

## **“The Beginning Word”**

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First in a series on John’s Prologue

John 1.1-9

November 30, 2014

In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.  
The Word was with God in the beginning.

Everything came into being through the Word,  
and without the Word nothing came into being.  
What came into being through the Word was Life,  
and the Life was the Light for people.  
The Light shines on in the Darkness,  
and the Darkness did not extinguish the Light.

A man named John was sent from God.  
He came as a witness to testify concerning the Light,  
so that through him everyone would believe in the Light.  
He himself wasn’t the Light,  
but his mission was to testify concerning the Light.

The true Light that shines on all people was coming into the World.

John 1.1-9 (CEB; alt)

Back in September, we started into the Gospel of John. This ancient writing is one of four accounts of Jesus in the Bible. They came to be called “gospels,” the Greek word for “good news,” because that is what they tell. “Breaking News Flash! Something BIG has just happened!”

Each – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – tells about Jesus in its own way. They are not interested in simply the bare details. They want us to know who Jesus is, what he means, and why he is such great news!

As I said, a few months back we started into John’s Good-News. Then we moved to some other things. Now we return. Not to where we left off, however, but to before the place we started. We started a bit in from the beginning. Before getting into the story of Jesus, John first gives us a poetic and grand picture, readying us for what comes next. It is an overture that starts a great symphony. It is a preface that launches a magical story. It is the front

hallway of a great house. Standing in it, we can glimpse through slightly-opened doors into the many rooms, and the treasures waiting for us inside. This Advent, leading up to Christmas, we're going to soak in this hallway.

Diane [Bethany] / Mel [Elora] and I are going to alternate. She will read a bit, then I will ponder, and back and forth.

*In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.  
The Word was with God in the beginning.*

The beginning. The Beginning before the beginning of . . . everything. Everyone we have ever known or will know, everything we have ever walked on or slept under, everything we have ever feared or will fear, everything we ever hold or behold. The Beginning before the earliest beginning we can discover. In the Beginning before all other beginnings, this Word already was.

Words can be gibberish. Words can be lies. Words can be foolish. Or, words can be true, trustworthy. Words can speak love. What sort of word was this Word who was in the Beginning?

This Word was with God. "With," as in "in God's presence," as in "very close to God," as in, "in close relationship with God."<sup>1</sup> Not simply beside God, or in the vicinity of God. With God intimately, fully, completely.

This Word was God. With Muslims, we must say "There is no god but God."<sup>2</sup> With Jews, we must confess, "Hear, Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is one."<sup>3</sup> Only God was in the Beginning. This Word was with God in the Beginning. This Word was God.

What sort of word is this "in the Beginning" Word?

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *pros* is more intimate than other words that mean "with" (*syn* and *meta*). The translations I offer are from John McHugh, Raymond Brown and Dale Bruner respectfully. See Frederick Dale Bruner, The Gospel of John, A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 11.

<sup>2</sup> The *Shahadah* is the basic creed of Islam, and is something we can hold in common with Muslims and all fellow monotheists. Where Christians part company is with the second part of the *Shahadah*, which states that Muhammad is the messenger/prophet of God.

<sup>3</sup> The *Shema Yisrael* in Deuteronomy 6:4 is the key statement of Jewish monotheism. As faithful Jews, Jesus and his first followers (including the composer of John's prologue) would have firmly affirmed the *Shema*.

*Everything came into being through the Word,  
and without the Word nothing came into being.  
What came into being through the Word was Life,  
and the Life was the Light for people.  
The Light shines on in the Darkness,  
and the Darkness did not extinguish the Light.<sup>4</sup>*

What sort of Word? This “in the Beginning” Word is the Creator. Through this Word, all things were made. Everything!

What do words do?

Words organize things, as in “*Let’s move the red Christmas ball to that branch.*” This Creator Word organizes, making order where otherwise there would be chaos. So this Creation-World is not random. It is intricately complex and delightfully simple.

Words make sense of things, as in “*This is why it was okay for Mommy to kiss Santa Claus underneath the mistletoe last night.*” This Creator Word gives everything its reason. So this Creation-World is not pointless. The Word makes it on purpose, and for a purpose.

Words communicate, as in “*Fear not! I bring you good news of great joy!*” This Creator Word breaks into our silence with sound, shout and song.

