

The Word in the Beginning

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 December 2021

Preacher: Rev. Andrew Ong

[0 : 00] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Okay, here we go.

Reading from the prophet Isaiah. 9-1. But there will be no gloom for her who is in anguish. And the former time he brought unto contempt the land of?

And the land of? But in the later time he has made glorious the weight of the sea, and the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of all the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in the land of dark, deep darkness on them has light shown. You have multiplied the nation.

[1 : 04] You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of?

The day of? The day of? And for the boot of the tramping warrior in the battle, Tomah, and every garment rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for the fire.

For as a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder.

And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And of the increase of his government and the peace, there will be no end.

On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

[2 : 14] The grass withers, the flowers fade. The word of our God, and forever. Okay, you ready for number two? Reading from the Gospel according to John.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light, and all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him. Yet the world did not know him.

[3 : 19] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believe his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of will, of the flesh, nor the will of man, but God.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise be to you, O God. You may be seated. Thank you, Gail.

Good morning, Christ Church. My name is Andrew, one of the pastors here, and I look forward to bringing God's Word to you today. Will you join me in prayer? Lord God, we want to give our attention to your Word, the Scriptures, but also your Word, your Son.

As we look forward to his return, would you fill us with hope and faith and love, and would we prepare our hearts rightly in anticipation of the great hope you've set before us in this Advent season?

So be honored in the preaching of your Word, and we pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen. You know, every single Sunday when I come up here to preach, I bring up with me the baggage of my best friend.

[4 : 35] Many of you have heard me mention this best friend before, and he's given me permission to share about him. But yeah, every time I come up here, I come up here with my best friend in mind, this best friend who is no longer walking with Jesus.

Because after watching his grandmother die a slow, gruesome, and painful death from cancer, he now finds it too hard, too hard to believe, and too hard to trust, and too hard to hope in an all-good, all-powerful, divine author of history.

The darkness was just too dark for him to believe in any ultimate light. And you know, growing up with him, I always just thought of him as a glass-half-empty kind of a guy.

Growing up, this was a kid who used to say things like, Oh, I just can't wait for Jesus to come back. Oh, I just want to get out of here. I just want to go to heaven. And as an adult, he'll still say things like, I never, never want to have kids.

There are just so many things that could go wrong. And, you know, why would I want to bring more human life into this broken world filled with despair? And you see this also come out in just the way he's chosen to live his life.

[5 : 48] He's not living a life trying to pursue lofty ambitions, but he's trying to live a safe life. A life that minimizes any possible experience of pain and loss.

He lives simply and with great contentment, just trying to enjoy what he can while he can. And, you know, for the most part, the strategy of avoiding loss, admittedly dependent on a ton of privilege and, you know, good fortune, it's worked out pretty well for him.

I've actually never seen him just absolutely downcast or overcome with sorrow. I mean, I've also never really seen him overjoyed and head over heels about anything either.

But, you know, if I'm honest, sometimes, especially recently, I envy him. And the simplicity of his life, just avoiding the darkness. Because sometimes the darkness is just too dark, right?

Sometimes it's just too dark. It's really dark, isn't it? I don't think I need to convince this particular church family today of the depth and darkness of the darkness.

[6 : 57] The gloom and the anguish spoken of by the prophet Isaiah in our text this morning, they are so real, right? They're so real. And for those of us privileged enough to escape for a time and to close our eyes and cover our ears and minimize our exposure to the depths of this darkness, it's tempting, isn't it?

For those of us who can, it's tempting to bypass the agony of Advent and to skip ahead to distract ourselves with a commercial Christmas, right? Stringing up hundreds, even thousands of artificial man-made Christmas lights as if they'll overcome the darkness we're trying to avoid.

And that's one way of dealing with the darkness, trying to ignore it, trying to forget it, trying to minimize its devastation in our lives. But while this strategy might work for a season or so, it's never a sure thing.

Never actually victorious over the darkness. Avoidance is but a poor and unreliable substitute for a lasting victory. You know, my friend, now that he's stepped away from the faith and from the hope of Christ, he is now inhabiting a new story.

