



12/17/2017 John 1:6-8, 19-28 & Is. 61: 1-2a, 10-11

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#### ENTERING THE SCENE:

We enter the third week of Advent and hear from our hair shirted voice words about the one who is to come. John the Baptist was seen as one who was sent from God to prepare the way of the Lord. John is sure of two things. One, he has been given a word from God for the people, and two, he is NOT the one they are looking for. So often in life we are like John. We are given words from the Lord for others that when spoken might cause us to lose our heads. But we are safe as long as we like John we keep clear about who we are and who we are not. As we draw near to Christmas, let us each find our unique contribution to make straight the way for the Lord.

#### John 1:6-8, 19-28

6 There came a man who was **sent from God**; his name was **John**. 7 He came as a **witness** to **testify** concerning that **light**, so that through him all men might **believe**. 8 He himself was not the **light**; he came only as a

witness to the **light**.

19 Now this was **John's testimony** when the Jews of Jerusalem sent **priests** and **Levites** to ask him who he was. 20 He did not fail to **confess**, but **confessed** freely, "I am not the **Christ**." 21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you **Elijah**?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the **Prophet**?" He answered, "No." 22 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 **John** replied in the words of **Isaiah** the prophet, "I am the **voice** of one calling in the **desert**, 'Make **straight** the way for the Lord.'" 24 Now some **Pharisees** who had been sent 25 questioned him, "Why then do you **baptize** if you are not the **Christ**, nor **Elijah**, nor the **Prophet**?" 26 I **baptize** with **water**," **John** replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose **sandals** I am not worthy to untie." 28 This all happened at **Bethany** on the other side of the **Jordan**, where **John** was **baptizing**

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** How does my life make straight the way for the Lord?

**PRAYER:** Dear John the Baptist, you were open to whatever God wanted from you and were willing to do whatever it took to ready others to receive God's presence into the world. Each year in Advent I encounter your voice booming from the scriptures. You call me to join you in making straight the way for the Lord in my life and in my world. Help me to grasp hold of the truth that I was given this mission by my baptism, so as to share this with those who witness my faith. Amen.

#### WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

**SENT FROM GOD:** John's author introduces John the Baptist as one sent by God.

*When you hear that, what do you think? Has God ever sent you for a certain task? If so, how do you know that God sent you?*

**JOHN:** John was Jesus' cousin and was 3 months older than Jesus. His father was a devout rural priest. He has been given the role of preparing the way for the Lord. All John knows for *sure* is that he ISN'T the Messiah.

*Does knowing who you are not, help you to know who you are? How?*

**WITNESS:** To witness something is to see with one's own eyes something with the possibility of needing to testify to others about this event. In this gospel the word is used eight times.

*What does this repetition of the word witness tell you about the theme of this gospel?*

**TESTIFY / TESTIMONY:** When someone is asked to testify or give testimony they are asked to swear that something is true. In Mt. 11:2-3, John, while imprisoned, sends his disciples to ask if Jesus is the Christ, while in the gospel of John he is absolutely sure of Jesus' identity in his gospel.

*How does the gospel of John differ from Matthew? Have you ever been very sure of something, and then changed your mind later on?*

**LIGHT:** Light is one of the main metaphors in John's gospel. Scientists tell us that all material is made up of trapped light that is slowed down enough to be experienced.

*Can this insight help us to get a handle on the Incarnation? How?*

**BELIEVE:** To believe is to accept something as true. John's entire gospel is testimony to what people have come to know to be true after the resurrection.

*What do you think John said that day that helped people believe? What helps you believe?*

**PRIESTS:** In the Christian scriptures the priests were connected with the temple and all the things that went on there.

*Why do you think the priests were sent to question John?*

**LEVITES:** The Levites were inferior ministers who assisted the priests. Their role was to make possible the orderly affairs of the temple.

*Why do you think the Levites were sent to question John?*

**CONFESSED:** In confession we acknowledge something and make it real by saying it to someone.

*In using the word confessed to characterize John's response to the Priests and Levites, what tenor does this set for this encounter?*

**CHRIST:** Christ in the original language means savior, the anointed one. When John says he is NOT the Christ he is defending himself against an implied accusation.

*What does this tell you about this encounter? Does it help to explain why the Priests and Levites were sent to question John? How?*

**ELIJAH:** Elijah was one of the figures that met God on a mountain. He was also someone who seemed to mysteriously disappear instead of dying. In Jewish customs a place is set at the table when celebrating the feast of Passover, because it is believed that Elijah will appear just before the Messiah comes.