This Word creates Life. Life is what it is all about. Where there is death – death of body, death of mind, death of spirit, the death that is injustice, the death that is despoiled creation, the death that is dehumanization, the death that crushes dreams – where there is death, this Word gives Life again. Flourishes Life again. Rescues Life again. Salvation! Resurrection!

This Word reveals Life again. “*The Life was the Light for people.*” The Word of Life shines into Darkness.

Think about it. There is nothing to darkness. It’s empty, simply an absence of light. You also know the Darkness would crush you, tear you, and wipe you out. It would wear you, despair you, destroy you and us all. But no Darkness will ever put out this Light, this Life,

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<sup>4</sup> The verb “shines” is in the present, the first time the present tense is used in the Prologue. However, the non-extinguishing of the Light returns us to the past tense. Dale Bruner sees the “did not extinguish” as a reference to Jesus’ crucifixion, whereas the ongoing shining of the Light is an allusion to the continuing presence of the risen Jesus. Bruner, 14.

this Word. No Darkness! Ever!

What sort of Word is this?

*A man named John was sent from God.  
He came as a witness to testify concerning the Light,  
so that through him everyone would believe in the Light.  
He himself wasn't the Light,  
but his mission was to testify concerning the Light.*

From the lofty heights, we now come to the ground where people walk, people like you and me. We start naming names. John. John the Baptizer.<sup>5</sup> Or, should we call him “John the Witness”?

John is someone who says, “Open your eyes,” because we are scrunched shut. He shouts, “Over there,” like a lookout in a sailing ship’s crow’s nest who spots a light through the night storm. We need witnesses to see and point. So God sent John.

John the Witness tells us about Jesus. He wants us to believe that Jesus is the Promised Deliverer, God’s Son.<sup>6</sup> Believing is more than knowing something. Believing is knowing and trusting. Trusting makes our seeing matter. The lookout shouts, “Light, over there!” Will you sail to it? Only if you trust it is the way to safety, the Light to Life out of the stormy Darkness.

We say, “seeing is believing” – in other words: show me, then I’ll believe. What if, also, “believing is seeing?” What if sometimes we believe first, and only then see? What if believing opens our eyes to see what we did not notice before? Believing lets you see that the Light, shining in the Darkness, is the way to safety. Trusting lets you hear that the Word, spoken through the storm, is the call of new Life, away from the crashing rocks.

John the Witness doesn’t point, just so we will see. He wants us to believe, to trust, to follow the Light. That’s why God sent him.

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<sup>5</sup> The “John” spoken of here is almost certainly John the Baptizer, who will appear again in John 1.19. However, he also sounds like “John” in whose name this book is written. Both the Baptizer and the Gospeller are witnesses, who point us to Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> This is the purpose the Gospel-writer gives for his work (John 20.31). I’ve paraphrased the title “Messiah” as “Deliverer.”

Are you starting to see who this Word is? Creator. Life-Giver. Light- Shiner. God.

Well, listen to this!

*The true Light  
that shines on all people  
was coming into the World*

Coming into the World?

This Light, Life, Word, in-the-Beginning . . . God! Coming into the World!

Not staying distant. Not remaining out of this messy fray. But coming! To where we are!  
To where all people are!

This true Word-Light, who shines on everyone, has come . . . to Ferguson, Missouri.  
. . . has come to Mosul, Iraq.  
. . . has come to a synagogue in Jerusalem, stained with blood.  
. . . has come to a demolished home in Gaza, stained with tears.

This true Word-Light, who shines on everyone, has come to Ebola clinics in West Africa. And a tiny apartment where a refugee family lives afraid. And a man sitting on cold pavement while we bustle by. And the shoppers who rush past, frantic and burdened. And a woman who hides her story, certain no one will believe her if she tells what happened.

This true Word-Light, who shines on everyone, has come to wherever you are, and I am, in all of this.

This true Word-Light, who shines on everyone, was coming into the world. It's a tantalizing clue of what is to come, when we continue next week.

Will we believe and see the Light this Word shines? Will we see and receive the Life this Word gives?

Whether or not we see, and whether or not we receive, the Word is still coming. Not waiting for us. Coming to us. No Darkness will overcome him. No Death will defeat him.

Thanks be to God. Amen.