One in which darkness is a mere and inevitable reality, best avoided by hard work, but mostly just by luck and chance. He's inhabiting this story in which the chief end of humanity is to hopefully experience more artificial light than impending darkness during one's temporary state of consciousness here on earth.

[8 : 35] And you might say that the Advent that he is living for, the only coming that he is preparing himself for, is the coming of death and darkness. Preparing for the inevitable by merely avoiding and delaying death and darkness.

But as we open up the Gospel of John today, the good news of John, God shows us a better way. A better way of responding to the real, deep darkness that so overwhelms us.

The prophet Isaiah, he caught a glimpse of this better Advent, this better story we're invited to inhabit. The prophet Isaiah caught a glimpse of it when he foretold the dawning of a great and ultimate light that was going to shine upon people dwelling in deep darkness.

A light to come at the arrival of a child who himself would be mighty God. From the very first verse, verse 1, John's Gospel, it retells the story. It retells the story of the world and invites us to inhabit God's story.

The most ancient story, a story not just of creation, but a story of new creation. In the beginning, it says, look there, in the beginning. Echoing the first words of the Christian Scriptures from Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, the story of light overcoming darkness.

[9 : 47] From the very beginning of the creation of the world, when God spoke with a word over the deep darkness, let there be light, and there was light. Just because he said so. Just because he said so.

And the good news of John is that we are invited into this better story in which just as creation came about by the personal divine word of God, so also will new creation come about by the personal divine word of God.

And that's what these opening verses of John's Gospel are getting at. In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God.

He was with God from the beginning. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and this life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John's Gospel is given to us, a people dwelling in darkness, to remind us that God, the creator, who overcame darkness at the creation of the world by the mere power of his word, he has sent forth another final word of new creation to permanently dispel all our darkness.

[11 : 02] John's Gospel is a reminder to us about the word of God. And the word of God alone is the hope of the world. It's the hope of the world, and it's a sure hope. You know, sometimes I wonder if we need a reminder in this Advent season that Advent isn't first and foremost about our longing, but it's actually about our Messiah's coming.

I wonder if we need a reminder that while Advent longing is definitely appropriate to this season, even more appropriate is Advent preparation. The preparation of our hearts to receive this coming one with repentance and faith and hope and trust.

The takeaway application of Advent and the whole takeaway application of John's Gospel is not to simply be real about the darkness and just linger in our longing. John tells us that the main purpose of this Gospel account, in chapter 20, verse 31, he says, These things are written that you may believe, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name.

The takeaway application of Advent from John is to believe. To believe. Even when it's hard, and even when the darkness seems like the realest and most ultimate thing, John's Gospel calls us not into a generic longing for some ambiguous better day, but to faith in Jesus, in the midst of our longing.

And so as we open up John's Gospel starting today, we're going to see that the point of Advent is not simply to indulge our longings, but it's to direct our longings toward our sure hope, toward the one who came and who's coming again, the one who made all things.

[12 : 45] This is the Word, right? The Word made all things. That's who we direct our hope and our longing toward, this Word who made all things, and this Word who said, behold, I am making all things new.

Write this down. These words are trustworthy and true, he says. It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. This is the sure hope that Advent and John's Gospel invite us to direct our longings toward the Word, who was with God from the beginning, and who is God Himself.

And my prayer is that as we look at this Word that John talks about, that our hearts would indeed be prepared, firm in faith, sure in hope, longing with love to joyfully receive this Word, who came and who's coming again.

Now I want to look at this text because I imagine that this first line of John's Gospel could be quite confusing, right? This verse 1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. It could be confusing. But I think that if we just slow down and break it down and observe a couple things, I think this will really help us. So first of all, what we need to notice is that while this language might seem strange to us, for John's monotheistic Jewish readers, he was making very explicit what had always been implicit in their tradition.

