

time, would recognize it as news; those who did it for the first time actually called it news, and good news at that; though we are likely to forget that the word Gospel ever meant anything so sensational.

Dorothy L. Sayers, 1893–1957

Related topics

For further study:

Incarnation; christology; salvation

Closing Prayer

How manifold are your works, O God!

In its wonder and beauty,
the universe declares your glory.

Now, in the greater wonder of redemption
you have shown the fullness of that glory in Christ,
your eternal Son.

Grant that your children,
brought forth to new birth in the blood of his cross,
may give true and faithful witness
to this new creation of your redeeming love.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Celebrating the Christian Year, Year B, 2 before Lent²

CPL • LBC Year B before Lent 2.odt • 2021-01-12

² *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*

The Second Sunday before Lent

Principal Service readings

Proverbs 8.1,22-31

Wisdom at the beginning of the world

Psalm 104.26-37

God sends his Spirit and renews the earth

Colossians 1.15-20

Christ, the firstborn of creation, and the head

John 1.1-14

In the beginning was the Word, who became flesh

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The Prologue

¹In 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.

John 1.1-14 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

The prologue (1.1-18) introduces the central ideas of the gospel: light, life, acceptance/rejection, and the divine glory of the Word. By starting his gospel with 'In the beginning' John alludes to the creation of the world, Genesis 1.1. God created the world by his Word and by his Wisdom, which existed in God before creation, one with God but somehow not identical, Proverbs 8.22-31, Wisdom 7.25-26. In a similar way, God's Word accomplishes the divine purpose and returns to God, Isaiah 55.10-11. John uses the word *logos* (Word) rather than *sophia* (Wisdom), although the two are equated in Wisdom 9.1, perhaps because it is masculine.

The first page of John's gospel is one of the most dense passages in the New Testament, a combination of the author's christology and theology. It is poetic, and perhaps an early Christian hymn. Commentators have discerned movement from pre-existence (1.1-2), into creation (1.3-5), through the story of the human condition up to the incarnation (1.6-14). The final part of the prologue deals with the subsequent reception of the incarnate *logos* (1.15-18).

In the first verse, the common translation is 'the word was God', but there is a danger in taking this reading of collapsing the Word and God into one, but the author has gone to great pains to distinguish between them. It is difficult to catch the nuance in English, but a better translation would be, 'what God was the Word also was'.

After the poetry of 1.1-5 there is a change to a narrative section, about John the Baptist, so rooting the passage in history. John was not any man for he was sent by God. He was part of the divine plan, coming to give witness to the light so that others might be enlightened and come to believe.

There is a switch again to consider the incarnate Word who was coming into the world (1.9). Now there is an indication of history for the incarnate world as it is stated that he came to his own place and his own people (1.11). The Word entered the world and was rejected by his own people (1.11), but some did both receive him and believe in him (1.12) – believing is the right way of receiving him – and these people are already counted as 'children of God'. They do not have to wait for the

completion of the plan; they are already God's children, not by human initiative, but by divine action.

The prologue informs the reader that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the pre-existent Word, and that life, light, and divine sonship flow from an acceptance of the story of the unseen God revealed by the incarnate Word. This story perfects the former gift of the Law given through Moses. The author tells us *who* Jesus is and *what* he has done, but an important question remains: *how* did this action of God in human history take place? John unfolds this story in the remainder of his gospel.

Quotations

1

The incarnate Word is with us, is still speaking, is present always, yet leaves no sign but everything that is.

Wendell Berry, 1934–

2

[God's] temporal plan ennobled each sex, both male and female. By possessing a male nature and being born of a woman he further showed by this plan that God has concern not only for the sex he represented but also for the one through which he took upon himself our nature.

St Augustine of Hippo, 354–430

3

So that is the outline of the official story – the tale of the time when God was the underdog and got beaten, when he submitted to the conditions he had laid down and became a man like the men he had made, and the men he had made broke him and killed him. This is the dogma we find so dull – this terrifying drama of which God is the victim and hero... now may call that doctrine exhilarating, or we may call it devastating; we may call it revelation, or we may call it rubbish; but if we call it dull, then words have no meaning at all. That God should play the tyrant over man is the usual dreary record of human futility; but that man should play the tyrant over God and find Him a better man than himself is an astonishing drama indeed. Any journalist, hearing of it for the first