*What are the Priests and Levites really asking by mentioning Elijah?*

**PROPHET:** A prophet was always a sign that God was present to the people.

*Was John right when he denied being a prophet? Have you ever been a prophet unawares?*

**ISAIAH:** Isaiah was the most often quoted prophet by Jesus, and there are references to Is. at least 41 times.

*What is John doing by quoting Is. 40:3? Read 40:1-2 for a possible answer.*

**VOICE:** To be a voice is to give oneself to another in the gospel of Mark. John calls himself the voice in this gospel. Is. 40:3 says "a voice".

*What does this say about John's self-understanding? Have you ever given voice to a wisdom of long ago, and thereby become "the voice"?*

**STRAIGHT:** Something is straight when it has no bends, curves, and corners.

*How is John able to get rid of the curves, corners, and bends in the search for the Messiah?*

**DESERT:** The desert is often the place where the people of God discover the new thing God is doing.

*What is it about a desert/wilderness that can enable new discoveries? Where is your desert or wilderness?*

**PHARISEES:** Pharisees were lay people who took their religious practices very seriously. They saw themselves as examples of the right kind of living.

*The Priests and Levites were sent by the Pharisees. What does that tell you about the reasons for their questions?*

**BAPTIZE:** This ritual signified a change of mind and heart that was to usher in a new way of being in the world. The person was to 'die' to their old ways and to 'rise' to a new way of living. Before John, there was no such thing as a person baptizing another. It was more of a purification rite one did before engaging in 'holy' activities.

*Since the accusers saw that only the Christ, Elijah, or a prophet should baptize, what were they suggesting about John's activity? How does John deal with the accusation?*



**SANDALS:** Untying sandals was the job of the lowest slave in Jesus' time.

*What was John saying about himself as he answered his questioners with this response?*

**BETHANY:** Bethany is located where the Jordan meets the Red Sea. It was a highly sensitive place in Herod Antipas territory, where guerrilla warfare often occurred.

*What significance might this have in helping appreciate the encounter in this passage of scripture? Has John set the scene for the rest of his gospel?*

**JORDAN:** The Jordan River was one of those places in the bible that symbolized a transition point in the faith life of the people.

*How does this help to explain the reason for this encounter-taking place here? Do you have a 'Jordan' in your life? Where is it?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** **Jn. 1:6** // Mt. 3:1; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:2f; Jn. 1:19-34; **Jn. 1:20** // Jn. 3:28; Acts 13:25; **Jn. 1:21** // Mt. 11:14; Dt. 18:15; Acts 3:22; **Jn. 1:23** // Is. 40:3; Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 3, 4; **Jn. 1:26** // Mt. 3, 11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:28 // Jn. 11: 18; **Jn. 1:29** // Rev. 17:14; Is. 53: 7,10;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** Is. 61:1-2, 10-11; [Ps. 126](#) 1 Thess. 5:16-24; Jn. 1:6-8, 19-28; Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 61:1-4, 8-11; [Ps. 126](#); 1 Thess. 5:16-24; Jn. 1:6-8, 19-28;

### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Note that it does not just say “Jesus,” but “flesh.” Let’s make it quite specific and practical: When you get up in the morning, ask yourself, “What aspect of God, what aspect of Love, am I being called to incarnate in the world today? How can I be Jesus today?” Richard Rohr

In the beginning was the Blueprint. The Blueprint was with God. The Blueprint was God. And all things came to be through this inner plan. No one thing came to be except through this universal plan. All that came to be thus had life in him. Ilia Delio

All language about God is necessarily symbolic and figurative. Actually all language is metaphorical. Words are never the thing itself; they can only point toward the thing, which is exactly why “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). As James Finley, a CAC core faculty member, often says, “Language is in service of the unsayable.” When it comes to comprehending God and the great mysteries of love and death, knowing has to be balanced by unknowing. Words can only point a finger toward the moon; they are not the moon or even its light. They are that by which we begin to see the moon and its light. Richard Rohr