[14 : 08] He was saying, you know your tradition, right, that says that God is a self-expressing God who revealed himself and created the world by his Word? John is saying, well, that creative Word who was with God is also God, and he was with God from the beginning.

What John is doing here is he is making explicit the Trinity, the triune nature of God, the mysterious paradox of our Christian faith, that God is one God, and yet also three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Spirit.

And what he's also doing at the same time, he is also making an explicit claim to his Greek readership as well. See, the Greeks were looking for and often debated something called the logos.

That's the Greek word for word. They were looking for something called the logos, this ultimate principle of reason, this essence of rationality, this meaning and purpose and direction and order of all things.

And here John is saying that this logos that the Greeks discussed and debated was not some abstract concept like mere being, it wasn't some principle or law like the law of non-contradiction.

[15 : 15] John was saying, yes, there's an ultimate order to this world, an ultimate reason and purpose and principle, but it's not an impersonal principle, it's a person. Notice he uses the personal pronoun here, it says, he, he was in the beginning, the divine Word by whom the world was made, the one who was with God and who was God, he is the logos.

So this is what John is getting at when he opens his gospel account by introducing this concept of the Word, the logos. He's getting at two things, that one, God is triune, one God and three persons, and that two, the logos is the divine and personal Word of God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, that that which is behind and holding together all reason and meaning and purpose and reality as we know it, is a person, the second person of the Trinity, the Word who created all things.

Now, okay, I know that was super abstract, right? I know that was super abstract, so let's get down to it. Why should any of this matter to us? What is the significance of God's triune nature and what is the significance of this personal divine logos?

Well, actually, a relatively newcomer to our church, he came over to my house a couple weeks, a couple weeks ago with Josh Lynn, and we sat around my table with watered-down boba and popcorn chicken, and he actually asked me this very first question, like, what is the significance of the Trinity?

He said to me, you know, I've been investigating Christianity, I've read the Bible from cover to cover, and there are tons of things that resonate with me, that God is powerful, and that He's authoritative, and He's the Creator, and I love His mercy and love, and that there's forgiveness through Jesus.

[16 : 56] But there are some things that really don't make sense to me, and I'm wondering how important they could really be. I'm wondering if I really need to agree with them to have a genuine faith, like the Trinity, he said.

Is it really that clear, and do I really need to believe in this Trinity that I can't make sense of? And I really appreciated the honesty of his genuine question, and there were a bunch of ways that I thought about answering the question, but you know what I said?

I said, you know, we could open up the Scriptures to various places that indicate this doctrine of the Trinity, and I talked about John 1, and how the Word was God, and the Word was with God, right?

But I said, or, or we can talk about, you know, church history, and how Christians have for a long time recognized this doctrine of the Trinity. And I said, I'm happy to chat about all these things, but really briefly, if I could share with you what I personally find most compelling about the Trinity, there are two things.

So this is what I said to him, these two things. First, the mysterious paradox of the Trinity, and the way it confounds my human categories of understanding, it actually gives me comfort, that God is God, and that I am not.

[18 : 13] And that even when I can't understand him, this is good, and right, and actually a confirmation of who he is, and of who I am. He is the creator, and I am the creature.

And what he reveals to me, even if I cannot wrap my finite and fallible mind around it, I can say, yes, Lord, and trust that he is good, and faithful, and true, apart, apart from what I think.

I'm so glad to have a God who doesn't need to fit in my small, small box of understanding. That's the first thing I said about the Trinity, this paradox that we confess as Christians.

But secondly, I said this, and the other thing I love about the Trinity, probably what I love the most about the Trinity, is that at the heart, at the core of who this triune God is, is a father loving a son with his entire being, with his entire spirit.

That before and completely independent of creation, before and completely independent of this world, love, and life, and joy, and harmony, have always been enjoyed, and beheld, and shared in God.

[19 : 26] See, a God who is not triune, cannot in its essence be loving, or caring, or dynamic, or personal, in and of itself. It would need something, it would need someone to love, and care for, and to interact, and be present with.

