

**SERMON: 2018/12/30 (Christmas 1, Yr. C) - *Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 147; Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7; and, John 1:1-18\_BTR***

The opening of John's gospel are some of the most beautiful and memorable words in the whole of the Bible.

And even against the backdrop of the rest of the book, these verses are especially well-written and thought-provoking.

What follows is mostly straightforward narrative prose, but the first paragraphs are a clever, rhyming poem.

And why?

Why begin his tale about the Savior in this peculiar, stand-out way?

Well, I think it is because John wants to convey something so unexpected, so incredible that ordinary speech would fall short - seem inadequate.

Like singing!

When we sing it has a powerful effect - on our minds, our feelings, and it isn't just the content of the lyrics is it?

Often, later, it is only the tune that we remember, and we find ourselves humming and tapping our feet even though we can't quite recall what exactly it might have been about.

Or consider the Ark of the Covenant - a beautiful golden box which could only be carried by priests who had ritually purified themselves - and yet, if you were to look inside, what would you have seen?

Two, dusty stone tablets with some Hebrew "chicken-scratchings."

As a non-believer, those heavy lumps of rock wouldn't have *appeared* to have been anything special, but the manner in which they were conveyed told you something very, very mystical and significant.

And so John is doing something similar with his introduction - he is trying to say something of the *greatest* importance - something that even a tale about stars and angels, dreams and wisemen wouldn't necessarily make clear - which is why he doesn't take *that* "route" as the other Evangelists - and that's that the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was a turning point in all of history.

Why?

Because history doesn't begin at Christmas with Christ, *but rather* Christ began history. He had an existence prior to His birth, and this isn't evident - at first glance(!) to the casual reader - in the other accounts; it remains a question; an uncertainty.

And this John won't tolerate:

It is an issue that needs to be "corrected."

He takes, therefore, the same fundamental outline of Jesus' career that we know, but he then *adds* to it - *he infuses it with* - the theological meaning which often goes unspoken in *Matthew, Mark* and *Luke* but must be searched out in their subtexts.

And, in particular, John brings to the fore - into full focus - the divinity of Christ. This is his 'distinctive purpose': at the heart of a project which was surely 'to produce a better gospel [than the Synoptics].'

(And if that sounds like a controversial thing to say consider that '[t]he earliest Christian communities were *one-gospel* communities', and each author was striving, in that environment, to produce something which would be 'a sufficient work...' [n.1])

And John doesn't want to leave it to chance that we might not notice God incarnate in that young Galilean rabbi, that baby in the manger - that we would fail to see the very many hints and subtle signals that abound in Jesus' words and actions as to His astonishing but veiled identity.

So, John "spells it out" in "flashing neon lights:"

Jesus was '*with* God' and Jesus '*was* God' '[i]n the beginning'. [1:1]

Everything else that follows, therefore, the miracles and healings etcetera need to be seen in *this* light: His commandments, His sermons and example isn't that merely of another philosopher or "guru," but rather comes *straight* from the Creator Himself.

And this is a truth we should *seize* on today as we face 2019 because n, for now - I don't need to tell you - is the time for New Year's Resolutions.

Yes, losing weight is a great plan.

And reading more books and spending less time on Netflix.

But what about Jesus?

And His Church?

How can you re-orientate your life more fully around Him and this as He - '*the Word*' - asks you to?

Let's pray: Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

Footnotes:

1. My argument here is influenced by the opening pages of the following work:

Colwell, Ernest Cadman (1936), *John Defends the Gospel*, Chicago, I. L.; New York, N. Y.: Willett, Clark & Company.