

Church of All Nations

January 5, 2025

John 1:10-18

Today we are reading from The Gospel of John's opening chapter –I We could describe it as it is this gospel's story of Christmas in a poetic hymn of praise rather than the Christmas Day reading from Luke's gospel with the familiar cast of Mary, Joseph, shepherds, magi.

But we do have an abundance of Mystery. Mystery conveyed through the images of Logos and Light. Though the translation of the term *logos* is the simple term *word*, *logos* carried a lot of philosophical weight in the ancient Greek world.

As the ancient philosophers pondered the ultimate questions of meaning and existence, they came up with a term to describe this transcendent reality. The term they came up with was *logos*. The *logos* came to be understood as that which gave life and meaning to the universe. There are two aspects to *logos*; first, reason, consciousness, mind, the creative power behind all that exists. Second a word, message, addressed to someone. Within the realm of Greek philosophy this *logos* was largely understood to be an impersonal force, not a personal being.

When we come to [John 1](#), we see that the apostle has done two things with the term that would have been unthinkable to Greek philosophers. Rather than an impersonal force, the *logos* of John's gospel is a personal being who can be received or rejected by other people (vv. 11–12). This *logos* also became incarnate as a human being and manifested the glory of God (v. 14).

The Word made flesh and dwelling among us; the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. This is the irony and paradox of incarnation in John's gospel. God comes speaking our language and still we do not understand. Word translated dwelt among us is more literally translated and pitched his tent among us – Peterson of the Living Bible people talks of God moving into the neighbourhood.

But, though Jesus is never again referred to as the Word of God in John's gospel the remaining chapters have an almost endless variation of this theme of words revealing the mystery, but not always being received.. The Living Word speaks living words. 'This is a hard word,' say his followers when he tells them that he is the bread come down from heaven (6.60). 'What is this word?', asks the puzzled crowd in Jerusalem (7.36). 'My word finds no place in you,' says Jesus, 'because you can't hear it' (8.37, 43). 'The word I spoke will be their judge on the last day', he insists (12.48) as the crowds reject him and he knows his hour has come. When Pilate hears the word, says John, he is the more afraid, since the word in question is Jesus' reported claim to be the Son of God (19.8).

Unless we recognise this strange, dark strand running through the gospel we will domesticate John's masterpiece (just as we're always in danger of domesticating

Christmas), and think it's only about comfort and joy, not also about incomprehension and rejection and darkness and denial and stopping the ears and judgment. Christmas is not about the living God coming to tell us everything's all right. John's gospel isn't about Jesus speaking the truth and everyone saying 'Of course! Why didn't we realise it before?' It is about God shining a clear, bright torch into the darkness of our world, our lives, our hearts, our imaginations, and the darkness not comprehending it. It's about God, God-as-a-little-child, speaking the word of truth, and nobody knowing what he's talking about.

Was not until began travelling a bit more that I realised the problem and frustration with people speaking a foreign language was not them but me. Only when I realised the issue was not so much that these people do not speak English but i do not speak Spanish or Laos or whatever was I able to gain some perspective, some humility and some respect. The Word was made flesh, not just for the speakers of the Hebrew language from which he sprung, but John tells us, for all God's people. Yet he does remain strange, peculiar, misunderstood, feared... but also by some loved and welcomed and received. He does come to challenge and, while not intended for his great desire is to gather all to himself, yes he does divide. Some for and some opposed.

Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Well, that could be viewed as a bit tentative, maybe a bit defensive, bit on the back foot... darkness has not overcome it, well that may be so, but has the light overcome the darkness? Has the light grasped the darkness by the scruff of the neck and given it a thorough shaking, so there is no longer people abused and exploited, children dying of malnutrition, people locked in dungeons, diseases rampant? Well no, except in the immediate vicinity of where the light shines. There the darkness has been overcome, at least for as long as the light continues to shine. I told the story at both Rathdowne Place and Redmond Park in the Christmas services of being in total darkness in a cave in Laos. My other experience to total darkness was in the underground caverns and passages under Edinburgh, alleged to be haunted. But down there, once our guide turned her torch off, it was total, black, dark, all enveloping darkness. After a couple of minutes, unlike most darknesses, I did not start to make out some shapes, or pricks of light. But funny thing was, after a couple more minutes, when just a single beam of light from a torch was switched on, it made a massive difference. Oh, we could not make out the total room we were in, but we had enough light to feel comfort, to have a sense of direction, to be able to put one foot in front of the other, and to know who we were once again .

You know what the King James version of this verse says, "and the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not". (John 1:5) The darkness looked at the light and did not understand, discern, take it in, comprehend or even desire the light. It went back to going about the works of darkness. And despite the coming of the light, there is still a lot of darkness, a lot of inhumanity, a lot of greed and exploitation, so in that sense the powerful, yet at the same time modest, statement, the darkness has not overcome the light, seems realistic and true to our experience of life. You got to pass the

light on, the light of Christ that has found you – or else it never spreads and never burns and lights the darkness.