But the triune God of the Scriptures, see, he did not need creation to be a God who is dynamically loving, and joyful, and harmonious, and a beauty beheld from all eternity.

The Father has always loved the Son, in the joyful presence of the Spirit's witness. Love and harmony have always existed, because the triune God has always existed.

And because he is all these things in himself, as one God in three persons, we can know that the world was created, out of a personal love, joy, peace, kindness, unity, harmony, and beauty.

Like, these concepts aren't mere social constructs, or superior evolutionary developments, developments of enlightened humanity, they're reflections, of our triune God, who is all these things, in his very essence.

[20 : 37] If you've known and enjoyed love, it is not just because of certain neurons firing in your brain, because of certain contexts that you're in, it's because you're created by a God, who is love.

Isn't that profound? Isn't that amazing? It's amazing to me. Because there's no other faith like this. Either you have polytheism with impotent, tribal, is it okay tonight?

Is that just like, I got a mic. Okay. So this is what's distinctive about our God.

He is three, and he is one. There is no other God like this guy. No other God. Now, not only this, John, one of us understands the humanitarian imitations of the law, but he also wants us to understand the lordship of the law.

Remember, for the ancient Greeks, the law was the rational principle by which the world was logically ordered. It was the most basic, most fundamental foundation of reality that made sense of and directed all things.

[22 : 27] And this may sound abstract and irrelevant to us today, but you see, what the Greeks were searching for, it's the same thing that we are searching for today. They were trying to make sense of the world and of reality by identifying an authoritative voice, an authoritative word.

They were looking for something or someone to tell them their purpose and the world's purpose, some guiding principle to live by that aligned with the essence of reality. And is that not what we are doing today?

Is that not what we're after today? A right understanding of who we are and what we're made for and who our neighbors are and how we're to relate to the rest of this world. And haven't we, just like these ancient Greeks, haven't we come up with several different kinds of answers to this question?

Think of all the words, think of all the different logoses that have been offered up to answer the question of the meaning of life. Right? For the consumeristic materialists, they live by the logos, get money, get paid.

Right? For the pluralistic relativists, they live by the logos, you do you. The hedonists say, YOLO, you only live once. The traditionalists might say, family first.

[23 : 37] And even those who don't think that we can know or identify a single logos that makes sense of the world, even agnostics have a word that governs them. They say, who knows?

Who knows? Or maybe if you're just like me, a simple, selfish, egotistical person, the logos that you live by is me first. Mine. What about me?

And my point is, see, if we don't use, even if we don't use the language of logos, we all live by a controlling word that tells us what is good and right and true and real.

And the question is, as the ancient Greeks debated, what is the true logos? What is the logos that makes the most sense? Now, I don't have time to make that argument and John himself is not concerned to make that argument here either, but what he does intend to make clear in these verses is who he and who the rest of Jesus' apostles believe the logos to be.

For John, the logos is none other than the word who was with God and who was God, creating the world and giving life to all. this one, the one who John the Baptist came and bore witness to.

[24 : 49] The one the rest of the gospel of John is going to talk about is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the logos. Now, maybe you are here and you're exploring Christianity and maybe you're, you know, or maybe you're just a Christian who struggles with a lot of doubt and it's frustrating to you that I'm not making a case for why you should believe what John has to say about the logos.

But you know what? This is actually intentional. I want you to look at verse 4. Verse 4 says, in him was life and this life was the light of men. Do you know why John doesn't make an argument for his claim about the logos?

Do you know why I'm not trying to make an argumentative case? It's because even those of us who say with the very tongue and lips that God created, I'm not sure if God exists.

Even those of us who think to ourselves, is God real? With the very minds that God gave us, that we have lives at all. Every life is actually a light that reveals the truth about God as our maker and our sustainer.

John doesn't give us a logical proof of God and I won't bother either because each of us having life from God himself, we cannot actually escape the light of God.

[26 : 03] Apostle Paul indicates this in Romans chapter 1 when he says, for what can be known about God is plain because God has shown it for his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

So we are without excuse for although we knew God, we did not honor him as God or give thanks to him but became futile in thinking and our foolish hearts were darkened claiming to be wise, we became fools and exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator.

