

The Word Was God

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, from the Word Made Flesh, and from the Holy Spirit, One God Now and Forever, amen.

What a great day to have a rally! It's hard to believe that summer is over and we're this close to fall and cooler temperatures already. Also, what a great Gospel reading to kick start our rally day events. The prologue to the Gospel of John is an ancient hymn that provides us with key insights into who this God-Man Jesus truly is. John's Gospel is quite different from the other three, Matthew, Mark and Luke. I mean all four Gospels share some information and stories in common, but John has some stories that aren't in the other three and leaves out some that are in all three of the others. For example, John has the miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana. He has the appearance of Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection where he directs the disciples where to fish for a great catch and then Jesus reinstates Peter into ministry after the embarrassment of his trifecta denials. Most notably, John has no institution of the Lord's Supper. Instead, on the night of his betrayal Jesus washes the feet of his disciples.

John's Gospel is also different in his proclamation of when Jesus and his reign began. In Mark Jesus begins his reign at his Baptism, when God spoke from Heaven. According to Matthew it began with God calling Abraham. Matthew starts out tracing the genealogy of Jesus and he begins with Abraham. Luke it begins with the miraculous births of both John the Baptist, who recognized Jesus

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even while still in his mother's womb and with the immaculate conception of Jesus himself. The author of the Gospel according to John takes us all the way back to the beginning as does the first chapter of Genesis, but I would argue John goes even farther to the time before time. John's Gospel is far more concerned with who this Jesus is from an eternal and a spiritual perspective. Therefore, John traces Jesus all the way back to God. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. It's in John's Gospel where the disciple Phillip asks Jesus if they can see The Father. Jesus famously answers, "'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves."

This is our second week focusing on the creeds as our confession of our faith. Last week I said if I wrote the creeds or was the final editor of the Bible, I would have started with Jesus and worked from there. Well folks, this is it. The highest form of theology I know. I fell in love with Jesus partly because of this beautiful ancient hymn. In this opening prologue John sets out his theme for his book. Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus is the one who did the grunt work of

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creation and continues to exercise that same creative power. Jesus is the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried. Jesus is the one who was raised from the dead and is seated at God's right hand. Jesus is the one who will come again, just as he promised. Jesus is the one we can look to and see our Heavenly Father.

Today as we give our children their new Bibles we're really placing in their hands the living Word of God. Actually, when Lutherans think about God's Word we usually mean one of three things. First and foremost Jesus Christ, the Messiah is the living Word of God. It is in and through Jesus that we're drawn into a relationship of love with God. Secondly, Lutherans think about the Bible as containing God's Word. The Bible is and was inspired by the Holy Spirit. A lot of folks today question if the Bible is really God's Word. They say it's not relevant to modern society and our culture. We believe the Bible we have today is exactly in the form God intended for us to receive. Some of the stories may be in languages we don't completely understand and some parts may contain myths and legends, but the form we have today is just what God created for us in order to know God and His Son Jesus. The third way Lutherans understand God's Word is through other Christians. We hear God's Word in our hymns and most importantly, in words of love and forgiveness offered from other Christ followers.

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Today we have fulfilled one of the promises we made when these children were Baptized, that we would place in their hands God's Holy Word. I hope you feel a sense of excitement to see how these young people are going to discover, wrestle with, and finally come to understand for themselves the incredible love God has for them as revealed through our Savior Jesus Christ.

It may be true that for Mark the truth of Jesus only began at his Baptism and for Luke it began at his conception and birth, for Matthew it began all the way back with the calling of Abraham, but John reveals to us that there never was a time when Jesus wasn't. Jesus was in the beginning with God and was God. This has big implications for how we see and understand God, especially the God revealed in the Old Testament. Jesus was always with God and Jesus was and is always going to be God. God didn't change plans when the first plan fell through because of our rebellion and sin. Jesus was always with God and was the one and only plan for the creation and for the salvation of all creation.

In the early days of Christianity controversy erupted over the interpretation of the prologue to John's Gospel. Some folks thought it was meant to be taken in a metaphorical sense rather than literally. That always seems to be the debate in several of the more controversial scripture texts. The winners in this particular debate were the ones who said it was meant literally. The technical term you might remember from your catechism days is *homoousios*. It was a fairly common word

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in ancient Greek and literally means made of the same stuff. The losers in the debate argues that Jesus was certainly God-like and when you look at Jesus and the way he lived and his teachings you were looking through a window into what God is like, but they are not the same stuff and Jesus was really just a man. A man named Arius was the proponent to the not of the same stuff crowd and Athanasius was the leader of the 'Oh, yes they are the same stuff' crowd. I made a few copies of the Athanasian Creed if any of you are interested in reading it. They're back on the Communications Table across from the Church Office. It's pretty long and contains a lot of repetition. That's why we hardly ever use it in Worship. The end result of that controversy was the adoption of the literal interpretation of the prologue to John's Gospel. The Orthodox position of nearly every Church denomination is that Jesus is in fact God and God the Father is also Jesus. They are truly made out of the same stuff.

May the eternal and living Word of God be with you always. May you hear God's Word in the words of Holy Scripture, in the songs we sing, and in the Words of forgiveness in our Confession. May you come to know God our Father because you have met His son, Jesus. May the love of God made known to you in Christ Jesus sustain you through every up and down this world throws your way. And may the Lord God hold you tight until the day when Jesus returns to bring His Kingdom to earth. Amen.