

## ***Jesus Changes Everything: Advent 2009***

### **Word and Wisdom**

#### **First Sunday in Advent**

November 28/29, 2009

**Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)**

***Jesus Changes Everything: Word and Wisdom***

Written by: Robert Ismon Brown (bbrown@chicagofirstnaz.org)

#### **Background Notes**

**Key Scripture Texts:** John 1:1-5; Isaiah 55:8-11; Proverbs 8:22-36

#### **Introduction**

Expectation and hope usually accompany the lighting of the first Advent candle. Symbolically, the darkness is at last pierced by the first glimmer of light. This initial flame ignites on the pages of the Hebrew Bible where the coming of Messiah is proclaimed in type, symbol, and prophecy. Each looks forward to the day when God would come to His people once more, and, above all, *speaks* with clarity and creativity, calling into being new things and restoring old things to their rightful purposes. Above all, ancient Israel yearned for a new *beginning* after generations of exile, failure and dread.

Word, beginning, light and new creation — these are the themes which introduce the Prologue of John's Gospel. During this Advent season, our pastoral staff and worship team have chosen John 1:1-18 as the primary guiding text. Through it, we intend to tease truth from ancient texts in anticipation that God is coming again to be among us. The beauty of the liturgical calendar, which begins a new cycle of readings with Advent, is the way it leads us to re-trace the ancient journey of God coming into the world. John's version of this story carries us back farther than the other Gospels. Before he tells us about the earthly Jesus, he calls us back before time itself and places us at the very threshold of Creation. We discover ourselves on tiptoes, peering into empty space and awaiting the earth-forming words, "And God said..."

The Advent story begins with a *speech event*: the Word of God. John introduces this single theme in his first eighteen verses, and we are left to ponder the mystery surrounding "the Word" until at last he tells us in 1:14 that "the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us." In effect we are told that in the coming of Jesus, God speaks yet again, but this time in flesh and blood living with us. When God speaks in Jesus in this unique way, everything changes. Never before or since has such a thing happened in human history. Advent announces an unparalleled redemptive act of God: He chooses to *enter* human history at the same time that He *speaks* to human history. His speaking *is* His entering, and His entering *is* his speaking.

#### **Prologue to the Prologue**

Before examining this week's key readings, we'd like to offer a general overview to the full text of John's opening introduction to his Gospel: the Prologue. Ironically, the *pro + logos* (=prologue) includes the introduction of the Logos (=Word)! Normally, prologues set the stage for what follows by laying out the key themes. In the case of each of the four Gospels, this kind of introduction exists.

1. *Mark* opens with "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God," and then proceeds with the ministry of John the Baptizer who introduces Jesus to the world through baptism in the Jordan.
2. In *Matthew* and *Luke* some sort of genealogy appears in the opening chapters, and both writers tell us about things that happened before the birth of Jesus.

Yet, in John's case, the *beginning* does not take place in history but in eternity instead. Largely he takes this approach to show that Jesus is God who becomes a human being. Nothing lives in eternity but God Himself, yet the Prologue boldly pushes the Word back before time.

Moreover, the structure of the Prologue is a chiasmus (cross-like format) which roughly approximates the following:

- A 1:1-2 The Word is God in eternity
- B 1:3-5 The Word creates the world
- C 1:6-8 The Witness of JBap to the Word
- D 1:9-11 The Word is rejected
- E 1:12-13 The Word received by some who become children of God
- D' 1:14 The Word becomes flesh
- C 1:15 The Witness of JBap to the Word
- B 1:16-17 The Word gives grace and truth
- A 1:18 The Word is God the Son

Using this structure, John focuses attention on the receiving of the Word by those who thereby become God's children. Already in the Prologue, God's arrival requires human response in order to become effective in human lives. We must receive the Son of God who comes at Advent in order to become the children of God ourselves. And that changes everything!

### **This Week's Main Text: John 1:1-5**

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Word we encounter in these verses takes the form of God's *promise* to humankind. Since there is no exact word for our English notion of promise, we are led to conclude from several examples that the Hebrew word *dabar* comes closest in meaning, and yet it is usually translated as *word*. God's word is his promise, and it is this Word which addresses us on the first Sunday in Advent.

### **The Beginning**

The familiarity of the phrase “in the beginning” is unmistakable. The Greek *en archē* (“in beginning”) parallels the Genesis 1:1 phrase *berēshîth*, and it draws the reader to the moment of creation. This is the beginning of all beginnings, and before it time belongs to God alone. No creature yet exists, even as the material universe lies dormant in the mind of God. For the writer of Genesis, the beginning is *the place* from which God takes His stand to speak all things into existence. It is an epoch shaping place, even as the verb “to create” is an epoch making event. Both the Hebrew and Greek writers omit the definite article before “beginning” in order to lay stress on the *essential quality* of the thing referenced by the word. All other beginnings must take their cue from this beginning. To borrow a concept from theologian Paul Tillich: just as God is not a being among beings but rather the ground of all being, so also, this beginning is not a beginning among beginnings, but the ground of all beginnings.

The Hebrew word for beginning is *rōsh*, meaning “first” or “head.” From the Greek *archē* comes the notion of *archetype*, the origin and form of things. Beginning is where things come *from* and is their ultimate pattern. Beginning tells us less about time and more about source. The Hebrews looked at time differently than the more Western Greeks. Even an idea like *eternity* is difficult to articulate within the world of the ancient Near East. The Hebrew Bible prefers to speak about the significance and impact of *events* and not about the passage of time. Time as chronology, sequence, and duration is largely eclipsed by time as quality, importance, and life processes. *What* and *how* something happened were more important than *when* it happened. Looked at in this way, eternity is that which imparts significance and value to events. The created world has value precisely because it originated in the beginning when God spoke.

