

**Christmas Day**  
**Saturday, December 25, 2010**  
**10 o'clock (People's Mass)**

**GOSPEL: John 1:1-14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

1Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. 2οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. 3πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν 4ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων: 5καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν. 6Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης: 7οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ. 8οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός. 9\*)=ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. 10ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. 11εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. 12ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 13οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν. 14Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

***Word of God, Word of Life***

+ *In nomine Domini. Amen.*

There is something quite special about coming to Church on Christmas Day. In our congregation the nave is never full and overflowing, as it was last evening at the early service ... and we do not find ourselves in that late night liturgical exhaustion as we often do at the Midnight Mass ... nor are we wrapped up in memories of Christmases past. On Christmas morning there is a certain forthrightness about things, a directness of meaning and expression.

What comes to my mind is: we gather in the daylight ... not in the darkness of the “bleak midwinter” as one of the Christmas hymns suggests, but with the sun risen in the sky, giving light

to the world. And even though Christmas Eve worship is beautiful and lovely and delightful in the tradition of liturgical drama and story ... there's nothing quite like being in the light.

And that, of course, is the very theme of this Christmas Day Eucharist ... the theme which comes from the appointed Gospel, the beginning of the Gospel According to John, so familiar to us that we can usually roll off the first verse by memory.

For me it always goes like this:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

It's one of the first things in the Bible I learned to translate when I studied the Greek Language, the language in which the New Testament was written.

We used to say that the first 5 verses of John's Gospel were the Prologue; and indeed, they do function in that manner. But many years ago I was attending a regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and attended a lecture wherein the presenter was convinced that what we have in those first 5 verses is an ancient Christian Hymn, much like the hymn in Paul's Letter to the Philippians ... the hymn which concludes that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord."

The presenter had all of us in the room recite the first 5 verses together first in Greek, and then in English ... and as we did, we realized that he was right ... here was not a dull, academic prologue to a story ... but a hymn that introduced the main theme of John's Gospel.

Listen to it ... or say it along with me (verses 1-4):

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

2He was in the beginning with God.

3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being 4in him was life,  
and the life was the light of all people.

We do not have the ancient music for it, but we can easily imagine the followers of Jesus gathered in the community in which we believe this Gospel was produced ... we can imagine them singing or chanting together these verses at the beginning of worship.

And after those first 4 verses comes a coda that ends the hymn and is so remarkable and I have to admit clever because everything to this point in those first verses has been in the past tense ... *In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God ...*

It's the Gospel version of the Creation Story of Genesis. Remember Genesis? *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth ...*

All past tense, the same here. *In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God ...*and so on and so forth ... the creative utterance of God that is completely God,

fully God ... the remembering in this Christian Hymn of the voice of God in the Genesis Story that speaks forth the seas and the dry land and the creatures and humanity ... All in the past tense and the same here in John's Gospel ... going on for just another verse until in verses 3 and 4 a simple phrase of creation *What has come into being in him was life ...*

There it is ... the crown jewel of Creation ... *life ...* but then in the hymn a sort of musical half-rest, the tempo changes as it were and we are given something completely different and unique ... a line that offers the uniqueness of this story of Creation in the Gospel ... *and the life was the light of all people ...*

Oh my! It's all part of the whole, it's all together ... the creative word of the God and the life that comes from that word and we know that it refers to the Christ-presence the Christ-light ... and in the hymn it's one and the same, isn't it? *The life* is at the same time all created life and this special life whose Nativity we are celebrating this morning ... they are, sings the hymn, the same thing ... life, created that is the light of all people is life that is the Christ-life-light.

And then for just another half-beat while we are contemplating what all that means ... comes the coda, a crescendo of meaning ... because everything that has been in the past tense, this story of Creation where life is light and light is life and it is all the Christ-light ... it now changes radically ... are you ready? Here it is:

5The light **shines** in the darkness,

See how it hits the senses? Was, was, was ... and just when we expect another past tense, our ears expect to hear *the light **shone** in the darkness ...* we get just the opposite ..

*The light shines in the darkness ...*

Meaning that it's not over! It's not finished! It hasn't ended.

That's Part I of the Christmas Message as introduced in this unique way by the Gospel According to John ... the light shines in the darkness ... not just in the past tense of all the hymns we sang last night when we sang about the birth of Jesus ... but in *this* ancient Christian hymn ... it's in the present moment that comes rushing toward us light a light that shines in the darkness ...

But then? ... then the hymn concludes with line that we can imagine was sung like a long "Amen" at the end of some of our contemporary hymns ...

The light shines in the darkness ...  
and the darkness **did not** overcome it.

Back to the past tense (!) ... but in a clever way, because we get the point, do we not? ... here is the light shining in the darkness and the darkness was not able to put it out and guess what ...? It still can't! That's the meaning of this most beautiful mixture of past-present-past ... in the language of faith ... seeking to express in human terms what people of faith knew and experienced in the Christ-light that was and is life, just like a light beaming in the darkness which cannot be extinguished.

There is our Christmas morning for us ... the one in whom we put our faith, whose life and light we follow and sing with praise by our hymns and music this morning ... that is the light in *our* lives, for *us* in our darkness and it cannot, will not ever go out.

Let us pray.

Lord Christ, you came into the world as an infant child and became for the world the light that illumines the path of those seeking to find God and God's love and God's embrace. On this day, the celebration of your birth, we bow in reverence and open our hearts in thanksgiving for the light which shines in our darkness. Amen.

*Deo Gratias (+)*  
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