See, the light has always shone upon us. People made in the image of God, we all know deep down who we are and what we're made for and who our lives belong to. Just like Woody from Toy Story, Woody's cowboy boot has always had Andy written on it.

Just like a Buzz Lightyear sleeve has always had Made in Taiwan etched into it. Our lives were given to us and they're owed to our life giver.

He's given us plenty of light. But see, the heinousness of sin is that we've chosen darkness instead. We've chosen to live by words other than the logos, words other than the word of God.

[27 : 20] And with this re-entrance of darkness and sin, because of our rejection of God's word, we become confused about what is light and what is darkness, unable to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong.

And that's why God sent witnesses like the prophets, like John the Baptist, to bear witness to the light, as it says in verses 6 to 8. And God even sent his own final word, his son, the true light, it says in verse 9.

But verses 10 and 11, while this world was made by him and he came to his own, his own did not recognize him. His own did not receive him.

Just like Buzz Lightyear refused to acknowledge he was made in Taiwan and it ended in a crash. And this is the insidious nature of sin. This is the depravity of living by a word other than God's word.

When we give up on God's word, the obvious truth is no longer obvious. And darkness creeps right in and all things, including you and me and our whole lives and our very understanding, it all gets twisted and distorted and put off course from the way things were meant to be.

[28 : 26] And so really, the problem of unbelief is not a lack of evidence. God's light has always shown clearly. He has sent many of his witnesses to bear witness to the light.

He even sent his true light. The problem is not that God has not revealed enough. It's that our sinful and darkened minds have not rightly received this revelation.

We have not rightly received his word. And this is the reason why Advent longing even exists at all because of our sinful rejection of the word.

But listen, our text this morning ends with good news. See, though we've all been infected by sin and our minds have been darkened making unbelief and doubt and skepticism more natural than trusting in God's word, God has still held out his gracious promise to us.

Verse 12, But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.

[29 : 34] And see, this is the gospel. This is the good news that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. That even when we insisted upon the darkness, God insisted on our adoption.

He has relentlessly pursued our inclusion and continues and continues to hold out his offer for us to join his family. How? Not by insisting that we have the right blood lineage, not by insisting that we exert our wills to obey him or measure up to some man-made standard.

We join his family by simply trusting in his word, trusting in his one and only son, the one he sent. That's all it takes. That's all it takes.

Just trust. He's already taken care of all the rest. He's done all the heavy lifting. He sent his only begotten son. He sent his only begotten son.

He denied the argument that it was no longer good or worthwhile to bring a child into this world knowing full well all the terrible things that could and would happen to his only son.

[30 : 41] Knowing that the world's deepest, darkest day was still yet to come upon his son hanging from a cross at Gilgotha. He sent him anyway. He sent him anyway all to pay for our inclusion into his family.

God drew near to the darkness of shame and death and defeat. And he defeated it. And he defeated it. And this is the hope of Advent, Christ Church.

This is the hope of Advent that the coming one is the Lord, the Logos of the triune God, the one from whom all eternity, the one who from all eternity enjoyed the loving smile of the Father and the affirming presence of the Spirit.

The hope of Advent is that he is coming. This is the kind of God who is making all things new. And he's coming for us that we might enjoy the eternal love and assurance of the Father with him forever.

Will you pray with me? Lord, we confess that there is no God like you. We are so glad that your Son is the Logos and that the Logos who is loved from eternity by the Father in the presence of the Spirit is a Logos of love toward us.

[32 : 01] He's given himself for us. Who's come near the darkness that we might be adopted into the family of God? Lord, would you open our eyes to the great privilege that you have offered to us that we might be called children of God to have access to you, the Creator, to be near you, to be embraced into your chest as your Son has been from all eternity.

Open our eyes to that great privilege and honor and would we not squander this offer but would we joyfully prepare our hearts to receive your Son and enjoy our Sonship in Christ we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.