Situating the world of John 1:1-18 within “the beginning” gives it the perspective of God-before-creation. It also draws the reader into the entire first chapter of Genesis where repeatedly we hear the words, “and God said” (*wayy'ōmer elohîm*). The verb “to speak” (*'āmar*) finds its counterpart in the noun “Word.” Speech for

God is not an abstraction, nor is God generating auditory sounds as He creates the world. Rather, the use of "Word" in conjunction with "in the beginning" evokes the image of God acting in and through His Word, who is also a personal being. As John eventually reveals, this Word is none other than the pre-incarnate Jesus of Nazareth! He who becomes flesh is also the one who fellowships with God the Father at the Creation, and who shares with Him in bringing the world into being. Other significant New Testament passages give voice to this idea, such as this one:

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Jesus himself is referred to as "the beginning of the Creation of God" (Revelation 3:14). He speaks authoritatively in the Gospels about what God did "from the beginning" (Mark 10:6; 13:19). He is called "the beginning" (Colossians 1:18). Later in the Johannine letters, we are told about:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...(1 John 1:1; see also 2:13-14).

From the last book of the Bible comes the emphatic assurance about Jesus: "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 21:6).

From this week's text we also learn that the Word was "with God" in the beginning (1:2). By making this association the writer clearly connects the person of Jesus with the person of God.

### **The Word**

Our text uses the Greek word *logos* to identify its subject. Through this choice of terminology, the writer reaches into the rich pool of both Hellenistic and Hebrew ideas.<sup>1</sup> The Greek *logos* has strong ties to the Hebrew *Torah* as evidenced in the LXX (Septuagint version). Of special interest is Exodus 35:1 where Moses gathers Israel and speaks to them the *logoi* commanded by Yahweh. Taken collectively, these words form the core of the holiest literature of Judaism, the Torah. In the same vein is the opening of *Deuteronomy* which proclaims, "These are the *logoi*..." (1:1). Psalm 119:105 explicitly connects the "word of God" with the "Torah of God." The Jewish philosopher Philo, also dependent on the LXX, states "The Law is nothing else but the divine Logos prescribing what one should do and prohibiting what one should not do" (*De Emigratione Abrahami*, 130).

In addition to the Torah association is the linkage between *logos* and wisdom or *sophia*. We see this in *The Wisdom of Solomon*: "O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy, who have made all things by your word (*logos*), and by your wisdom (*sophia*) have formed humankind to have dominion over the creatures you have made" (9:1-2). From *2 Enoch* we see how *sophia* is present at creation: "And on the sixth day I commanded my wisdom (*sophia*) to create humankind" (30:8). This is followed closely by the Dead Sea Scrolls (100 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.): "Blessed is he who created the earth with his power, who established the world with his Wisdom" (*11QPsa Hymn to the Creator*). Likewise, Philo also connects creation with wisdom: "who is to be considered the daughter of God but Wisdom (*sophia*), who is the firstborn mother of all things" (*Questions in Genesis* 4:97).

The rabbis add their understanding with the following:

Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, "In the beginning God created," "beginning" referring to the Torah, as in the verse, The Lord made me as the beginning of his way" (*Genesis Rabba* 1:1).

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<sup>1</sup> Considerations of both influences receive treatment in David A. Reed, "How Semitic Was John? Rethinking the Hellenistic Background to John 1:1," *Anglican Theological Review*, 85:4, Fall, 2003, pp. 709-726. Throughout this series we will also consult: C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, 1953; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29, Doubleday & Company, 1966; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NIC, F. F. Bruce, General Editor, Eerdmans Publishing, 1971; Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, Baker Academic, 2007 (Especially pp. 240-242 which deals with "monotheism in the beginning").

The Law, highly prized than everything, was created before everything (*Sifre on Deuteronomy 11:10*).

Thus, Law and Word become interchangeable, while Wisdom pre-exists creation itself and is the basis for its origin. The implication of these terms is worked out by Jacobus Schoneveld:

If it is generally recognized that Wisdom equals Torah and that Wisdom equals Logos, it seems...quite possible to close the triangle and conclude that Logos equals Torah. If a Jew heard about "The Word" (*ho logos*) in such an absolute use, he could hardly help but think of the Torah.<sup>2</sup>

In confirmation of this correlation, we only need examine John's later citations from Jesus himself:

<sup>35</sup> If he called them gods to whom the word (*logos*) of God came- and Scripture (*graphē*=Torah) cannot be broken- <sup>36</sup> do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? (John 10:35-36).

<sup>38</sup> and you do not have his word (*logos*) abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. <sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures (*tas graphas*) because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me (John 5:38-39).

<sup>25</sup> But the word (*logos*) that is written in their Law (*tō nomō*) must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause' (John 15:25).

What does this suggest about the meaning of John 1:1? Perhaps, following Reed's suggestion, the translation should be: "In the beginning was the Torah, and the Torah was toward God, and God-essence was the Torah.

In some essential and deeper sense, Jesus appears as the Torah in this opening text of John's Gospel.

As such he is also the *Wisdom* of God:

23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory (1 Corinthians 2:7).

...the knowledge of God's mystery...is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2-3).

These texts borrow from the teaching about Wisdom personified as found in Proverbs 8:22-36:

<sup>22</sup> "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. <sup>23</sup> Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. <sup>24</sup> When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. <sup>25</sup> Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, <sup>26</sup> before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. <sup>27</sup> When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, <sup>28</sup> when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, <sup>29</sup> when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, <sup>30</sup> then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, <sup>31</sup> rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man. <sup>32</sup> "And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. <sup>33</sup> Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. <sup>34</sup> Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. <sup>35</sup> For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, <sup>36</sup> but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death."

With a skillful interplay of terms like "at the beginning," "before the beginning," and "when..." the writer of *Proverbs* offers a vivid metaphorical depiction of wisdom (Hebrew: *hācmāh*) who appears as a being in the service of God Himself at the creation of the world. So distinct are the word choices, when compared with John 1:1-5, we are led to see in this ancient passage the typological presence of the pre-incarnate Jesus. Alongside God the Father, he acts as the "master workman" who forms the world. More importantly, Wisdom is the one

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<sup>2</sup> "The Torah in the Flesh," *The New Testament and Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Studies in Honor of David Flusser*, ed. M. Lowe; Emmanuel 24/25; Jerusalem: Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel, 1990, pp. 77-93.

in whom the righteous human being finds "life and obtains favor from Yahweh." Read through Christian eyes, Wisdom is Jesus who is the "way, truth and life" (John 14:6), and the source of grace and salvation to the believing heart.

Likewise comes the message of Isaiah 55:8-11:

<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. <sup>10</sup> "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so shall my word (Hebrew: *dābār*, Greek LXX: *hrēma*) be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:8-11).

