

John 1:1-4  
Tim Anderson 17/12/17  
*In the beginning was the Word*

Christmas feels like it has well and truly begun.  
It's still a week away,  
but we've had the community Christmas Carols,  
we've had the Playgroup Christmas Service,  
Kids have given their teachers Christmas presents -  
(Thank you, Aldi, for the well priced Chocolates)  
There are random Christmas decoration around street signs in Hastings.  
And Australia has won the first two test of the Ashes.  
It's definitely Christmas.

But you know there's a problem with Christmas.  
There's too much Jesus in a manger.  
Yes you heard right.  
The minister is not complaining about too much Santa.  
Not complaining about too much commercialism.  
He's complaining about too much Jesus in the manager.  
So we're going to inject a little balance to our Christmas,  
with a bit of John's gospel the week before Christmas.

I suppose you realised that in two of the four gospels: Mark and John,  
there is no nativity story.  
Mark starts the story with John the Baptist,  
which doesn't really lend itself to Christmas.  
But John is an important part of the Christmas story,  
because it gives us balance.

What do I mean by balance?  
Well Christians believe that Jesus is fully man and fully God.  
100% a human being and 100% God come to live with us  
at the same time.  
The nativity stories do a great job of showing  
that Jesus was fully human.

And you can tell from them that Jesus is the Son of God.  
But the opening of John's gospel  
gives us Jesus as the Son of God in all his glory.  
And that is very important.

Over the years, lots of people have asked me  
why the story of Jesus' birth is not told in Mark and John.  
No one has ever asked me  
why Jesus' divine origin is only laid out for us in John.  
But it is equally important.  
You can have too much Jesus in a manger.  
Not that we want to replace Jesus in a manger with tinsel and reindeer.  
But we want to balance baby Jesus in a manger  
with the glory of God the Son.

So let's do that.  
Let's turn to the text.  
In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
The Word is God the Son.  
That is, Jesus who came to live with us.  
And he was, "In the beginning".  
John doesn't mean the beginning of his gospel.  
He doesn't mean the beginning of God's saving plan even.  
He means God the Son was there in the beginning before creation.  
Before this universe was brought into being by God,  
God the Son, otherwise known as the Word,  
was there beside God the Father.

When John wrote these words,  
you can hear the echoes of John's own Bible.  
"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."  
That's how Genesis starts.  
God was there before creation.  
God is not part of creation, he is the creator.

The world is beautiful and creation is good,  
because God is a god of order and beauty.  
As John starts his gospel,  
he's not overturning the picture of creation that Genesis gives.  
He believes every word that Genesis speaks.  
But he adds another facet to the picture that we didn't know beforehand.  
God was there before creation,  
and God the Son was there alongside God the Father  
when creation was being created.  
"In the beginning was the Word."  
The Lord Jesus is eternal.  
You and I have a starting point.  
I was born on 16/12/1972, 45 years ago yesterday.  
But that's not my starting point.  
I was growing inside my Mum for 8 and a half months before that.  
Maybe I was conceived on my Father's 24th birthday on 31/3/1972.  
I'm not sure but God knows.  
At any rate what I do know  
is that I had a starting point sometime around then.  
I am eternal.  
I have put my trust in the Lord Jesus.  
He is my Lord and Saviour.  
I have eternal life.  
I will live with him forever.  
But it's only eternal life in one direction.  
I will live forever in the future.  
But in the past there's a point where I did not exist.  
Sometime around my Dad's 24th birthday.  
Jesus on the other hand is eternal in both directions.  
He sits right now in glory at God the Father's right hand.  
And before the creation of the world,  
he was there beside the Father as well.  
"In the beginning was the Word."  
The Lord Jesus is eternal in both directions.

But why is he called "the Word"?

Jesus has many names in the Bible.

Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, Emmanuel, Prince of Peace, Mighty God, the Servant of the Lord, Teacher, Rabbi, Faithful and True, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the First and the Last, the Living One, Son of David, Lord, well it's a very long list.

But here John calls him 'the Word'.

What does that signify?

Let's go back to the creation account in Genesis.

"And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light."

"And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.""

"And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear.""

And God said, and God said, and God said.

In the creation story,  
when God makes something happen,  
he does it by his word.

He speaks and it is so.

And this is a theme that continues in Scripture.

In Isaiah 55, God says,

"My word that goes out from my mouth:  
it will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

When God does something,  
he does it by the power of his word.

In the beginning was the Word.

Who is Jesus?

He is the man through whom God the Father does things.

As it says in verse 3 of our reading,

"Through him, (that is through the Word, through Jesus)  
all things were made;

without him nothing was made that has been made."

When God the Father was creating,

he did his creating through Jesus.

Jesus is the Word.

That means he is the one through whom the Father does things.

But it is more than that.

God doesn't only do things through his word,  
he also reveals himself.

How do we know anything about God?

You remember the ten commandments, right?

No images, no paintings, no statues.

You are not allowed to make a representation of God.

Why is that?

Because God has revealed himself in images but in words.

When God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush,  
there is no form but there is the sound of a voice speaking.

When God reveals himself to the rest of the people of Israel,  
there is no picture like the gods of the nations around about.

But there are words.

"I AM or Yahweh has sent me to you."

When God reveals himself to his people,  
it is through the words of the Law given to Moses.

It is through the words of the prophets.

Here's how the writer to the Hebrews puts it.

"In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets  
at many times and in various ways,

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,"

How does God reveal himself, make himself known?

He does it through words.

Why is Jesus called the Word?

Because Jesus is God's ultimate way of revealing himself to us.

Nothing speaks to us more clearly of who God is than Jesus.

Jesus is God's final word of revelation.

"In the beginning was the Word."

Why is Jesus called the Word?

