

St. John's Gospel
Session #2 – May 14, 2017
St. Bede's Anglican Church

Last week we began our study of St. John's Gospel. Briefly in review, we mentioned that John's Gospel was the latest of the 4 Gospels to be written – probably sometime near 90-100 AD. It was written by John, son of Zebedee, and was put in the form we have today by John's disciples. A Johannine community grew up around John, in much the same way that in medieval days, great painters had a collection of people they taught the techniques unique to the master.

We noted that there is a very remarkable literary structure to John's Gospel – 4 parts:

1. The Prologue
2. The Book of Signs
3. The Book of Glory
4. The Epilogue

The reason for John's Gospel is clear throughout – Christological - John writes to tell people who Jesus truly is, the Christ. While that is clear to us looking back on history, to those living in Jesus day, it was not at all clear. After all how could a man be God? This was to many blasphemy or unthinkable. John's purpose is to make this truth clear.

The synoptic Gospels tell us “this is what happened”. John seeks to tell us: This is the meaning of what happened.

This morning we will look at the Prologue – John 1:1-18. It is one of the beloved readings in all of Holy Scripture and is used as our reading for Christmas Day.

The Prologue – poetically takes us from before creation, through creation, to the Incarnation and beyond. The Prologue is pretty universally agreed upon by scholars to be an early Hymn of the Church.

Structurally the hymn has 4 verses:

John 1:1-2 - The first verse of the Christological Hymn - The word with God

John 1: 3-5 – The second verse of the Christological Hymn – The Word and Creation

John 1: 10-12 – The third verse of the Christological Hymn – The Word in the World

John 1: Vs 14 & Vs. 16 - The fourth verse of the Christological Hymn – The community shares in the Word made Flesh.

John 1: 6-9 – are inserted into the original hymn. They deal with John the Baptist. They were written because in the Johannine community there was still a dispute about who was the greatest – John the Baptist or Jesus. So those who put the Gospel in its final form inserted this as a statement right off the bat to make it clear that Jesus is the Messiah. John was great and to be honored, but there is only one who is the Christ – Jesus.

It is unusual to open a Gospel with a hymn. But remember what we said the first week. John is not concerned with telling a historically accurate Gospel. We will see this over and over again as we move forward. He is interested in telling a story that will convince people that Jesus is the Christ.

The first verse of the Hymn – John 1:1-2 – John begins with those most sacred of words to the Jews: “In the beginning” They are announcing to everyone, that this Gospel is announcing that a **new creation** has come into existence through Jesus life, death and resurrection. It begins with a reference to Genesis 1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” By opening his Gospel with these sacred and familiar words, John has got everyone’s attention. Some 50-60 years earlier, St. Paul opened the doors for the Gentiles to be a part of God’s chosen people. Paul preached that with Jesus – all people can now be a part of God’s saving embrace. The Prologue attempts to be a description of the history of Salvation History.

But John does not start with creation as does Genesis – John goes back to **before creation** - “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God”.

John is saying God is Word. This is why in Genesis, when it talks about creation and how God does it, It says: “Let there be light” – and follows with the response: “And there was light”.

God merely speaks His Word, and creation comes into existence. (ex. – Genesis 1: Vs 3, Vs 6, Vs. 9, Vs 14, and so on)

John is saying that God not only speaks the Word, HE IS THE WORD! God’s Word when spoken does not come back to Him empty (Isaiah 55: 10-11)

The second verse of the Hymn – John 1:3-5 – The Word and Creation. In verse 3 – we note we have moved now into creation. All that is created is done through God’s spoken Word. This is why studying the Bible is critical for growing in our faith. God seeks to make all things new within us. In Christ we can become a new creation ourselves! Yes that means change! When we get to vs. 4 – we are

starting to see a reference to Jesus. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”. John is continuing to parallel Genesis – “Let there be light”. When God speaks His Word, there is life and there is light. Vs. 5 – “The light shines in the midst of darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” THIS IS GREAT NEWS FOR US - There is no darkness that can overcome God’s light. God will triumph in the end.

Verses 6-10 – are the John the Baptist insert into the Christological Hymn. If you read it as a hymn, you would skip from verse 5 to verse 10, and then it continues to flow. You will see when you read vs. 6-10 that they are a deliberate intent to diminish the significance of John the Baptist. John was not the light, Jesus is the light.

The third verse of the Hymn – John 1: 10-12 – The Word in the World. - While the most clear statement about the Incarnation does not come until verse 14, verses 10-12 are clearly now speaking about Jesus and his rejection by the Jews.

He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. And then you get the good news, “but to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” WOW – salvation is now open to anyone and everyone who believes. Vs. 3 of the Christological Hymn are a reflection of what is happening in the world. By 90-100 AD, the church is moving forward as a Gentile entity. Those who are now children of God, are those who believe in Jesus.

The fourth and final verse of the hymn – John 1 vs 14 and vs. 16 (Vs. 15 is another insert to diminish John the Baptist in order to point to Jesus - It is not meant to demean John the Baptist. It is a stylistic way for John to elevate Jesus as the Christ. Vs. 14 “and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son of from the Father” These are words that clearly tell people that Word which existed with God and which is God, the word which created the world, has become flesh, Incarnate. God became a man, Jesus. We have beheld his

glory. John is not talking about Jesus suffering, or the cross, he diminishes the passion throughout his Gospel. No Simon of Cyrene in John's Gospel, Jesus carries his own cross. No darkness covering the face of the earth from noon – 3 PM in John's Gospel. For John it is the glory that he wants people to get. He has no concern whatsoever about being historically inaccurate (or simply by leaving out what he does not think will serve his purposes). In vs. 16, John is proclaiming that you and I are the new Israel. We are the new community of faith. Vs. 17-18 - The law came from Moses, but grace and truth come from Jesus, who is the Christ, the way the truth and the life.