If we look at the evolution of the laws of nature and of natural selection from our Christian theological map, we might say that the Word of God evolves from natural laws to biological natural selection and to the cultural selection pressures of moral and religious systems. We might also say that the Spirit of God evolves in new kinds of random interactions that give rise to new possible life forms, cultural artifacts, ways of living, and forms of thought. I suggest that a major event in the evolution of evolution or of the immanence of God as Spirit and Word took place about two thousand years ago. The Gospel of John calls this event the "Word become flesh." Biblical scholar Gerd Theissen calls it a great mutation in the history of Judaism-Christianity. He writes that Jesus called people to a "form of life in which we develop structures adapted to our environment, not against each other but with each other, in which our less adapted fellow human beings and lower forms of life do not fall by the wayside as 'dysfunctional', but are integrated into a more comprehensive structure of adaptation" (Theissen 1985, 122). We could say that this was an emergence of a new kind of human being or a new way of being human. What was it about Jesus and the way people experienced him that led some to conclude that the Word had become flesh? World religions scholar and teacher Huston Smith suggests that it was not how he looked or any particular thing he said or did but the kind of person he was. In people's experience of him, the tradition of loving God and neighbor was transformed from loving only certain people to universal, unconditional love, love that knew no bounds, love for everyone, in every condition: . . . Peters, Karl E. *Toward an Evolutionary Christian Theology*. Zygon. 3/2007.Pg. 58.

God that is God does not cease to "exist." Creation is not God, as I understand pantheism to suggest, but rather essentially "otherness" of God. I cannot see how the various models of pantheism help in constructing a Christian theology of nature. The Christian revelation about creation does not proclaim that creation is an extension or a function embedded in God. Rather, the Word of God that is and remains God is given away to creation. It is a gift that empowers creation to become itself.

How it can be that the Word of God remains God yet also becomes the creative center of creation is beyond human understanding. It is a paradox of Christian faith that human logic cannot resolve. There is a light, however, that illuminates this paradox from another incomprehensible event: the mystery of Christmas. In this event true God becomes truly human. God becomes that which God is not, a human being. As I see it, the mystery of Christmas illuminates the mystery of creation. Christmas is the demonstration that God can be God in that which is not God.

The attempt to construct a trail toward an updated understanding of creation has led us from Genesis to Christmas. . From here a view opens into the mystery that cloaks creation. From the mystery of incarnation shines a light in which one can see that Christmas and creation belong together. They belong together because the Word of God becomes otherness of God in creation and in the Christmas event. Pope John Paul II, addressing the bishops of the Catholic Church in a letter, wrote: "The mystery of the Incarnation will always remain the central point of reference for an understanding of the enigma of human existence, the created world and God himself. The challenge of this mystery pushes philosophy to its limits, as reason is summoned to make its own a logic which

brings down the walls within which it risks being confined" (1998, 84). God's logic of incarnation, the paradox that God can be God in that which is not God, is the foundation of creation. The Word of God incarnate in creation is that creative center from which all creativity of nature originates. This creative center is the Word of God that is God but departs from God, is given away to creation so that creation may become. The philosophical question "What is the nature of Nature?" finds here its answer: The nature of Nature is the Word of God given away to creation. Brun, Rudolf B. *Strict Naturalism and Christianity*. Zygon 9/2007 Pg. 711.

The Ebionites did not subscribe to the notion of Jesus' preexistence or his virgin birth....Ebionite Christians, however, did not have our New Testament and understood Jesus differently. For them, Jesus was the Son of God not because of his divine nature or virgin birth but because of his "adoption" by God to be his son. This kind of Christology is, accordingly, sometimes called "adoptionist." To express the matter more fully, the Ebionites believed that Jesus was a real flesh-and-blood human like the rest of us, born as the eldest son of the sexual union of his parents, Joseph and Mary. What set Jesus apart from all other people was that he kept God's law perfectly and so was the most righteous man on earth. As such, God chose him to be his son and assigned to him a special mission, to sacrifice himself for the sake of others. Jesus then went to the cross, not as a punishment for his own sins but for the sins of the world, a perfect sacrifice in fulfillment of all God's promises to his people, the Jews, in the holy Scriptures. As a sign of his acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice, God then raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to heaven.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities*. NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2003. Pg. 100-01.

The feast of Advent began in Western Christianity in the 10th Century. In the Middle Ages it was a pre-Christmas fasting time. The focus shifted from Christ's Second Coming as Lord and judge to the anticipation of Jesus' birth.

If you took all of creation history and called it a year, Jesus would have been born only four seconds ago. Carl Sagan.

