

**Jeremiah 31:7-14**  
**Psalm 147:12-20**  
**Ephesians 1:3-14**  
**John 1:1-5; 14**

Sermon for Jan 2, 2022

**IN THE BEGINNING**  
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Summary: Reminders for a New Year.

Today is the first Sunday of the new year, and it's therefore the perfect time to remind ourselves of the fundamental truths that lie at the foundation of our faith. The opening verse of John's gospel tells us what those fundamental truths are. It has three claims. The first is that in the beginning was the Word. The second is that the Word was with God. And the third is that the Word was God. Let's remind ourselves of what each of these three claims tells us.

In the Beginning

You'll remember that the very first words of the Bible itself are the same as the words with which John opens his Gospel: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. By using this phrase – In the beginning – John is clearly reminding us of the central element of spiritual faith: That God created the world: the world did not create God.

The materialist, atheist worldview has a different fundamental belief. Its belief is that the material world, the world we see and touch and measure and experience with our senses, is at bottom, all that there is. Everything that exists, including human life itself, with all its thoughts and hopes and experiences, including its religious beliefs, is simply the result of the impersonal interaction of the fundamental physical elements, be they atoms or quarks or energy fields or quantum possibilities or something else for which we don't even have names. There is no intention to it all, only a direction that can be calculated by mathematics; there is no meaning in it; there is no point to it. The movement of

the galaxies, the rise and fall of empires, the suffering of babies dying of cancer, the discoveries of science, the enjoyment of your morning coffee, is all a tale told by an idiot, written by clashing atoms bouncing off each other, full of sound and fury and what we experience as enjoyment and tragedy, but at bottom, signifying nothing. Th..th..that's all, folks, is its motto. Th...th..that's all there is. So let's keep dancing. If there is no God. In the beginning.

The Judeo-Christian is the opposite. It is the view that something which is not of this world, made this world. It is the view that there is something else other than the material universe, and that that something else is responsible for our reality. It is the view that what we experience as reality is a creation, that it was created. It is not just a collection of energy particles bouncing off one another; it is the product of a mind, and the manifestation of that mind's intentions. And that mind we call God.

But John's gospel adds something amazing to what the first verse of the Bible tells us. "In the beginning", John says, "was the Word." The Word is John's name for Jesus in this opening chapter of his Gospel. It was the word who became flesh and dwelt among us, with the human name of Jesus.

So what John is telling us is not only that God is the source of creation, but also that Jesus was there when creation occurred. Jesus was there before creation.

This is a very difficult thought to grasp, perhaps an impossible thought. But it does mean one very simple, very practical, and very tremendous thing. If Jesus was with God before time began, if God's word is part of the eternal structure of things, it means that God was always like Jesus.

Sometimes when we read the Old Testament, we get a picture of God as stern and avenging, as well as just and holy. And that can lead to an understanding of Jesus, on the cross, as having accomplished something that changed God's anger into love, that altered God's attitude towards humanity. But what this passage of John tells us is that that's absolutely false. God has always been like Jesus, from the beginning. Jesus shows us the eternal and unchanging nature of God.

But we may then ask, What about all those passages in the Old Testament where God destroys whole cities, men, women, children, babies and animals? What about the anger and jealousy and vindictiveness of God that are so often portrayed in the older parts of scripture?

John's answer is this, and our answer is this: it is not God who has changed; it is our knowledge of God that has grown. Men wrote those things about God because they didn't know any better. They could only see God through a glass darkly. But now that Jesus has come, we can see and know fully what God has always been like.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever,” the author of the book of Hebrews informs us. And John’s gospel draws the inference from that that God is also unchanging in His fundamental nature, which is Love.

*...and the Word was with God.....*

What does that mean? It means that there has always been the most intimate and loving connection between Jesus and God. And what that means is that there is no one who can tell us what God's thoughts are, what God's values are, what God's will is, what God's heart and mind and soul are, the way Jesus can.

A little later in his first chapter, John expands on this point: “*No one has ever seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, he has shown what God is like.*” And in the 6th chapter of his gospel, John quotes Jesus himself making the point:

*Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.* (v. 46)

And Jesus puts it perhaps even more clearly and forcefully in chapter 14: *I am the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus said. No one comes to the father except through me.* This is usually taken to have reference to the one way to salvation being through belief in Jesus, but surely Jesus is saying something much more than that. What Jesus is saying is that God has provided one way, and only one way, of knowing who God is, and that is through knowing Jesus, because only Jesus knows God through and through. Why? Because he's been with God, since the beginning.

And that brings us to the third part of the verse. *...and the word was God...*

That is certainly an extraordinary thing to say, and something very difficult to understand. There is a temptation, which many have succumbed to over the centuries, to interpret it as meaning that Jesus – the Word – is somehow identical with God.

But that can't be correct. John's own Gospel later quotes Jesus saying of himself, not only that He is not identical with God, but that He is in some respect subordinate to God.

*John 7: 16 Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me."*

*John 12: 49. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.*

*14: 23-24 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words. The word that you hear is not My own, but it is from the Father who sent Me.*

When John wrote that the Word was God, he was not saying that Jesus is identical with God. He was saying that Jesus is so perfectly the same as God in mind, in heart, in being that in Jesus we perfectly see what God is like.

St. Paul, the other great theologian of the church, was expressing the same idea in his letter to the Colossians. He didn't describe Jesus as the Messiah or the branch of David or the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah or anything like that. Here's what he told his non-Jewish readers about Jesus:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. **I**And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (1: 15-18)*

In other words, he was the Word of God.

According to our traditional Christian calendar, on this day two thousand and twenty-one years ago, the baby Jesus was eight days old. Just think of that. Eight days old. If you had been there, standing with Mary and Joseph, you could have picked Him up in your arms, counted his toes, maybe sung Him a lullaby. And you would have been holding and singing softly to someone who had been with God forever, someone older than time, someone who will someday take you by the

hand, and guide you into the presence of your almighty, and infinitely loving Father.

And as our first pulpit message of this brand new and sparkling year, perhaps it would be good to remind ourselves that we have a human brother guiding us to an eternal Father, someone who came not only to save us, but also to help us to see and understand the vital source of all creation, to help commit us to goodness and mercy and forgiveness and humility, not because these are admirable human qualities, but because they are part of the very fabric of creation, part of the glory of God Most High.

And so let's make that our prayer for this morning and the coming year. Father, we pray that you help us to pattern our own lives after the example of the one who patterned his life after You, not as an article of faith, but as an article of knowledge. We ask that we may come to know Jesus as intimately as he knows You. We ask for eyes to recognize his virtues, and ears to follow his guidance. We ask that you open our heart to him, because in so doing, we open our hearts to You, and we do so in his name.