The imagery is suggestive of the Advent of Christ. The "word" goes forth from Yahweh's mouth just as rain and snow *come down from heaven*. Natural creation benefits from precipitation, causing seeds to sprout which in turn provide bread for the hungry. In the same way, the Word coming down from heaven becomes bread for a hungry humanity who stand in need of God's "higher thoughts and ways" and the certainty of His purpose fulfilled in human history. Jesus the Word is the fulfillment of God's purpose and the success of His kingdom project! This saving Word originates in the "heavens" as One "higher than the earth," but then comes down in order to change emptiness into fullness. Also, "He sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions" (Ps 107:20).

Examined within Jewish tradition, the Word, Wisdom, Torah traditions are about God's self-revelation to human beings, the ultimate reality revealed.<sup>3</sup> As Dodd comments:

We conclude that, along with other quite ordinary uses of the term, the Fourth Evangelist uses the term *logos* in a special sense, to denote the eternal truth (*alētheia*) revealed to men by God — this truth as expressed in words (*hrēmata*), whether they be the words of Scripture or, more especially, the words of Christ. ... That is to say, it is a rational content of thought corresponding to the ultimate reality of the universe. ... But in view of the equation of the divine *logos* with the *alētheia*, it is significant that Christ says, *egō eimi hē alētheia* ("I am the truth," 14:6). He not only "gives" the word which is truth, He *is* it; just as He not only gives life, but *is* life. This is admirably illustrated in the discourse of ch. Vi. Here Christ gives the bread of life, but He *is* the bread; and His comment on this is, "The words (*hrēmata*) that I speak to you are life" (6:63). All that Christ is, is in His words, and He is the truth and the life. It is only a step from that to say, He is the Logos. This step is taken in the Prologue.<sup>4</sup>

While the Greek world also had its Logos philosophies, they do not bear down as heavily on John's understanding of the pre-existent Jesus as the Hebrew understand does. However, there are suggestive connections. If we cobble together some key Greek texts, the following evidence for *logos* congeals into a fair understanding of what a Greek reader might have heard when reading John 1:1-5. The Logos is:<sup>5</sup>

The plan or model of the universe.

Philo, On the Creation V; X; XLVIII; Allegorical Interpretation III XXXI

The source of order in the universe, that by which all things come into being and all things come to pass.

Heraclitus, fr. 1

Diogenes Laertius, VII, 134; 136; 149

Plutarch, Isis and Osiris, 377-378

Marcus Aurelius, V, 21; VI, 1

Philo, On the Cherubim -- Part 1 XI; On Husbandry XII; Allegorical Interpretation III XXXI; Who is the Heir of Divine Things XXVI; XXVII; XXXVIII

The source of human reason and intelligence.

Philo, On the Creation LI

Sextus Empiricus, Against the Logicians I, 131

Marcus Aurelius, IV, 4

Philo, Who is the Heir of Divine Things XLVIII

Marcus Aurelius, V, 27

Not understood by humankind.

Heraclitus, fr. 1; 2; 64

Universal.

<sup>3</sup> Dodd, p. 267.

<sup>4</sup> Dodd, p. 267-268.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Funk collected these Greek sources. <http://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Personal/logos.html>

Heraclitus, fr. 2 ; 118  
Plutarch, Isis and Osiris, 377-378  
Marcus Aurelius, IV, 4; 29; VII, 53

Eternal.

Heraclitus, fr. 1

God.

Diogenes Laertius, VII, 134; 136

The readers of our *Background Notes* should also consult the selected passages found in the **Appendix** at the end of these notes.

Persons with exposure to Hellenistic ideas who read John's Gospel would likely make their own connections between Jesus the Word and what the ancient writers had to say. While the primary context for the *logos* doctrine of John 1 remains the Hebrew world, still we cannot escape the reality of thought forms present in audiences throughout Asia Minor and the Roman Empire. They surely would see that Jesus fulfilled the foreshadowed intentions of their own trusted philosophers, and that added nuance gained traction as later Christian theology, especially through the church fathers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, took shape. For example, early Christian apologist Justin Martyr clearly presented his earlier teachings on the *logos* (Jesus relationship to Father) in the *Dialogue with Trypho* (56). Also, Origen notes, "The Word can also be 'the Son' because he announces the secrets of the Father, who is 'Mind' (*Nous*) analogous to the Son who is called 'Word' (*Logos*). For as the word (*Logos*=Reason) in us is the messenger of what the mind perceives, so the Word of God, since he has known the Father, reveals the Father whom he has known, because no creature can come into contact with him without a guide" (*Commentary on John* 1.278). To the fathers, *logos* was an early intimation found in the writings of the ancients which became a clear statement at the Advent of Jesus. What the pagan writers anticipated in their reasonings about the world, took on fresh meaning when the *logos* entered human history. That which the Greeks conceived as the pattern for all things appeared within all things as a human being.

What is distinctive about John's handling of *logos* is that "the very title 'Word' implies a *revelation* — not so much a divine idea, but a divine communication."<sup>6</sup> From the depths of eternity comes a communiqué to the human race, and it assumes the shape of flesh and blood and not the spirit of a disembodied messenger. God's Word to His creation is not the ecstatic utterance of the Oracle at Delphi but instead the embodied presence of the Son of God. No speculations are offered about *how* the Word was *with God* or how the Word *was God*. Rather, the One who existed in the period before Creation as Word-Wisdom-Torah also lived in the presence of God Himself. From that privileged place, "in the beginning," the Word is well-qualified to speak for God, and, more dramatically, to represent accurately God's character for the world to see.

### **With God**

Twice in the opening verses, we are informed that the *logos* was "with God" (1:1-2). The Greek phrase *pros ton theon* leans toward "in the presence of God" for its intention. When the preposition *pros* occurs with the accusative case (as it does here), it usually implies motion. However, a further meaning of *accompaniment* and *localization* seems more likely here. Elsewhere in the Gospel (17:5), the word "with" translates *para* rather than *pros*, but has a similar meaning when Jesus prays to the Father, "that glory which I had *with you* before the world existed." Another attractive option is to consider *pros* as suggesting *companionship* in the sense we noted from Proverbs 8:30 "I was there *beside him*..." The Hebrew has: 'ehyeh 'ētselō 'āmōn. "I was besides (proximate to) him as his artificer." What seems in view is not mere presence but the role of an assistant or helper. Actually, the root of the word 'āmōn is the verb which implies trust, reliance, dependency, and faithfulness. For the Word to be "with God" in the sense Proverbs suggests means for him to be God's "trusty right hand man" — to borrow from the vernacular.

