

Welcome Home!

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[0 : 00] What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring him a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet what I can, I give him my heart.

One of the ways we can give him our heart during this season is to give attention to the text of scripture which explains why rugged shepherds and educated wise men felt compelled to go to Bethlehem and fall to their knees before Jesus. We can give him our heart today by giving attention to the opening lines of the gospel according to John. John chapter 1 verses 1 to 18 is a beautifully crafted document. It's clearly a poem. I think it might also be a hymn. For when you read it in the original, you feel as it begs to be set to music. It's crafted in what is called staircase parallelism. One word dominant in one line is taken up in the next, where it is connected with another word which is then taken up in the next line. The clearest example is in verses 4 and 5. In him was life, and the life was the light of humankind, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. We've been calling John 1, 1 to 18, the overture. Not just a prologue, not just an introduction, but an overture, like the overture to a musical or an opera, not only preparing us for what is to come, but actually drawing us into the major movements and themes of the story that is to follow. Today I invite you to remain seated for the reading of God's word.

At a number of points, I will pause, giving space for contemplation, during which you will hear the refrain Andrea composed for this series. You can join her if that would help you as you open your heart to the text. The word of the Lord.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

[2 : 59] In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God. And the word was God. He was with God.

He was with God. He was with God. He was with God. All things came into being by him, and apart from him, nothing came into being that has come into being.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men and women. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came that he might bear witness of the light.

He **■**orn **■**■ And the word was with God And the word was God And he was with God in the beginning There was the true light, which coming into the world, enlightens every man and woman.

[5 : 16] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him.

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become. Children of God, even to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

The beginning was the word And the word was with God And the word was with God And he was with God in the beginning And the word became flesh And dwelt among us And we beheld his glory Glory as of the only begotten of the Father

Full of grace and truth And John bore witness and cried out, saying, This is he of whom I said, The one who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for he existed before me For of his fullness we have all received Grace upon grace For the law was given through Moses Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ No one has ever seen God at any time The only begotten God Who is in the bosom of the Father He has explained him In the beginning was the word And the word was with God And the word was with God

He was with God And the beginning And the beginning And the beginning He came unto his own, and those who were his own did not receive him.

[8 : 35] But to all who did receive him, he gave the right to become children of God. In this third study in John 1, 1 to 18, I want to focus on why, according to the overture, Jesus Christ comes into the world.

And then on how we get in on why Jesus comes into the world. Verses 11 and 12. He came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him.

But to all who receive him, he gave the right to become children of God. The wonder of what the overture sings, the wonder of what we celebrate in the Advent Christmas season, finally becomes real to us when we receive.

To fully appreciate the wonder, we need to follow the flow of the text. So, let us review what John tells us before he brings us the good news of why Jesus Christ came into the world.

John begins by declaring, in the beginning. The Jesus story begins before anything we read in any of the four Gospels.

[10 : 10] Long before Easter. Long before Good Friday. Long before Palm Sunday. Long before the Transfiguration. Long before Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River.

Long before he's born in Bethlehem. Long before he's conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In the beginning. Long before God. Long before God. The story about Jesus begins way back in the beginning.

In the beginning, says John, was the word. The Logos. In the beginning was the Logos. As I pointed out, the Greek word comes into English language in words like logic and logical.

In the beginning was the Logos. And the Logos was with God. And the Logos was God. All things came into being by the Logos.

And the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us. And to those who received him, he gave the right to become children of God.

[11 : 21] Again, I want to ask, why does John begin the story of Jesus using the term Logos? Clearly, John is saying that Jesus is the Logos.

Lying in the manger is the Logos. Hanging on a cross is the Logos. Standing outside an empty grave is the Logos. But why begin using this term?

Why not begin with the term John will use the most in the rest of the story? The term Son. Why not begin with the Son? We will learn, as we read the rest of the story, that Jesus of Nazareth is self-consciously the Son.

The Son of God. The only begotten Son of the Father, as John calls him, in the middle of the overture. So why not say, in the beginning was the Son? That is the case.

And the Son was with God, toward God. That too is the case. And the Son was God. That also is the case. The only begotten Son of the Father is God.

[12 : 27] All things came into being by the Son. And the Son became flesh and dwelt among us. Why not craft the overture that way? Or, why not use the term Lord?

That will become the dominant title for Jesus in the rest of the New Testament. The core conviction, the core affirmation will be, Jesus is Lord. So why not begin the story, in the beginning was the Lord?

That is the case. And the Lord was with God. That too is the case. And the Lord was God. That also is the case. All things came into being by the Lord.

And the Lord became flesh and dwelt among us. Why not begin on that note? Why begin with logos? Because John is first and foremost an evangelist.

He is a pastor. He is an historian. And he is a theologian of the first rank. But first and foremost, he's an evangelist. He's a good newsizer.

