

Christmas 2022

Sermon #2: In the Beginning ... Jesus

John 1:1-5

Kevin Maurice ---- December 4, 2022

About a year ago, my wife Kate and I took our three daughters to Disneyworld for the very first time. And one night my oldest daughter Mary and I got to spend some time, just the two of us. And so, we decided to ride the Tower of Terror. It's an awesome ride. It's got a freefall drop and this cool Twilight Zone theme. And she loved it—so much so, that as the park was closing, she said, “Dad, can we squeeze in one last ride?” So, we ran for it. We were ducking under the ropes and weaving in and out of the empty lines, trying to get to the front in time. One of the park employees saw us and motioned for us to come follow him. So, we did, through this hallway shortcut. And as we're following him he starts doing these sleight of hand magic tricks for my daughter. So, he pulls a quarter out from behind her ear and he makes a card appear and then disappear.

We get to the front of the ride and we take our seats and we say goodbye to this new friend. And my daughter, with this sense of wonder in her eyes and in her voice, says, “Dad, I guess at Disney magic really is real.” It was awesome.

I would love to feel what a child feels at Disneyworld. Because let me just tell you, as a grown adult, I did not feel the wonder that week. I walked around with purpose. I navigated the most efficient way through the crowds. I found the very best stroller parking. Most places that I went, though, I just saw lines and dollar signs. I was busy. I was focused, just maybe not on the right things. Because my kids walked around in wonder. Everywhere they went they saw magic.

The British author G. K. Chesterton once wrote, **“The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for the want of wonder.”**

Today we're going to study some of the most wondrous words in the entire Bible. This Christmas season at Grace we're studying John chapter 1, and it's one of the most beautiful, most Christological (that's Christ-revealing and Christ-focused) passages in all of Scripture.

The Book of John is written by one of Jesus' disciples, one of His best friends. John is known as the disciple whom Jesus loved. They had this close bond. And John's writing about

Jesus reflects that. It's somewhat unique from the other three gospels. It's a bit more poetic, and John tends to zoom in and linger on particular scenes and conversations. And what I love about John's gospel is that he portrays the wonder of who Jesus truly is.

So, please turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 1. As we open up the Scriptures, it's my hope today that together we'll feel the awe and the weight of this passage. So, let's retrieve our sense of wonder. Would you please stand with me as I read from God's Word?

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Please be seated.

Today as we study John chapter 1, verses 1 through 5, we're going to come face to face with and encounter the inexpressible glory and wonder of who Jesus is. Because John 1, this passage, reveals three things about Him—three incredible truths about Jesus. He was, He created, and He is light and life. That's our outline this morning. We're going to work our way through the text. First, Jesus was. Second, Jesus created. And finally, Jesus is life and light.

John starts with this phrase "In the beginning ..." "In the beginning was the Word." In the beginning was Jesus. Jesus was there. And this is intended to immediately draw our attention to another part of the Bible. In fact, if you were here last Sunday, John 1 might sound very familiar, because last Sunday we studied Genesis chapter 1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." So, Genesis says "In the beginning ..." and John says "In the beginning ..."

That's not a coincidence. The first five verses of the Book of John are meant to be a reflection of the first five verses of Genesis. And when you place them next to each other, you see what the author's up to. And so, we're going to do that. We're going to look at these passages side by side so we can see the parallel in what John tells us about Jesus.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Genesis 1:2

The earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

John 1:2

He was in the beginning with God.

Genesis 1:3

And God said, "Let there be light, " and there was light.

John 1:3

All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.

Genesis 1:4

And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.

John 1:4

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Genesis 1:5

God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Do you see what the author's doing here? With each verse he traces a line from the Word, from Jesus, back to creation. So when John says "In the beginning, the Word ..." we're meant to also hear Genesis, "In the beginning, God ..."

Verse 2: "The Word was with God." Just like in Genesis: the Spirit was with God.

John talks about the Word creating all things, and Genesis tells us how. God spoke and created.

Verse 4 says, In Him, the Word, Jesus, there's life and light. And Genesis told us that God says the light was good.

John tells us that the light shines in the darkness and is not overcome by it, and Genesis talks about day and night and darkness and night, the first day. But it says “evening and then morning,” which means it ends with light.

Now why is John doing this? What’s he trying to tell us? What’s his purpose? John reveals so much about who Jesus is by allowing Genesis to color in the outline. Genesis 1 tells us that in the beginning, there was God. Even when there was nothing else, there was only an endless, dark, empty void, there was God. And John tells us that in the beginning there was Jesus, even when there was nothing else. Even when there was only an endless, dark, empty void, there was Jesus.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This is such a theologically rich introduction to the person of Jesus. And it drives us to the very heart, the very core, of the doctrine of the Trinity. God exists eternally in three persons: God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son.

And what John 1 illuminates and allows us to see is the Trinity all the way back in Genesis. In the beginning, there’s God the Father. Hovering over the face of the water is God the Spirit. And then God speaks—the spoken word. John says that’s Jesus. That’s Him. In the beginning was Jesus. Jesus was with God because Jesus is God.

That means that Jesus has always been. He was not created. He was not a part of God’s created order, He wasn’t a secondary plan that God came up with later. He didn’t emerge for the very first time on the scene in the manger.

The early church father Athanasius said it this way: **“There never was when the Son of God was not.”**

The Old Testament prophet Micah writes about Jesus’s birth long before it happens. And he’s speaking on behalf of God, and he knows that Jesus is pre-existent. And so, he writes this: **As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, you’re too little to be among the clans of Judah. But from you one will go forth from me to be ruler in Israel. And His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.**

The short New Testament Book of Jude—it’s toward the end of your Bible—is maybe two pages long. Jude points to Jesus existing before all time. And he says, **To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and majesty and dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.**

Often at Christmas, we read from the Book of Luke, which is a wonderful place to go at Christmas. It's Jesus being born in Bethlehem. There's Mary and Joseph and there's no room in the inn. It's a wonderful passage in the Bible to read about the incarnation of Jesus.