The pre-incarnate Jesus as the Word *partnered with God* in all of His works. The Word was intimately involved in what God *was doing* and ultimately in what He *would do*. The Word occupied a position from which he might speak with confidence about what God's plans would be: "I speak of what I have seen *with my*

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond E. Brown, p. 24.

*Father*, and you do what you have heard from your father" (John 8:38). In contrast to the chaos of human experience, Jesus and the Father consistently share each other's presence: "Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is *with me*" (John 16:32). Moreover the one who shares the Father's confidence makes life known to us: "...the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was *with the Father* and was made manifest to us" (1 John 1:2). And this closeness of the Word with the Father has enormous consequences for us: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have *an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*" (1 John 2:1). The simple fact that Jesus Christ, the Word, is an advocate *with the Father* confirms the saving role of the Word in the lives of God's creations. In future terms, the return of the Word to the Father, after his earthly sojourn, is connected with sovereign rule: "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down *with my Father* on his throne" (Revelation 3:21).

When we speak, then, about the "with-ness" of the Word with God, more than one idea is intended. Still, in the repetition of 1:2, we are left wondering what John means when he writes, "the same was in the beginning with God." The Greek word translated "same" is actually *houtos* which might better be translated, "this one," pointing to the Word as the one who is "in the beginning with God." We might suspect that the writer is answering an implicit question by inserting this seeming explanation into his text, to the effect, "Is this the same being who was in the beginning?" What would raise such puzzlement on the part of the reader? The answer lies with the third great affirmation of 1:1, and to that we now turn.

### Was God

As Raymond Brown notes this clause "has been the subject of prolonged discussion,"<sup>7</sup> a true understatement! The obvious reason lies in the implied claim concerning the deity of Jesus. What complicates the discussion is the form of the Greek word for "God" found in the text. In the prior occurrence, the noun "God" (*theos*) is preceded by the definite article "the" (*ho*). That is, "the Word (*ho logos*) was with the God (*ton theon*)," where *ton* is the accusative form of the same article. However, in the clause, "the Word was God," no definite article precedes *theos* even though it does precede *logos*. What are we to make of this omission?

When the definite article is absent, the grammatical form is said to be *anarthrous*: "without the *joint* or article." Such anarthrous forms can either mean the same thing as our indefinite article, "a" which implies a single thing or a particular thing. If that were true in this case, the translation would need to read, "The Word was a god." Unfortunately, some have chosen this option; among them are the Jehovah's Witnesses who, in their *New World Translation* of the Bible, adopted that translation in John 1:1. However, another more plausible choice is to see this absence of the definite article as emphasizing the *quality or essence* of something rather than referring to its particularity.<sup>8</sup> As Greek grammarians Dana and Mantey point out,

The basal function of the Greek article is to point out individual identity. It does more than mark "the object as one definitely conceived" (W. 105), for a substantive in Greek is definite without the article. ... the Greek noun has an intrinsic definiteness, an "implicit article." Therefore, the explicit article does more than merely ascribe definiteness. ... [It is used ] to mark a specific object of thought. ... The use of the articular and anarthrous constructions of *theos* is highly instructive. A study of the uses of the term as given in Moulton and Geden's *Concordance* convinces one that without the article *theos* signifies divine essence, while with the article divine personality is chiefly in view. ... The articular construction emphasizes *identity*; the anarthrous construction emphasizes *character*.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the word order of the third clause in 1:1 determines the use of the article or its absence. The text reads in Greek: *theos ēn ho logos*, "God was the Word." The subject of this clause is "the Word" and the

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<sup>7</sup> Brown, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament*, Hendriksen, 1974, p. 81;

<sup>9</sup> H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, The Macmillan Company, 1927, pp. 135-140.

predicate consists of the imperfect form of the verb "to be" ("was") and a predicate noun: God (*theos*). If a predicate noun *follows* its verb, the article is usually included; when a predicate noun *precedes* its verb (as in this case), the article can be dropped.<sup>10</sup> Because the predicate (God) occurs first in the clause, it is said to be in the *emphatic position*, throwing attention on it. In such a case, the article would be unnecessary. There is little doubt as to the *identity* of God: the writer is obviously talking about the same God with whom the Word was previously associated. The emphasis falls in this instance on the *character* of God, for it is this character which the Word himself fully possesses and will fully reveal in his capacity as *the Word*.

All of this having been argued, we make the plain inference that the writer of the Gospel claims for the Word the same character as he claims for God.

### **Maker of All Things**

The assertion that in the Word "made all things" would have been incomprehensible without the prior claim that "the Word was God." The Greek phrase "through him" is *di' autou* and the phrase "without him" is *chōris autou*. The Word — Jesus pre-incarnate — was the supreme and indispensable *instrument* for the creation of the world. That is the force of the two prepositional phrases taken together. "No Word" equals "no Creation." The writer's choice of the verb *ginomai* in its various forms (aorist and perfect tenses) locates the origin of the world's "becoming" in the Word. The root idea of *ginomai* is simply "to become" or "to come into being." Sometimes the verb denotes nothing more than mere existence: "was." But here the emphasis is on the bringing into being of something which did not exist before, namely, the creation of the world.

As "maker of all things" the Word cannot himself be "a thing." The text makes that clear with "without him *not one thing* (from the Greek *oude hen*) came into being which has come into being." Furthermore, this comprehensive language ("all" from *panta*) subordinates every other creature in the universe to the Word, since they all owe their existence to him. Among the competing religious views, those who held to a myriad of beings between God and the physical world, were inclined to locate Jesus among them but deny to him the primary place over them.<sup>11</sup> John 1:3 rules out such a hierarchy of being. Jesus is no more a mere being among other beings than God Himself. Like God, the Word is the sole author of creation. To this affirmation, the New Testament gives a hearty acclamation:

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs (Hebrews 1:1-4).

<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible (Hebrews 11:3).

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17).