[13 : 26] As an evangelist, he wants to speak in ways that connect with something about which his hearers and readers already know something.

John wants to begin by hooking into something in the minds and hearts of his hearers and readers, from which he can then lead them into the gospel. And logos is just the right term to use.

For logos rings deep chords within every culture in John's day. Not that John means everything every culture means by the term.

The fact is, as we will see in a moment, John will go way beyond what anyone in his day meant by the term. But it is a great place to start.

So let me again show you why. For many Greek philosophers of John's day, the logos is the rational principle of the universe. That which gives life its reasonableness.

[14 : 28] For other Greek philosophers, the logos is the integrating principle of the universe. That which gives life its orderliness. That's what holds all things together. For many of the Jewish philosophers of John's day, the logos is the agent of creation.

The medium of God's governance of the world. Philo of Alexandria called the logos the captain and pilot of the universe. For the biblical authors, the writers of the Old Testament, the logos was the means by which the living God creates and communicates.

God creates by the logos, by the word. And God communicates by the logos, by the word. So, John begins the story of Jesus by hooking into all of that philosophical, theological searching and thinking.

People pick up a copy of his gospel, and initially, they hear things about something they already know something about. In the beginning was the logos.

And the logos was with God, and the logos was God. All things came into being by the logos. It's brilliant. Simply brilliant.

[15 : 40] John meets a wide scope of humanity on terms people are thinking and talking about. And in the process, John takes them and us straight into the heart of the gospel.

He does this in his overture by moving two giant steps beyond most people's understanding of the logos. First, John declares that this logos is personal.

The logos is not just a principle. The logos is not just a force. The logos is not just a medium of divine creativity and communication. The logos is personal.

The logos is a person, just like the personal God. For the logos is the personal God. The word was God. Now, in and of itself, that was good news for John's contemporaries.

And it is good news for us and our contemporaries. It says that we live and move and have our being not in a principle, not in a force, not in a medium of divine creativity and communication, but rather that we live and move and have our being in a person.

[16 : 54] It all emerges from a person. It all coheres in a person. The universe is held together by and in a person. We are held together by the mercy and grace of a person.

That is why leading Christian theologians like James Houston keep talking about personhood. Everything comes down to a person.

The second giant step that John takes in the overture takes us into the heart of the gospel. John 1.14 And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

This logos becomes flesh. The logos, who is a person, becomes a human person. No one had anticipated that move.

No Greek, no Roman, no Jew. No Persian, no Egyptian, no Indian, no Chinese. No one ever dreamed of this move.

[17 : 56] The rational principle of the universe becomes flesh. The logos, who is a person, becomes a human person, taking on our flesh and blood in the womb of a virgin. The integrating principle of the universe becomes flesh.

The logos, who is a person, wraps himself in the finitude and frailty of humanity and is laid in a manger in Bethlehem. The agent of creation, that which sustains the universe, becomes one of us. And the angel says, you have to give him the name Jesus. It took people's breath away. It takes my breath away. The origin of all things turns out to be a person and the person forever chooses to forever alter the form of his eternal existence and becomes a human being.

Most people in our time sense that there is something more than what we can see and hear and touch and feel.

They may not admit it. They may not say it out loud. But most people in our time sense that the universe and we creatures in it did not simply emerge out of thin air.

[19 : 11] I hear it when people ask things like, well, if there is a Big Bang, where did the stuff come from that made for the Big Bang? Most people sense there is something more, or at least they hope there's something more.

Here is the good news of John's overture. Here is the good news of Advent and Christmas. In the beginning was the something more. And the something more was with God.

And the something more was God. This something more is a person who had no beginning and has no ending. All things came into being by the something more.

Creation is, after all, creation and not just nature. The something more made all other somethings that are. And the something more became flesh and dwelt among us.

On Christmas Eve, the something more was lying in a manger. On Good Friday, the something more was hanging on a cross. On Easter morning, the something more emerged from the grave, alive in a way no one ever imagined possible.

[20 : 30] And the something more came to the grave, alive in a way no one ever imagined. The something more came to his own. The Logos, a person in whom is life, says John.

Zoe life, life that has no beginning and no end. Uncreated, eternal life. Life that oozes light. Life that is light. Life that enlightens every human being.

The Logos becomes what he was not. He becomes flesh. And moves and take up residence in our world. Now why?

Why does this great Logos do it? He came unto his own. And those who were his own did not receive him.

But to all who did receive him, he gave. Now what comes to your mind when you hear or see this verb receive?

[21 : 34] What ideas or images or pictures come to your mind when you hear receive? For most of us, it suggests the picture of receiving gifts. Right?

Someone comes to us with a gift. And the gift makes no particular claim upon our lives. We can do with this gift pretty much whatever we want to do. Except when the giver has expectations of what we're supposed to do with a gift.

