

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing * John 1
December 2, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

When you grow up in the church, there are a lot of things that you just implicitly ‘get.’ Like when you talk about grape juice being blood, you just kind of ‘get it.’

One of the things that I’ve learned doing funerals though is that some of those things that we just ‘get’ are just downright baffling to non-Christian people. They don’t make any sense to them. I remember having a conversation about 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul talks about the body being planted like a seed and growing into something better and this person couldn’t wrap their mind around it.

I suspect that the line we’re going to look at today is another one of those baffling things. It’s a line from ‘O Come All Ye Faithful’ – ‘Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.’

To a lot of people, that doesn’t make any sense. Maybe some of you are going – ‘yeah, what DOES that mean?’ Well, we’re going to find out today.

And to do that, I think that we need to ask two questions – first, what or who is the ‘Word of the Father’ and second, what does it mean that the Word is ‘now in flesh appearing’?

So – What is the Word of the Father? And what does it mean that He is now appearing?

To answer the first question, we need to go to the Gospel of John because John chapter 1 is all about ‘the Word.’ Whenever you think ‘the Word’ in the NT, think John chapter 1. So turn with me to John chapter 1 and we’ll look at the first few verses. John chapter 1, starting in verse 1.

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 He was with God in the beginning.
- 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made...

Now listen, John is doing something really interesting here. He’s taking a secular idea and using it to describe a Christian reality. We might be baffled by the idea of ‘the Word’ in 21st century Canada, but John’s 1st century Greek readers would immediately have got it. Because to them, this idea of ‘the Word’ was a very popular, very common philosophical idea. In the same way that we all hold to the idea of ‘the common good,’ they had this idea of ‘the Word.’

Now, one of my theological dictionaries takes forty pages to explain ‘the Word’ – I’m going to try to do it in about three sentences. So Greek philosophers had this idea of ‘the Word,’ literally the ‘logos.’ And the logos was the eternal power that gave order to the universe. They believed that creation moved in an orderly, rational manner and it was the logos that caused it to do so. Day turns to night turns to day turns to night; it always goes winter, spring, summer and fall, and if you drop a piece of toast, it will always land buttered side down and it’s the ‘logos’ that’s causing it to happen. The Greeks had a concept and a word for the power that brings order to the universe and that is word is ‘the Word.’

Now the Hebrew people too, they also held to the idea of ‘the Word,’ but with a twist. To them, the ‘Word’ was not just an impersonal force that held all things together; the logos was the power *of God* that brings order to the universe. Hebrew writers (writing in Greek) could use the word ‘logos’ to describe the power of God at work in the world, creating and redeeming and sustaining all things.ⁱ

So to the Greeks, the Logos was the power of stability and order in the universe; to the Jews, the Logos was the power *of God* bringing order and stability to the world; and then in John's Gospel, John comes along and says 'Guys, the logos is a person.' He's not just a power; he's not just a force; the Logos is a person. And John 1 describes that person. What he says here is very important, so let's look at it again.

In the beginning, was the Word. So – in the beginning, does that sound familiar? He's taking us all the way back to Genesis 1 and saying 'hiding behind the lines of text in Genesis 1 was 'the Word.' He was there. In the beginning, the Word was there.

And He was with God. Before the world existed, the Word was there and He was WITH God. The Word was not simply some power that God exercised; the Word was a person who would be 'with' God.

But not only that, He WAS God. You know, you could say, 'ok, if there's a power of God expressed in a person, maybe that's just some kind of superhuman next to God,' but John says here, 'no, He WAS God. That's why He is the power of God; He has the power of God because He IS God.'

And yet the fact that He was also WITH God means that He is not God alone – He, along with the Father and the Spirit who hovered over the face of the waters in Genesis 1:3, is the Triune God we see in the Bible.

And just like Psalm 33 says, 'by the word of the Lord were the heavens made;' John clarifies that the Word did indeed create all things. Verse 3 - Through Him all things were made and there is not a single thing that exists that does not have His fingerprints all over it. When God said 'Let there be light,' it was the Word that brought the light into being. He is the Creator of all.

The Word of the Father then is not the Father, but He IS God, and He is the power of God at work in the world.

Now that's what 'the Word' means and in John 1, John uses that word to describe the person who was with God and who was God in the beginning. The million dollar question though is 'who.' Who is the Word of the Father? Well, given the rest of John's Gospel, what do you think?

It's Jesus, right? Jesus is the Word of the Father. He was there, in the beginning. He was with God. He was God. And all things are made through Him. Jesus is the Word of the Father. All the fullness of God expressed in a person.

And the reason that we celebrate Christmas is that the Word of the Father was 'now in flesh appearing.' As I kid, I always kind of thought this line sounded like a movie trailers – 'Now appearing in theatres near you!' But when 'O come all ye faithful' says 'Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing,' it's actually announcing this incredible news that the person of God who wields the power of God for stability in the world has decided to put on flesh and appear in our midst, as a flesh and blood person.'

In the words of John 1:14, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' The invisible God took on visible humanity.

Now this is an incredible fact. The eternal person and power of God chose to become a human being and experience life in the exact same way as we do.

Just imagine - the Word was with the Father. The Word was God Himself. Jesus was standing in the throne room of Heaven, surrounded by angels and glory and power. He could bring things into being with the Word of His mouth, and brings things to nothing if He really wanted to.