The role of Jesus the Word as original Creator had profound significance for the Christian movement. Not only would Jesus be associated with Genesis 1-2 creation, he would also become the author of "the new creation." Having presided over the first creation, his work within the new creation would be seen as a continuing and ongoing work of God and not a counter-creation project. The New Testament does not repudiate the world which God has made, but it does provide for the world's renewal and ultimate transformation. One of the errors into which Christian teaching might fall was that of Docetism which refused to accept that the Word actually

<sup>10</sup> See J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Syntax* by Nigel Turner, Vol.III, T & T Clark, 1963, pp. 182-184.

<sup>11</sup> The sort of hierarchy of beings described here existed in the movement which later become known as Gnosticism.

became a human being precisely because it viewed the material creation as evil and beneath the dignity of God. As the Word, Jesus takes full responsibility for the created order and anticipates its restoration. The old creation might suffer because of the domination of sin, but it concurrently looks forward to something better:

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now (Romans 8:19-22).

The world is good because the Word made it.

At the same time, 1:3 makes quite clear that there is a distinction between the Word and "all things" which he made. While the Word has a shared essential relationship with God ("the Word was God"), the Word does not have a shared essential relationship with the creation. That is, Christian theology does not accept pantheism: the belief that God and the world are the same.<sup>12</sup>

The writer's choice of *dia* as the instrumental preposition describing the role of the Word in creation does not exclude the involvement of the whole Godhead. The roles of Father and Son are carefully complementary in the New Testament, as 1 Corinthians 8:6 shows:

6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from (Greek: *ek*) whom are all things and for (Greek: *eis*) whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through (Greek: *dia*) whom are all things and through (Greek: *dia*) whom we exist (1 Corinthians 8:6).

For from (*ek*) him and through (*dia*) him and to (*eis*) him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:36).

For it was fitting that he, for (*dia* + accusative case) whom and by (*dia* + genitive case) whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering (Hebrews 2:10)

If we study the opening verses of Genesis 1, we also observe the role of the Spirit (Hebrew: *ruah*; LXX: *pneuma*) who "hovers/moves over the waters." Taken collectively, these texts attribute Creation to the Triune God, while acknowledging the role of the Word as Mediator in the creative process.

## Life and Light

The attribution of "life" (Greek: *zōē*) to the Word is consistent with what the Old Testament says about Yahweh's role as giver of life. Among the notable texts is this one:

The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life (Job 33:4).

Frequent prayers found in the *Psalms* appeal to God to "give me life" (see 80:18, for example). There is even a connection between the petition "give me life" and the phrase "according to your word" (119:25, 107). *Ecclesiastes* shows greater restraint, but concedes that God has given human beings "few days" of life (5:18; 8:15).

In the *Gospel of John*, we find Jesus telling his audience: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will" (John 5:21). "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33). Jesus connects his own giving of life with the giving of life by the Spirit (John 6:63). One special form of life — *eternal life* — is the gift of Jesus (John 10:28; 17:2). The Greek phrase used in this case is *zōē aiōnia* which refers to the "life of the Eternal One," namely, the life which comes from God. The emphasis is on the quality of the life not its quantity.

Paul, in his preaching at Athens, affirms:

<sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the

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<sup>12</sup> Such a view was held by Spinoza, the 17<sup>th</sup> century rationalist philosophy who wrote frequently in terms of "God or Nature," treating the terms as synonyms of each other.

face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, <sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup> for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring" (Acts 17:24-28).

The clause, "In him we live and move and have our being," carries the meaning of 1:4, "In him was life..." Similarly, in 1 Timothy 6:13, Paul writes, "God, who gives life to all things..."

The ancients recognized the real distinction between animate and inanimate things, though at times they tended to personify the inorganic world (but, so do we!). Genesis 1 speaks of "kinds" (*mînim*) and their ability to "bear" (that is reproduce) after their kind — the identifying mark of living things (1:11ff) — something not attributed to air, water, land, sun, moon and stars. According to 1:20, animals are "living creatures" (also, 1:21, 24, 30, 2:19).. This phrase comes from the Hebrew *nephesh hayyah*. The word *nephesh* points to a particular being, though it commonly is translated "soul" or "being." Such creatures are beings with life, creatures which "breathe."

In Genesis 2, the quality of humankind was "the breath of life" (*nishamath hayyîm*) which rendered the dust-formed creature as a "living soul" (*nephesh hayyah*) (2:7). The presence of "life" — *hayyah* — is due, in this case, directly to God's own breath (*neshamah*). Although the phrase is identical to that of other animals, the "breath of life" from God gives to this endowment a unique quality. Earlier, in 1:27, that uniqueness gets captured in the phrase "image of God" (*tzelem 'elohîm*).

What is the meaning of God's "breath"? In Job 27:3 the word "breath" (*neshamah*) and the phrase "Spirit (*ruah*) of God" are parallel in meaning. Still, in Job 32:8 "the spirit in man" stands parallel to "the breath of the Almighty" and to these synonymous things is credited the ability to "understand" (*tebinah*). From Isaiah comes a useful summary statement, but also one which connects the life of God with the light of the world:

5 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 6 "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, 7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. 8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. 9 Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isaiah 42:5-9).

According to John 1:4 (and the Isaiah passage), the impartation of life by the Word is also the giving of "light for the nations." The sort of life which the Word imparts has as its *purpose* "a covenant for the people" that makes the people light-bearers in the world. Blind eyes are opened and prisoners emerge from dark prisons because of this light. From the perspective of ancient Israel, God breathed life into His people so that they might serve His wider mission to the Gentiles. The correlation between "breath to the people" and "light for the nations" is explicitly set forth in the Isaiah passage.

In conjunction with the "life and light" theme, Isaiah also looks to the future when old things pass and new things come. This is remarkably like 2 Corinthians 5:17:

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Jesus takes up this image later in the Gospel:

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The phrase "the light of life" (Greek: *to phōs tēs zōēs*) actually translates as "the light of *the* life," with the emphasis falling on a specific kind of life. This would imply that the light proceeds from the life which Jesus gives, and I take the genitive form as denoting origin or source. In Paul's letter to Timothy, he connects life and light through the proclamation of the Gospel:

...and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel... (2 Timothy 1:10)

Not only is life the source for light, but also light becomes the supreme means by which life itself is made visible for all to see. Curiously, Plato, in the *Allegory of the Cave*, spoke of sunlight as that which is not only the *source of all things* but it is the instrument for *seeing all things*. Paul declares that the Gospel in its proclamation becomes the *carrier* of the life made manifest by the appearing of Christ Jesus the Savior.