Like wear the wrong collared sweater to the next family occasion. Or place the poorly taken photograph on the living room mantle. But for the most part, the gifts we give and receive make no long term claim on us.

John is using this verb in its Middle Eastern sense.

Now you know that in the Middle East, one of the greatest values is hospitality. The word receive refers to receiving of visitors into one's home.

[22 : 49] To receive someone means to take the person into one's home as an intimate friend and honored guest. Matthew uses this verb in his telling of the Christmas story when he says that Joseph took Mary to be his wife.

Joseph received Mary as his wife. Jesus will use this verb later in the Gospel of John when he promises to come again and take us to himself.

Just as a groom takes his bride to himself. Jesus will come and he will receive us into his home. He came to his own and those who were his own did not receive him.

But to those who did receive him. So the picture John intends to create in our minds is that of welcoming another person into our home.

treating this other person as an intimate friend and as a trusted guest, honored guest. And then doing everything possible to make the other person feel at home.

[23 : 58] I experience this whenever I've traveled in the Middle East or Asia. I am received. A total stranger. I am received as an intimate friend and honored guest.

Those receiving me do everything they can to make me feel at home. It's a very moving experience. Those receiving me do everything they can to please me.

He came unto his own. And those who were his own did not receive him.

But to those who did receive him. Do you see what John is getting at? To receive Jesus the Logos is to take him to myself as an intimate friend.

To receive Jesus is to take Jesus the Logos into my home as an honored guest. And then, therefore, to do everything I can to make him feel at home.

[25 : 07] Which means rearranging the whole pattern of my life so that I can be about the things that please him.

He came to his own. And those who were his own did not receive him.

Do you feel with John the incredible irony of that? John says, He, the Logos, who is life and light, was in the world.

And the world was made through him. Which is why Abraham Kuyper so daringly said, There is not a square inch of the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ does not cry, Mine. Every land is his. And every human being is his. I know that that is a bold claim to make in our time.

[26 : 11] I can feel how jarring that is to say in our city. I can feel some of you squirming even right now. That's way too audacious. Every human being, whether they recognize it or not, whether they believe it or not, owes their existence to Jesus the Logos.

Every one is his own. We are all his own. He came to his own. Which means that when we do receive him, we are not only receiving an intimate friend and an honored guest. We are receiving the owner of a house. The owner has come home. Standing at the door is the true light, says John, which coming into the world enlightens everyone. Light stands at the door. Truth stands at the door. The one who enlightens every human being stands at the door. The reason, any human being can reason, stands at the door. And John is shocked and saddened that when the light, who is the life and enlightens everyone, comes into the darkness, so few receive him. But what especially saddened John was the non-receptivity of many of his fellow Jews.

[27 : 40] The land, the people, the religion, most prepared for the coming of the Logos did not welcome him when he came in the flesh.

It was a sad irony, a horrible irony. William Barclay puts it this way. Jesus came to a land which was peculiarly God's land. To a people who are peculiarly God's people. He ought, therefore, to have been coming to a nation that would welcome him with open arms. The door should have been flung wide open for him. But instead he is rejected. He's received with hate and not with adoration.

Boy, this fact gives me great pause. For it warns us. It warns us of the awful irony that religion can actually blind us to the light.

The wise men came from the east to Jerusalem asking, where is he who was born king of the Jews? They tell people about this star they had seen in the west from which they made their deductions.

[28 : 42] The scribes and the priests tell the wise men that according to their holy book, according to the prophet Micah, the king is to be born in Bethlehem. And so the wise men head off to the village.

But not the scribes and the priests. The scribes and the priests who knew he was coming don't go to Bethlehem. They're too busy being religious to welcome the new king. The sad fact of the rest of the story is that the greatest resistance to Jesus of Nazareth was religion. It was the religious community that did not receive him. Especially the religious leadership. So, says Leslie Newbigin, commenting on this sad fact, Religion in its purest and loftiest form is found to be in the area of darkness.

He came to his own. And his own did not receive him. The Logos, by whom all things came into being, by whom all things exist, in whom is life, who is light, comes to his own and they do not receive him.

[29 : 59] It is so illogical. That's the only word I can come up with.

It is simply illogical. It doesn't square with the Logos. He came to his own and his own did not receive him.

His own did not receive him as an honored guest and intimate friend. It's worse than sad. It's just plain illogical. It's contrary to logic.

It's like it's like having your computer crash and hearing a knock on your door. And there, to your surprise, is the guy who built your computer.

He says to you, I heard your computer had a crash. I put it together and I've come to fix it. And you say, beat it. Illogical. Or it's like being a school teacher.

[31 : 00] Working with a new curriculum. And feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. When in through the door walks one of the educators who put the curriculum together.

