

# Second Sunday after Christmas Day

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## Introduction

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke start with Jesus' genealogy. John starts at the beginning of time and the moment of creation through the agency of the "Word". He identifies Jesus as the Word made flesh. In the first 18 verses of John's Gospel John presents the grandeur of his claim concerning Jesus in a highly structured poetic, hymnic form as the prologue to his Gospel.

We are looking at the Gospel readings through the lens of conflict. It is illuminating to see the God's creative activity in terms of reconciliation. God's creative process in bringing order out of chaos, and light out of darkness, continues as characteristic of Salvation History.

While asserting clearly the divinity of Jesus, John presents Jesus' earthly mission as a Divine search for reconciliation with humankind. Through the life of Jesus, his words and actions, and through his death and resurrection, God's true nature is made known and invites our response. "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (v16). It is the evangelist's intention that his readers, through meeting the Jesus of his Gospel, would be drawn close to the Father's heart.

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## Text

John 1:(1-9), 10-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And 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. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks

ahead of me because he was before me.” ʘ) From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

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## Comment

John’s style is marked by the frequent use of dualism: light and darkness, life and death, truth and falsehood, flesh and spirit etc. This is not unusual tendency in a passionate preacher and John makes no bones about it, for John is an Evangelist. In fact he tells us that his intention is to so present Jesus to his readers that they may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (2o.31).

Viewing this passage through the lens of Conflict and Reconciliation we see this approach entails a quest for truth, a spirit of openness, and a refusal to paper over the cracks to win cheap compromise.

The Gospel writer makes the extraordinary statement that part of the Word’s activity in creation was to share the Words own nature with his creatures, (“in him was life, and the life was the light of all people”). The indelible mark of that creative gift still remains, “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”

John the Baptist is called to witness to the light, “which enlightens everyone” and to announce that the Word, was among them in the person of Jesus.

After such a “high” we read the words, “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him (v1o)”. John is like a novelist portraying the pain of unrequited love: loneliness, isolation and rejection. In the face of a needy world, Jesus as God’s Word, comes with a gift to satisfy all longing, but the loving offer is rejected.

By contrast those who received this gift find their true identity as children of God (v12)

This prologue is like an “executive summary” of the Gospel – it is all here in this poetic jewel. It also can teach us so much about the manner of God’s initiative in addressing broken relationships.

- The problem is acknowledged and costly Action is planned.
- The Initiative is relational and personal.
- Success is not guaranteed. It is an open offer, a response to reject the offer is an option
- The action is unconditional. It does not wait until those who are ‘to blame’ show they have changed.

- It is a loving offer, showing that the motivation is the well-being of 'the other'.

So in verse 14–18 we have a description of Jesus life as the Word 'lived among us', 'pitched his tent among us', or 'tabernacled with us'. The tabernacle, (Tent of the presence), was the symbol of God's accompaniment of his people as they made their 30 year journey in the wilderness. So the life of Jesus divine presence in human form, reveals the glory of God more fully than ever before. Up to this point in history, the perception of God's glory was limited by human incapacity to comprehend the divine. John's gospel presents Jesus as the one who can at last communicate the glory of God, fully. "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

In God's reconciliation initiative in Jesus, God makes himself fully known, and fully vulnerable. A most remarkable aspect of God's glory, is God's vulnerability as God seeks a loving relationship with a humanity that has lost its way.

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## Response

a. Call to mind when a loving gesture that was rejected. Is there anything in this passage that assist the search for a creative response to that experience?

b. I am a member of The Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, and we use the phrase "It's better together" to express our commitment to reconciliation. Is it true?

c. Are you aware of a current conflict in your relationships? What guides your response to the conflict?

d. A retreat to hard edged Dualism is characteristic of what happens in Conflict – there are no shades of grey. John is writing, many scholars claim, soon after the fall of Jerusalem (CE70) and the context that John sets the ministry of Jesus is in a conflict with the synagogue authorities. In the life of Jesus and his mission to bring about reconciliation, how is the balance between naming the conflict, while not writing off your opponents achieved? Or is it? What can we learn from this, about how to make a creative reconciliation initiative?

e. What sustains you as a Reconciler?

f. The author Ben Okri has written, 'Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings.\* And, 'Stories, are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations.\*' (\*from 'A way of being Free' by Ben Okri ISBN 0753801418 p 112)

Does the story of Jesus give a reconciler a story to live by?

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## Prayer

God who delighted in work of creation

and continues to care for your world

in vulnerable and costly love,

Empower us as your children

To follow the example of Jesus

To respond to the destructive power

With initiatives of healing and reconciliation.

Amen