The association of life and light may also involve *royal* or *kingly* connotations. Consider this passage from *Proverbs*:

In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain (Proverbs 16:15).

While the immediate reference is to an earthly king (probably Solomon), the parallel to John 1:4 is possible. As the Word, Jesus is the royal giver of light which shines forth from his divine face, and in that light "there is life." The New Testament speaks elsewhere about light on the "face of Christ:"

"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The language used to describe Jesus on the Mount of his Transfiguration is similar:

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light (Matthew 17:2).

In effect, the light from the face of Jesus reveals the "glory of God" to the world. With this statement, we have come full circle in our understand of *logos* as the revealer of God's true character. We find this echoed in the Old Testament: "For with You is the fountain of *life*; In Your *light* we see *light*" (Ps 36:9).

A familiar Advent theme is the arrival of "light in the darkness:"

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined (Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:16).

## Light and Darkness

This is the final theme of this week's reading. Though we have seen the contrast between light and darkness in the Old Testament texts cited above, now for the first time the writer of *John* makes explicit the *conflict* between these two realities. Once more we are in the middle of Genesis 1 themes, where God during His creation of the world confronts "darkness over the face of the deep," and then utters those triumphant words, "Let there be light!" Darkness and light become natural divisions in the order of nature by the Word of God. Minimally, that is the background source for John 1:5.

What does the writer make of this distinction? The answer lies in correctly translating the Greek phrase: *kai hē skotia auto ou katelaben*. The crux has to do with the verb *katalambanō* used in the aorist tense. Earlier English translations handled this with, "and the darkness did not *comprehend* it," suggesting that the light imagery had to do with knowledge, ideas, or truth. On that basis, 1:5 seems to be saying that darkened *minds* fail to *grasp* the light which flows from the life of the Word. The whole clause becomes a statement about spiritual ignorance or willful misunderstanding of God's truth. There are other texts which support that view:

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity (Ephesians 4:17-19).

8 ...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:21).

As our underscoring suggests, there are several points of common ground. We also find parallels in the Old Testament, and this one in particular:

<sup>4</sup> Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." <sup>5</sup> They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken (Psalm 82:4-5).

However, a second possible translation presents itself. The verb Greek verb has the additional meaning of "to overtake, overcome," and if there is any "grasping" involved, it is that found in a wrestling match, with hostile intention! From the *Odes of Solomon* (18:6) comes a closely worded text: "That the light may not be overcome by the darkness." From the Dead Sea Scrolls comes a collection of texts which deal with the *War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness*. We find evidence for this option in the Gospel itself: "The darkness will not overcome you" (12:35).

The conflict between light and darkness begins for humanity with the Fall (Genesis 3). Among the classic passages is this one:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

Consisting of words spoken by God to the serpent, the text serves as a blueprint for the conflict between good and evil. Ultimately, the "seed of the woman" is victorious over the dragon (Revelation 12). In the meantime, the battle rages, as the dragon "makes war with her seed" (Revelation 12:17).

Throughout the New Testament, light and darkness frame the Christian journey, and in view are strong spiritual and moral concerns. A few passages will illustrate this point:

12 The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (Romans 13:12-14).

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to *light* the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).

14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14).

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light (Ephesians 5:11-14).

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).

4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining (1 John 2:8).

To varying degrees, the New Testament depicts a continuing engagement between light and darkness, but with the overwhelming conviction that the light of God prevails. The last text above — also Johannine — makes its

case that "the darkness is passing away and the true light is *already* shining." This, then, is the message of the first Advent Sunday: **the Word who was in the beginning, God the Son, Creator of all things, spoke light into the darkness and, in his coming, promises light through the new creation.**

## **Concluding Thoughts**

God's Word is His promise to humankind. As we have studied in John 1:1-5, God reveals Himself through His Word, the embodiment of His Wisdom. Our Advent celebration this year falls in Year C of the lectionary reading cycle. The readings for the first Sunday in Advent support the theme of promise by declaring that God's kingdom — His reign — is coming, and then they ask that we make ourselves ready for it. With words of hopeful expectation, free of fear, the Old Testament prophet proclaims the soon arrival of Messiah. In turn the Psalm prays for help and forgiveness, trusting the righteousness and faithfulness of God. From Paul's epistle we discover his petition that God's people be prepared for the coming of the Lord. Then, in a glorious crescendo, the Gospel reading anticipates the nearness of God's coming *again*. We incorporate those readings, in conjunction with three Advent prayers, to affirm the Word, Jesus, who reveals the true character of God.

## **The Readings**

### **Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16**

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'"

### **The Psalm: 25:1-10**

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. 2 O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. 3 Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. 4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. 5 Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. 6 Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. 7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD! 8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. 10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

### **New Testament Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

9 For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 10 as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

### **The Gospel: Luke 21:25-36**

25 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29 And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 34 "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. 35 For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

## **The Prayers**

### *Thematic*

God of justice and peace,  
from the heavens you rain down mercy and kindness,  
that all on earth may stand in awe and wonder  
before your marvelous deeds.  
Raise our heads in expectation,  
that we may yearn for the coming day of the Lord  
and stand without blame before your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

### *Intercessory*

We seek the mighty God  
in the most unlikely places  
as a child in a stable,  
and in an empty tomb.  
May God hear these prayers,  
which come from the unlikely corners of our lives.

### *Prayers of the People, concluding with:*

Give us ears to hear, O God,  
and eyes to watch,  
that we may know your presence in our midst  
during this holy season of joy  
as we anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### *Scripture*

O God of all the prophets,  
you herald the coming of the Son of Man  
by wondrous signs in the heavens and on the earth.  
Guard our hearts from despair so that we,  
in the company of the faithful  
and by the power of your Holy Spirit,  
may be found ready to raise our heads  
at the coming near of our redemption,  
the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Glory to God! Amen.