Many religious systems use light as a central metaphor. Some are: Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism. "According to mainstream biblical scholarship, the Genesis account is based on Mesopotamian and Canaanite creation myths. There are, however, a number of examples of the appearance of light in other religious cosmologies worldwide. Among these are the creation myths of the Polynesians, the Navaho and Zuni in the southwestern United States, the Tuamotuan, and the Egyptians to name a few." Pg. 76.

Fagg, Lawrence W. *Electromagnetism and the Sacred*. NY. The Continuum Pub. Co. 1999.

In the ancient world there developed ways of thinking about what was real and what could be known. "Philo identified this intelligible with a hypostasis (separate manifestation) of God which he called the logos the rational pattern of the world. The Gospel of John 1:1 translates logos as "Word" but it never means "Word" in any lexical sense. It is this rational hypostasis of God which the Gospel of John proclaims as the creative agent in the world (1:3) and is incarnated in the person of Jesus (1:14) Philo would have agreed with the first statement but found the second illogical and impossible. This term already had a long history and technical meaning in Stoicism but Philo found it advantageous for his own mixture of Stoicism and Platonism, so he developed new meanings and uses for it." Pgs. 371-372. Segal, Alan F. *Life after Death*. NY. Doubleday. 2004.

Baptism means immersion. If our mission as Church is to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit, it means to discover and help others to discover the immersion of God in our world, or rather, that our world is immersed in God. Fr. David Bock

JOHN'S BAPTISM: It was not forgiveness so much as the dramatic once-for-all conversion which John's baptism symbolized which was new. --William Loader

Perhaps Christians need to say something different to their children. "My child, the world is always a dangerous and threatening place where death surrounds us. When I brought you for baptism I acknowledged that I could not possibly guarantee your future. I handed you over to the God who loves you and with whom you are safe in both life and death. There is no security to be found elsewhere, certainly not from me or those like me. Live with courage, therefore, and, if it must be, do not be afraid to die in the service of what is good and just." Meilaender, Gilbert. [After September 11](#). Christian Century 9/36-10/3, 2001 Pg. 8.

Christ does not confine God. Christ rather reveals God. Christ unveils God, but does not limit God. Christ is the image of the imageless one (Col 1:15). Christ belongs to all, and not to Christians alone, even if Christians have a singularly unique access to Christ through the Church and sacraments. Christ is the Logos incarnate, but according to the Catholic Tradition, and in patristic theology, the Logos is not confined to its presence and action in Jesus. There is more to the Logos than Jesus alone. The Logos was already present and active in creation and history before Jesus was ever conceived. Seeds of the Logos were present there, and the Logos himself was present there. Nothing came to be without the Logos (John 1:1-14).

The incarnate Word is the Word, and the Word is the same Word that is incarnate. Yet the presence and action of the Word is more extensive than its historical presence and action in Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe that Jesus is the most intensive presence of the Word in history, unsurpassed and unsurpassable, but not the Word's only or exclusive presence, but rather the supreme manifestation of what is present elsewhere. Jesus fully embodies the Word. That's who Jesus is, and that's who the Word is, but God's presence in Christ does not confine God's presence, but rather reveals it. The Word reveals. That is what the Word does as God's

self-communication, self-revelation. The Word was with God, the Word was God, the Word is God as self-communicating, as self-disclosing, as reaching out, as coming near, as close at hand, as in our midst, as Immanuel (Is 7:14; John 1:1-18) The Word grounds all religious truth and is the underlying interconnection of the religions of the world.

So there is more to the Word than its incarnate presence in and self-identification with Jesus, and more to the Spirit than its activity in Jesus and the church. The Word and Spirit are present and active in all the major religious traditions of the world -- the selfsame Word that is Jesus, the one and only Holy Spirit, source of unity and diversity in the world and in the religions of the world. The Holy Spirit and the only-begotten Son do not confine God. They are not God confined but God unleashed, the sources of God's immanence and presence. They are God as self-revealing and self-giving. **Dialogue and Truth** by Donald J. Goergen, O.P.



12/11 BCE: Agonalia for Sol Indiges Ancient Roman- Festival to honor the sun god, Sol Indiges. One of the many pagan feasts that surrounded the people of Jesus' times.

Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. Advent is a winter training camp for those who desire peace. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place.- Edward Hays, "A Pilgrim's Almanac"

Jn. 1.1–18: Prologue. In contrast to Matthew and Luke, John does not include an infancy narrative describing Jesus' conception and birth; neither Joseph nor Mary figures in the account of Jesus' human origins. Rather, Jesus' arrival in the world is described in cosmological terms, and his role as God's son emphasized. 1–3: In the beginning, echoing the opening of Genesis. The Word signifies God's power of creation and redemption; as a means of expression, reason (or truth), and grace it is identified with Jesus (vv. 9,14,17). It suggests Wisdom terminology (Ps 33.6; Prov 8.7–30; Wis 9.1,9; 18.15; Sir 24.9; 43.26). For the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo, God's Logos was the very first fruit of creation; Leg. all. 3.175. In the Wisdom of Ben Sirach, Wisdom is strongly associated and even identified with the divine commandment, that is, the Torah (Sir 24.22–23). This identification persists well into the rabbinic period, as attested by its presence in Gen. Rab. 1.10, probably redacted no earlier than the fifth century. See also the use of "memra" ("word") in the Aramaic Targumim to Genesis (see "John's Prologue as Midrash," p. 546). With God, as in Prov 8.22–31, "I [Wisdom] was there . . . I was beside him [the Lord]." 4: Life, whose source is God (Gen 1.20–25); light, the first created thing (Gen 1.3); a frequent image for God or God's presence or favor (Isa 2.5; Ps 27.1; 36.9). Cf. also Wis 7.26. 5: Creation (Gen 1.2). The light/darkness contrast, a prominent theme in the Gospel of John, is evident also in the Dead Sea Scrolls, e.g., 1QS 3.13–4.26, but direct influence of the DSS on the Gospel is unlikely. 6–8: These verses preview 1.19–34. John the Baptist is also mentioned by Josephus, Ant. 18.116–119. 10–12: These verses summarize the basic plot of the Gospel, on both the historical and cosmological levels: Jesus' own people, the Jews, failed to accept him and indeed they led him to his death; those who did accept him become God's children and receive eternal life. The world (Gk "kosmos") is used in two senses, meaning both creation and humankind, or, more specifically, that portion of humankind that rejected Jesus (cf. 12.31; 16.11). 11: His own people are the Jews (4.22; cf. Ex 19.5). 12–13: Contrast between a biologically based covenant, such as that of the Jews, and a faith-based covenant, such as that the Gospel proposes (cf. 8.33–40). Believed in his name, gave him due honor. Children of God, contrast Deut 14.1, where the "children" are enjoined from following other religious practices than those given to them. 14: Word became flesh, a paradoxical formulation since "flesh" is all that is perishable and "logos" is a divine quality that is eternal; cf. Isa 40.6–8, "All people [lit., 'flesh'] are grass . . . The grass withers . . . but the word of our God will stand forever." This point marks the "incarnation," the moment at which the Word becomes a human being. The idea that a divine being, "God's son," can simultaneously be human is seen as a major dividing line between Judaism and Christianity by many Jews and Christians today. It should be noted, however, that Jews in the Second Temple period believed in the existence of supernatural beings, such as angels, who could at times take human form (e.g., Raphael in the book of Tobit). This is not to say that Christ-confessors believed Jesus was human in form only (this was argued by the Docetists, a group labeled as heretical by the developing Christian church), but simply that the boundaries between human and divine were understood in a more porous and less absolute way at this time. Lived among us, the Gk means "tabernacled," an allusion to the Tabernacle that the Israelites constructed in the wilderness and the precursor of the Jerusalem Temple (e.g., Ex 25.9). There may also be a connection to the Heb "shekhinah," which in some texts, such as Tg. Onq. at Deut 12.5, was used as a technical term for God's presence among God's people. Glory, Gk "doxa" is the usual LXX equivalent of Heb "kavod," the visible manifestation of God's presence (e.g., Ex 16.10). 17–18: Contrast between Jesus and Moses, and the superiority of the Gospel to the Torah (Ex 34.18). Grace and truth, both God's loving presence (Heb "hesed," "steadfast love," e.g., Ps 85.10) and God's firm faithfulness (Heb "emet," "truth" that does not give way). Pgs. 157-158

[The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#) For a comprehensive introduction to this gospel read pages 152-7 of this same text.

#### SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: [www.theark1.com](http://www.theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2007. Pgs. 11-14. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2010. Pgs.9-12. To order contact [Carol Oberfoel](#)