She says to you, I hear you're having a hard time with it. I've come to show you how it works. And you say, go away. Illogical. Illogical. Or, it's like being in a hospital facing risky surgery.

When in through the door walks a doctor who has perfected a new procedure that can heal you.

The doctor offers to help you. And you say, I don't need your help.

Get lost. Illogical. Illogical. When the Logos knocks at the door, when he, by whom all things came into being, knocks at the door, which he is doing right now to each of us and to every human being, the only logical thing to do is to open the door and receive him.

and then to go about rearranging the pattern of our lives so that we can do what he calls us to do. Anything else is illogical.

[32 : 18] It is contra-Logos. Now, here is the good news the overture sings. He will not go away.

The Logos will not go away. When he is not received, he will not go away. He comes to us.

He stands at the door. He keeps knocking and he will stay at the door until he is finally received.

Why? Because he loves his own. because he wants his own to have what only he can give. Joy to the world.

The Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. If the earth would just receive, if earth would just receive the Logos who is the light and the life, this would be a very different place.

[33 : 22] Now, I know that what I just said is written off as simplistic and naive. I know that and it's painful. I know it's written off as simplistic and naive, but given who Jesus is, it is not simplistic and naive.

We are talking about the one by whom and for whom everything and everyone was made if the earth would just receive.

For when the earth receives, something happens. something wonderful happens. Something truly radical happens.

He came into his own and those who were his own did not receive him, but to those who did receive him, he gave the right to become.

Become. Welcome in the Logos and the Logos who spoke the universe into being does a new creative work. We become.

[34 : 26] We become. The Logos gives us the authority and power to become. To become something new. To become the children of God.

He gave them the right to become the children of God. Become? Are not all human beings children of God by birth?

We are creatures of God by birth. But no, we are not all children of God by birth.

Become, says John, literally it is begotten. Does that ring a bell? If you were here last week, it should ring a big bell.

For as we saw, there's all the difference in the world between created and begotten. what we create is different than ourselves. What we beget is similar to ourselves.

[35 : 29] What God creates is different than himself. It's other than himself. But what God begets is similar to himself, like himself, partaking of his own life. All human beings were created by the Logos.

Ah, but here's the wonder. When human beings created by God the Logos receive God the Logos, God the Logos begets children of God.

Children who share in the very life of the only begotten God. Jesus, the only begotten son of the father. The Logos becomes what he was not so we can become what we were not.

The Logos becomes like us so that we can become like him sons and daughters of the living God.

Now none of us can make this happen. We creatures cannot make ourselves into children of God.

That's why John goes on to say speaking of being born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of man. Human beings can beget children of human beings but human beings cannot beget children of God.

[36 : 40] Only God can beget children of God which is what happens when anyone receives the Logos. We are reborn again from above made new as Jesus tells Nicodemus later in the story.

When we receive the Logos who is life and light he makes us new creations who share in his life and walk in his light people who live with new desires new drives new motives new ambitions new understandings of the world new power new peace new hope new joy new ways of relating to

human beings a new capacity to love that's the wonder of Christmas when we receive the great Christmas gift himself he gives us the right to become what we were not we become children of God he came unto his own every human being living today is his own every person walking down

the street outside this sanctuary right now is his own every person shopping at the mall right now is his own every person who stayed home in front of the television to watch hockey or football is his own you are his own

I am his own and if his own would only receive him it would be a very different world and a very different church so here's what I invite you to do today if you've never received Jesus like this is the best day to do it right now right now and here's how you simply say to him something like this

I am his own and if his own would only receive him it would be a very different world and a very different church so here's what I invite you to do today if you've never received Jesus like this is the best day to do it right now right now and here's how you simply say to him something like this

welcome home Jesus welcome home I now realize that I'm yours you made me you made me for yourself I now see that I can't be who you made me to be without you so come in come in and make yourself at home in me and make me a child of God and if you'd like to have someone pray with you along those lines during our hymn in a few minutes just make yourself come on down here we'll pray with you others of us have received him but we forgotten what happened to us so I invite you to join me in saying something like this welcome home Jesus I'm yours you made me you made me for yourself I've let other things become much more important than you I know I'm incomplete without you so come in again come in and make yourself more fully at home in every room in every closet and by the way Jesus you can rearrange the furniture any way you want to and then I invite you all to join me and on behalf of our contemporaries welcome him into our cities join me in saying something like welcome home to Vancouver Jesus welcome to North Van and West Van welcome to Burnaby and Coquitlam welcome to Richmond Jesus welcome to Surrey and Langley and White Rock Jesus every city on the face of the globe is your city Jesus and they're incomplete without you come in come in and make yourself at home in our cities and do your work of grace how silently how silently the wondrous gift is given so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven no ear may hear his coming but in this world of sin where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in welcome home eternal Lagos