## Appendix: Greek Sources for the *Logos* Doctrine

Though I'm inclined to believe that the idea of the *Logos* in John 1 is more connected to Jewish thought than to Greek, it still seems likely that the writer of John's Gospel was aware of the generally held beliefs about the *Logos* doctrine in antiquity. The following quotations reveal how the world was being prepared by God, even through philosophy, for the coming of the Word in the person of Jesus Christ. Take note of how these Greek thinkers conceptualized their understanding of the *Logos*, and note the ancient parallels to Christian thought.

### **Heraclitus**

**Wheelwright, P. (1959). *Heraclitus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.**

Heraclitus was a native of Ephesus who lived in the sixth century, BC. He was among the first western thinkers to set forth what could be called a systematic philosophy. His writings exist now only in the form of fragments, preserved by later writers, such as Sextus Empiricus.

#### **Heraclitus, fr. 1 (p. 19)**

Although this Logos is eternally valid, yet men are unable to understand it -- not only before hearing it, but even after they have heard it for the first time. That is to say, although all things come to pass in accordance with this Logos, men seem to be quite without any experience of it -- at least if they are judged in the light of such words and deeds as I am here setting forth. ...

#### **Heraclitus, fr. 2 (p. 19)**

We should let ourselves be guided by what is common to all. Yet although the Logos is common to all, most men live as if each had a private intelligence of his own.

#### **Heraclitus, fr. 64 (p. 68)**

Although intimately connected with the Logos, men keep setting themselves against it.

#### **Heraclitus, fr. 118 (p. 102)**

Listening not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to acknowledge that all things are one.

**Sextus Empiricus (1935). *Sextus Empiricus, Vol. II* (translated by R.G. Bury), Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [PA4410.S5]**

Sextus Empiricus was one of the philosophers who preserved the fragments of Heraclitus, in the form of quotations used in his own works.

#### **Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians I*, 131 (pp. 70-71)**

... Heraclitus, then, asserts that this common and divine reason [logos], by participation in which we become rational, is the criterion of truth. ...

### **The Stoics**

**Diogenes Laertius (1931). *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (translated by R.D. Hicks), Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinmann Ltd. [PA3612.D5]**

Diogenes Laertius summarized the thoughts of early philosophers. He wrote probably in the third, perhaps as late as the fourth, century BC. Though probably not a Stoic himself, the following excerpts summarize some Stoic beliefs.

#### **Diogenes Laertius, VII, 134 (pp. 238-239)**

They [the Stoics] hold that there are two principles in the universe, the active principle and the passive. The passive principle, then, is a substance without quality, i.e., matter, whereas the active is the reason [logos] inherent in this substance, that is God. For he is everlasting and the artificer of each several things throughout the whole extent of matter.

...

#### **Diogenes Laertius, VII, 136 (pp. 240-241)**

In the beginning [God] was by himself; he transformed the whole of substance through air into water, and just as in animal generation the seed has a moist vehicle, so in cosmic moisture, God, who is the seminal reason [logos] of the universe remains behind in the moisture ...

**Diogenes Laertius, VII, 149 (pp. 252-253)**

... all things happen by fate ... Fate is defined as an endless chain of causation whereby things are, or as the reason [logos] or formula by which the world goes on. ...

**Plutarch (1936). Moralia (translated by F.C. Babbitt), Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [PA4368.A2]**

Plutarch was a philosopher of the first and second centuries AD. He was an independent thinker, but was known best for his biographies of other philosophers.

**Plutarch, Isis and Osiris, 377-378 (pp. 156-157)**

... just as the sun and the moon and the heavens and the earth and the sea are common to all, but are called by different names by different peoples, so for that one rationality [logos] which keeps all these things in order and the one Providence which watches over them and the ancillary powers that are set over all, there have arisen among different peoples, in accordance with their customs, different honors and appellations. ...

**Marcus Aurelius (1916). The Communings With Himself of Marcus Aurelius, Emperor of Rome (translated by C.R. Haines), Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [PA3939.A2]**

Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher of the third century, AD. His philosophy, while not entirely systematic, was a practical rule of life rather than an esoteric doctrine. Though he lived and wrote long after the time the fourth gospel was written, it is believed his thoughts on The Logos were pretty representative of Stoic thought around that time.

**Marcus Aurelius, IV, 4 (pp. 70-71)**

If the intellectual capacity is common to us all, common too is the reason [logos], which makes us rational creatures. If so, that reason [logos] also is common which tells us to do or not to do. ...

**Marcus Aurelius, IV, 29 (pp. 82-85)**

... He is an exile who exiles himself from civic reason [logos], ... he who renounces, and severs himself from, the reason [logos] of our common Nature, because he is ill-pleased at what happens -- for the same Nature brings this into being, that also brought thee; a limb cut off from the community, he who cuts off his own soul from the soul of all rational [logical] things, which is but one.

**Marcus Aurelius, V, 27 (pp. 122-123)**

Walk with the Gods! And he does walk with the Gods, who lets them see his soul invariably satisfied with its lot and carrying out the will of that 'genius,' a particle of himself, which Zeus has given to every man as his captain and guide -- and this is none other than each man's intelligence and reason [logos].

**Marcus Aurelius, V, 21 (pp. 124-125)**

... What soul, then, has skill and knowledge? Even that which knoweth beginning and end, and the reason [logos] that informs all Substance, and governs the Whole from ordered cycle to cycle through all eternity.

**Marcus Aurelius, VI, 1 (pp. 130-131)**

The Universal Substance is docile and ductile; and the Reason [Logos] that controls it has no motive in itself to do wrong. For it hath no wrongness and doeth no wrong, nor is anything harmed by it. But all things come into being and fulfill their purpose as it directs.

**Marcus Aurelius, VII, 53 (pp. 184-187)**

A work that can be accomplished in obedience to that reason [logos] which we share with the Gods is attended with no fear. For no harm need be anticipated, where by an activity that follows the right road and satisfies the demands of our constitution, we can ensure our own weal.

**The Hellenistic Jews**

**Philo of Alexandria (1993). The Works of Philo, translated by C.D. Yonge. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.**

Philo was a Jew of Alexandria who lived around the time of Christ. He wrote elaborate allegories of the books of the Bible attributed to Moses, interpreting Mosaic writings in terms of Greek philosophy. As such, his writings constitute a summary of Greek thought prevalent up to his time.