Number 1. Because God does stuff through his word.

And everything God does, he does through his Son.

Number 2. Because God the Father reveals himself through his word.

And Jesus is the final and perfect revelation of the Father.

"In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God and the Word was God."  
So God the Son was there with God the Father before time began.  
When we read in the creation story,  
"The God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness."  
Who was he talking to?  
It was God the Father talking to the Son  
(and the Spirit but that's a subject for another day)  
There were not two Gods.  
There was one God.  
And yet the Word was God and the Father was God.  
If you know a bit about this history of the early church,  
in the first four centuries there was lots of wrangling  
about how the members of the Trinity work together.  
And you can still see the remnants of those disagreements,  
in groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses today.  
They are not Christians because they don't believe that Jesus is God.  
If John had wanted to say that Jesus was a divine being,  
but that he wasn't fully equal to the Father,  
he had a perfectly good way to do it.  
He could have said,  
"The Word was with God and the Word was divine."  
But he didn't say that.  
He said the Word was God.  
He didn't say the Word became God either,  
as if God the Father had created God the Son.  
No. The Son was with the Father for eternity  
and the Son is equal to the Father.  
But why does it matter?  
Why does it matter  
that Jesus is God the Son and not just a divine being?  
Why does it matter that Jesus is God the Son  
and not just a holy prophet with a message from God?  
Let me give you two reasons why it matters.  
It matters because Jesus died on the cross for our sins,  
he was a sacrifice sent from God the Father

expressly for that purpose.

Now if Jesus were not fully God and one with God the Father, then God would have been sending someone else to do his dirty work for him.

But because Jesus is fully God and one with God the Father, the sacrifice of Jesus is a sacrifice of the Father.

He shared in the cost of paying for our forgiveness.

The pain that Jesus cried out from the cross,

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

The Father experienced that pain too.

Because his relationship of perfect love with the Son was being broken.

So it matters that Jesus is fully God and one with the Father,

because that's how his sacrifice

is a perfect and costly gift from the Father.

Here's the second reason why it matters that Jesus is God.

Love is a very important part of Christianity.

The two great commandments -

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Love your neighbour as yourself."

In John's gospel we read Jesus give a new commandment.

"Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Where does love come from in Christianity?

In John's first letter, he tells his readers.

"Dear friends, let us love one another,

for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God,

because God is love."

Well where did John get the idea that God is love?

In Islam there are 99 names for God.

But none of them are love.

If you ask a Muslim why that is,

they will tell you that to love is to experience emotions and passion.

And such things are beneath God.

But the Christian believes that God is love.

Not just that God experiences love,  
but more than that, love defines who God is.  
Where does that idea come from?  
The Word was with God and the Word was God.  
God the Son is having a perfect relationship with God the Father  
for eternity.  
In Islam, Allah is God alone,  
he can't love because there is no one to love.  
But in Christianity, Father, Son and Spirit love one another.  
That is why the Christian can say, "God is love".

The Word was with God and the Word was God.  
Why does it matter?  
It matters because that's how Jesus can be a sacrifice for our sins  
lovingly sent from the Father,  
and not some innocent third party doing the Father's dirty work for him.  
It matters because that is why God is love.  
The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father  
and they both love the Holy Spirit.

One of the ways that people celebrate Christmas is with lights.  
One of our family traditions is to take a drive on Boxing Day  
past some of the best Christmas lights we know.  
I guess we'll have to find some new lights to look at this year.  
So people celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus with lights.  
John says,  
"In him was life,  
and that life was the light of all mankind.  
The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it."  
Bear in mind that so far Jesus hasn't been mentioned by name.  
So if you were reading this for the first time,  
you would be thinking about the Word and creation.  
The Word was not only God's agent in flinging stars into space,  
but he was also God's agent  
in breathing life into plants, animals and people.

The life he gave to us,  
enables us to respond to God.  
To know God and delight in his creation.  
But the life and light that Jesus brings are more than physical life.  
If you had read John's gospel once,  
and you went back and read the start again,  
you would be struck by the spiritual life and light that Jesus brings.

He gives spiritual life to those who are dead in their sins.

This is John 3:16

"For God so loved the world,  
that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him  
shall not perish but have eternal life."

That's spiritual life.

He brings spiritual light which reveals evil for the black darkness it is  
and helps us to recognise spiritual good correctly.

This is John 3:19-21

"This is the verdict:

light has come into the world,  
but people loved darkness instead of light  
because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light  
and will not come into the light  
for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light,  
so that it may be seen plainly  
that what they have done  
has been done in the sight of God."

That's spiritual light.

In John 8, Jesus ties light and life together.

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,  
but will have the light of life."

Jesus is the one who brings spiritual life and light to all who follow him.

Jesus is the one who brings spiritual life, even to those who have died.

in John 11, after Lazarus died,

this is what Jesus said to his sister Martha.

"I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live,

even though they die;

and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."

"In him was life,

and that life was the light of all mankind."

Spiritual life and light come from Jesus.

That's why it's really important

that we don't only have the baby in the manger at Christmas.

We need the start of John's gospel

so we remember why Jesus came.

He came to defeat evil, death and darkness

and bring life and light to all who follow him.

Jesus is not someone sentimental and cuddly.

He is the Word through whom God created the universe.

He confronted the powers of evil in battle

and has defeated them.

Jesus is the Word

who was with God the Father before the creation of the world.

And that's important.

It makes his sacrificial death a loving gift of God the Father.

And it firmly establishes that core belief of Christianity.

God is love.

You can't love without having someone to love.

And the Father, the Son and the Spirit

have been loving one another for all eternity.

If love is important to you,

then rejoice that

"In the beginning was the Word,

and the word was with God and the word was God."