But there was a moment when He said 'Goodbye' to the Father and stood on the brink of the galaxy and dove into the world that He had made. He somehow fused with a virgin's ovum and became a little zygote, tucked away in His mommy's tummy. And then cells multiplied and muscles formed and nine months later, out He came, a helpless baby, weak and vulnerable and dependent upon first time parents. He was born into a manger, with hay for a bed. And then He grew and experienced life, just like we do. He felt pain and joy and frustration, He got tired and hungry, he knew sorrow and loss – the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The divine power of order in the world came into our world.

Just as an aside, this would become a real issue in the 300's AD. There was this pastor named Arius who started preaching that Jesus was not really God and that He was just another created being. This became a huge deal, to the point where there were fist fights in the streets; people arguing over the nature of Jesus the way we're seeing people argue about masks today. Some people said 'there was a time when He was not – when Jesus didn't exist;' they insisted that Jesus was not God but in fact a sub-God or created being.

What do you think of that in light of John 1? It's silly. John 1 clearly says that Jesus is God. That He pre-existed Creation. He is the one that brought creation into being so how could He Himself be a created being? The idea that Jesus was created is just silly.

And the reason I tell you that is because that Arian controversy left a mark on our song. We don't sing this verse very often, but if you look on the bulletin, you'll see it –

God of God, light of light,
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God, begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore Him, (3x)
Christ the Lord.

The person who wrote O come all ye faithful wanted to affirm that the Word of the Father is 'very God' – like 'God Himself' – 'truly God' and He was begotten, not created. Yes, He entered into Creation, not by being made, but by being 'born' or 'begotten' into it. He existed before Creation, He created all things and then allowed Himself to be born into it.

And the carol proclaims the news – 'Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.'

But here's the question – why? Why did the Word of the Father come in the flesh?

Well, John gives us two answers in John 1, one that's very broad, and one that zooms in and focuses on a specific aspect of God's plan.

So first, the broad reason – verse 18 – The Word of the Father came in the flesh to show us what God is like. Look at John 1:18. 18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (Joh 1:1-18 NIV). The Word of the Father came to earth to reveal the Father

to us, to show us what He's like. No one has ever seen God, except for Jesus, so Jesus came in the flesh to be the visible expression of the invisible God. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus, because Jesus show us what the Father is like. He came to make Him known.

Jesus shows us the Father's mercy, the Father's love. Jesus shows us the Father's righteousness, the Father's justice. And Jesus shows us the Father's desire to rescue sinners and make them children of God. That's the 2nd reason Jesus came, the 'zoomed in' reason – Jesus came so that we could become the children of God.

Look at John 1, verse 10.

10 He [the Word – Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--

13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word of the Father came in the flesh so that we could become the children of God. The Incarnation, the entry of the Creator into Creation was not just some publicity stunt. This was not Richard Branson and Jeff Bezos popping into space to have a look around. This was Son of God entering into His Creation so that we too could become children of God.

God is a good Father – He created us, He sustains us every day – and yet we're all a bit like the prodigal son. We want to go off and make our own way and we take for granted the blessings that we have in God. Our Father though is so rich in mercy, so full of compassion that He sent His only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. And not just eternal life, but eternal life in God's own family. In our wandering, we disown Him, but He takes us as sinners, and offers to adopt us back into His gracious family, now and forever. To those who receive Him, to those who believe in His name, He gives the right to become children of God.

What should we do about that?

Well, let's start here – who is Jesus to you? I remember twenty years ago, I thought I had a pretty good handle on God the Father and God the Spirit, but I just didn't know what to do with Jesus. There are so many competing views out there – to some, He's just an anointed teacher, a person showing us how to live a good life. To others, He's just an activist, fighting the injustices in the world. To some, He's just a myth, to others, a created being, not God.

But John 1, 'O come all ye faithful,' Christmas itself calls us to say – 'no, Jesus is truly God. The God who created all things, who entered the world with the best of intentions, to forgive my sin and adopt me back into the family of God.' Jesus is good and gracious, God Himself, worthy of trust and adoration.

So receive Him. Invite Him into your heart, the way you would invite guests into your home. Some of you will have relatives into your home over Christmas; the same way you invite them in, ask Jesus into your heart to make your heart His home. And know that whoever you were before, you're a child of God now, loved, valued, accepted. You are precious to God. John practically gushes in his first letter –

See what love the Father has lavished on us, that we should become children of God!ⁱⁱ When you receive the Son, the Father lavishes His love on you and you become a child of the King. Receive the new life that comes from God.

And then, live as a child of God. Live in a way that is consistent with the character of God. Let His goodness and graciousness and mercy and justice characterize your life.

If you think about your friends, your neighbours, your families – would they believe that you are a child of God? Do they see the character of God, your father, abundantly in your words and actions or are you just reflecting the world back to them?

Jesus came to reveal the Father; now that we know Him that becomes our job too. To show the world what God is like and to invite them into relationship with Him too. The Word of the Father has come in the flesh so we can become children of God; live like a child of God.

ⁱ For example, the Greek version of Psalm 33:6 says ‘by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made’ and Psalm 107:20 says ‘20 He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.’

ⁱⁱ NIV 1 John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1Jo 3:1 NIV).