**Philo, On the Creation V (20) (p. 4)**

As therefore the city, when previously shadowed out in the mind of the man of architectural skill had no external place, but was stamped solely in the mind of the workman, so in the same manner neither can the world which existed in ideas have had any other local position except the divine reason [logos] which made them ...

**Philo, On the Creation X (36) (p. 6)**

The incorporeal world then was already completed, having its seat in the Divine Reason [Logos]; and the world, perceptible by the external senses, was made on the model of it; ...

**Philo, On the Creation XLVIII (139) (p. 20)**

... For God does not seem to have availed himself of any other animal existing in creation as his model in the formation of man; but to have been guided, as I have said before, by his own reason [logos] alone. ...

**Philo, On the Creation LI (146) (p. 21)**

... Every man in regard of his intellect is connected with divine reason [logos], being an impression of, or a fragment or ray of that blessed nature ...

**Philo, Allegorical Interpretation III XXXI (96) (p. 61)**

... But the shadow of God is his word [logos], which he used like an instrument when he was making the world. And this shadow, and, as it were, model, is the archetype of other things. ...

**Philo, On the Cherubim -- Part 1 XI (35) (p. 84)**

... it is not the pursuits which you follow that are the causes of your participation in good or in evil, but rather the divine reason [logos], which is the helmsman and governor of the universe ...

**Philo, On Husbandry XII (45) (p. 178)**

... For God, like a shepherd and king, governs (as if they were a flock of sheep) the earth, and the water, and the fire, and the air and all the plants, and living creatures that are in them, whether mortal or divine; and he regulates the nature of the heaven, and the periodical revolutions of the sun and moon, and the variations and harmonious movements of the other stars, ruling them according to law and justice; appointing as their immediate superintendent, his own right reason [logos], his first-born son, who is to receive the charge of this sacred company, as the lieutenant of the great king; ...

**Philo, Who Is the Heir of Divine Things XXVI (130) (p. 287)**

... it was the untaught God who divides them, and that he divided all the natures of bodies and things one after another, which appeared to be closely fitted together and united by his word [logos], which cuts through everything; which being sharpened to the finest possible edge, never ceases dividing all the objects of the outward senses, ...

**Philo, Who Is the Heir of Divine Things XXVII (140) (p. 287)**

... God, having sharpened his own word [logos], the divider of all things, divides the essence of the universe which is destitute of form, and is destitute of all distinctive qualities, and the four elements of the world which were separated from this essence, and the plants and the animals which were consolidated by means of these elements.

**Philo, Who Is the Heir of Divine Things XXXVIII (188) (p. 292)**

... if there is anywhere anything consolidated, that has been bound by the word [logos] of God, for this word is glue and a chain, filling all things with its essence. And the word, which connects together and fastens every thing, is peculiarly full of itself, having no need whatever of any thing beyond.

**Philo, Who Is the Heir of Divine Things XLVIII (234) (p. 296)**

... the two natures are indivisible; the nature, I mean, of the reasoning power in us, and of the divine Word [logos] above us; but though they are indivisible themselves, they divide an innumerable multitude of other things.

**Digger Deeper:** *Jesus Changes Everything: Word and Wisdom* — First Sunday in Advent  
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *Jesus Changes Everything: Word and Wisdom*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. Read through the entire Prologue to John's Gospel, 1:1-18. Then focus on this week's reading, 1:1-5. What function do these opening verses have in shaping the theme of the Prologue?
2. Briefly identify the key words within 1:1-5, and then comment on their contribution to the whole passage.
3. When you see the phrase "in the beginning," what other Scriptures come to mind? Consult the following texts as you think about your response: Genesis 1:1-5; Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 John 1:1; 2:13-14; Revelation 21:6.
4. What is the meaning of "the Word" (Greek: *logos*) as it appears in John 1:1? Why does John choose to introduce his Gospel by using this designation? What function do "words" have? Apply this insight to the role of "the Word."
5. How does Psalm 119:105 help us understand the connection between "the Word" and "the Law" (*Torah*)? In what ways does Jesus make the same association in the following texts: John 10:35-36; 5:38-39; 15:25; Matthew 5:17?
6. The word "Wisdom" appears in Proverbs 8:22-36 in a personified form. What similarities do you see between "Wisdom" and "Word" in that passage? Notice how Jesus has the same designation in these passages: 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; 2:7; Colossians 2:2-3. Draw some conclusions from this.
7. Read Isaiah 55:8-11. How is God's "Word" described? Could you substitute the word "Jesus" in place of "Word" in this text? What implications follow?
8. Why does 1:1 tell us that the Word was "with God"? Compare this phrase with John 17:5, Proverbs 8:39, John 8:38, 16:2, 1 John 1:2, 2:1, and Revelation 3:21. How do these additional texts enhance its meaning?
9. Because 1:1 says that "the Word was God," what conclusion can we draw about the relationship of Jesus to God? How can the Word both *be with God* and *be God* at the same time? What Christian doctrine eventually emerged from passages like this one?
10. According to 1:3, what has the Word achieved in relationship to the universe? Also, examine these related passages: Hebrews 1:1-4; 11:3; Colossians 1:15-17; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Romans 11:36; Hebrews 2:10.
11. What future plans does the Word have for the creation? Consult Romans 8:19-22 as you respond.
12. In 1:4, we read about the Word and "life." What do the following passages tell us about "life" originating from God: Job 33:4; 119:25, 107; John 5:21; 6:63; 10:28; 17:2; Acts 17:24-28; 1 Timothy 6:13?
13. What connection between "life" and "light" appears in Isaiah 42:5-9? Explore this connection in the following texts: John 8:12; 2 Timothy 1:10; Proverbs 16:15.
14. How does "light" belong to the special nature of the Word (Jesus)? See 2 Corinthians 4:6; Matthew 17:2; Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:16. How is this a key Advent theme?
15. The contrast between "light" and "darkness" is treated in 1:5. Explain the nature of the conflict between these two realities. How does Jesus confront darkness, and with what outcome? Compare the following passages: Ephesians 4:17-19; Romans 1:21; Psalm 82:4-5.
16. How does Genesis 3:15 portray that conflict, and what symbols does it use to do so?
17. Do a further study of *light vs. darkness* based on the following Scriptures: Romans 13:12-14; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:11-14; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 1:5-7; 1 John 2:8.