

John 1: 10-18

2nd Sunday of Christmas – 3rd January 2021

I wonder if you were commissioned to write a story of Jesus and his significance, where would you begin? If we think of the writers in the New Testament **Paul**, the first to write with his letters, amazingly hardly mentions the life of Jesus. **Mark** the first of the Gospel writers begins with the ministry of John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus. **Matthew** begins with Jesus family tree taking it back to Abraham and then gives a brief account of the birth of Jesus, after an angel has appeared to Joseph to reassure him that though the child is not his, he can go ahead with his marriage without fear. And **Luke** begins with John the Baptist's birth before the Annunciation by the angel to Mary that she will be the mother of the Christ. And finally **John**, several years later, who presumably knows the existence of the other gospels, but who is very distinctive in his approach. I can imagine him wrestling in his imagination how he is going to highlight the significance of Jesus coming. For him no angels or shepherds, innkeeper, star or wise men, not even the mention of Mary or Joseph... no material for a children's Nativity play in John's Gospel.

It's a bit like walking through a contemporary art gallery and you come across a huge canvas and as you stand before it, you wish you had an interpreter: what does it all mean?

Listen again to the opening line of his Gospel: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God...* as David Lose writes *You Gotta love John's chutzpah I mean there's absolutely no question what line he's imitating when he starts his Gospel: 'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.'* John in his deliberate echo of the opening words of the book of Genesis is declaring that the coming of Jesus into the world is an event which if you are looking for comparisons can only be compared with the act of Creation itself!

And just as God speaks his Word and the cosmos is brought out of the chaos in creation, so God speaks his word in Christ, *the Word who dwelt with God, who was Godthe Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth (14)*. That is God again has spoken, but this time he has spoken into the mess and chaos of human lives and through Jesus brings them to order life and light. *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.*

Whose birthday do we then celebrate at Christmas? The answer we've know from our childhood: it's Jesus' birthday of course, but John wants to say more: It is **our birthday**. In this amazing prologue to his gospel, which acts like an overture, rehearsing themes that will be picked up in the great symphonic story that follows, he bears witness to the one who comes so that we might be children of God.

God has spoken his Word to us that our lives might be nothing less than recreated and made new. The invitation that he throws out to us this Christmas – the Christmas gift above all gifts is the gift of Life in all its fullness. We are like the people of the seven signs with which he

structures his Gospel, which reflect the seven days of creation and he invites us to come in our chaos, in our joylessness, in our emptiness, in our darkness, in our meaninglessness, in our loneliness, in our lifelessness.

As John says in verse 16 of his prologue, *from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace*. The image is a bit like standing under a waterfall, a dynamic image. Grace washing over us, but there is always more. Today's grace meets us in our needs today, but today's grace will not be sufficient for tomorrow; but the grace continues to flow and will meet us in the particular challenges that tomorrow brings.

John's Gospel and the presentation of Christmas that he brings is one that isn't just an event, a gift that once you unwrap is it. It is a gift that will go on sustaining us into the New Year and beyond, that will keep us exploring and discovering new treasures.

To use another image, Christmas with John is a little like a Russian doll, except, when you open it up, rather than the doll inside getting smaller and smaller, as we open each layer inside, each one is bigger and more wonderful.

It reminds me of the final scene in CS Lewis' Last Battle...

After the last great battle for Narnia, with the kings and queens and faithful servants of Narnia pressed to the wall against foreign invaders and Narnian traitors, those loyal to the last king of Narnia, Tirian, are forced into a small stable at the top of a hill.

Tirian looked round again and could drinking everything in even more deeply than the others. She had been too happy to speak.

May the New Year be one when we too when we give ourselves time to reflect and will drink in deeply of the grace upon grace that is ours as children of God.

hardly believe his eyes. There was the blue sky overhead, and grassy country spreading as far as he could see in every direction, and his new friends all round him laughing.

"It seems, then," said Tirian, smiling himself, "that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places."

"Yes," said the Lord Digory. "Its inside is bigger than its outside."

"Yes," said Queen Lucy. "In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world." It was the first time she had spoken, and from the thrill in her voice, Tirian now knew why. She was drinking everything in even more deeply than the others. She had been too happy to speak.

May the New Year be one when we too when we give ourselves time to reflect and will drink in deeply of the grace upon grace that is ours as children of God.

Canon Chris Butt 10.1.21