recognize as Messiah came into this world. But we need both parts. The warm, cuddly, heart-warming story of the birth narrative—the how. And the more philosophical, theological backstory—the why.

Only when we bring the two together, do we get a complete picture of just how special and amazing the birth we celebrate this day really was. That to us is born this day in the city of David a Savior. A Savior who is not merely a human chosen by God to be the Messiah. No, that job was too important, the love God has for us is too deep, to entrust to an ordinary human. This was a job that was so important that God needed to do it himself. No, this child born to us and for us is none other than God, the Word who became flesh to live among us, full of grace, truth, and love.

Merry Christmas!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Logos>