John is also telling us about Jesus—he's just starting way earlier. He's connecting his audience—he's connecting us—back to the very beginning. And what he's doing is reminding us that the incarnation was not the creation of Jesus. John 1 locates the Word, the Son of God, in relation to eternity. And he says that He existed before time. Jesus always was.

Now you may have noticed in this passage that John doesn't actually say "Jesus." You'll find it later in this chapter, later in the book. We know that John is writing about Jesus. But in his gospel, we don't actually get the name "Jesus" until verse 17. John introduces us to Jesus by calling Him "the Word."

And to understand why, we go back to Genesis. We look at the creation of the universe, because at the beginning of time, how did God create? How did God cause all that there is to come into being? He spoke. God spoke. In the beginning, there was nothing, and then God spoke a word, and there was. And when God spoke there was no secondary action needed. He didn't need to flip a cosmic light switch for things to happen—it just happened.

Because for God, speaking and creating are the same thing. Because the words of God are not just words. The spoken word of God is not just a spoken sentence. The Word of God is a person. And so, not only was Jesus there at the very beginning when it started, but He created. He created. Look again at John 1:3: **All things were made through Him. Without Him was not anything made that was made.**

Everything in the universe was created by Jesus. And it's not just that Jesus was the mechanism or the means of creation. He's not just the battery fueling God the Father's creative purposes.

Colossians chapter 1 tells us: By Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him.

Everything that ever has been or ever will be was made through Jesus and for Jesus. That's the wonder of who He is. Jesus is the Word. He's the voice that spoke and created.

Maybe He shouted into the void and creation, the universe, came to be. Or maybe it was a simple, direct command, and life sprang forth.

C. S. Lewis, in one of his fantasy books in *The Chronicles of Narnia* talks about the creation of Narnia occurring as a song. And Lewis writes, **“In the darkness, something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. At first it was very far away and it was hard to decide from what direction it was coming. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once. But it was beyond comparison, the most beautiful voice you ever heard. It was beautiful you could hardly bear it.”**

Maybe creation was a song.

Or perhaps it was a whisper.

In one of my favorite stories from the Old Testament the prophet Elijah is on a mountain and he's sitting in this cave and he's waiting to meet with God. And while he's in this cave, this tornado, this giant wind, strikes the mountain. And it's tearing rocks off, it's shaking this little cave he's sitting in. But the Bible says, “The Lord was not in the wind.” Then immediately after there's an earthquake. And again, this mountain cave of Elijah is being shaken to its core. And the Bible says, “The Lord was not in the earthquake.” And then there's a fire and there's light and heat and it's burning. And if I'm Elijah, I'm thinking, *Okay, surely this is God.* And the Bible says, “The Lord was not in the fire.”

And after all of that has subsided—it's all died down—Elijah hears this soft, quiet, small voice. My favorite translation of this is “a low whisper.” And when Elijah hears this whisper, he comes out of the cave and he meets with God. Because the Lord was there in a low whisper.

Maybe that's how Jesus caused creation, like a parent coaxing a child out of sleep and whispering, Hey, it's time to get up.

Now the Bible doesn't tell us how God spoke creation into existence, only that He spoke creation to exist. And the how is not the point. The purpose in all this is to show us the wonder of who. The purpose is Jesus. In the beginning, from the beginning, He was God, He was with God, and He created.

As we approach Christmas and this celebration of Jesus coming to earth, we're celebrating Jesus stepping into His own creation. He set foot on a planet that He made. He breathed air that He breathed into being. He drank water that He caused to exist. He spoke with and He spent time with and He healed and He was friends with people that He formed in their mothers' wombs. He was crucified onto a tree that He designed and spoke into being.

And the truth that Jesus was and that He created means that He created you. And Jesus knows you, and He has known you from all eternity. Jesus knows all about each and every moment of your life, because He's been there for all of it, and He created you. And you were made by Him and for Him, and the Bible says, ultimately, to have life in Him. You are made by Him and for Him to have life in Him. He's the only true source of life.

We see this so clearly in John 1, verses 4 through 5: **In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

Over and over and over again in the Gospel of John, Jesus talks about life. In John 10:10, Jesus says, "I am come that you might have life and might have it abundantly."

In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life."

And every time Jesus talks about life, He's talking about life that He created, and He's talking about an eternity that He knows. And every time He mentions life, real life, true life, He says that "you will only ever find it in me," because, He says, "I am life and light." John combines these two things, life and light. He's very clear, he's very specific on that.

For a moment, just think about how light works. How does light operate? To alter darkness, light must go into what's dark. Light dissipates the darkness that's around it by shining into it.

In our solar system we see this. The sun is 93 million miles away and it hurls its light through the dark emptiness of space until that light reaches our little blue marble.

When the power's out in your house and you light a little candle, you see the light dissolve the darkness that's around it. And for a time that room is full of light.

If you have kids, their room is probably illuminated by a little nightlight that's there in the corner. Y'all, my daughter's nightlight is kind of creepy. It looks like there's an alien abduction happening every night because there's so much light it radiates out from under the doorway. We walk by and think, *Yikes!* But she loves that nightlight because it destroys the darkness. There is not anything dark in that room.

Your flashlight, your headlamp, scatter darkness. Light must enter into the darkness to dispel it.

Now the truth of the Bible, the reality of our world, the truth of every human heart, is that on our own, you and I and all of humankind have darkness at the core of our hearts and souls. That is the truest state of our being—darkness.

And you can call it selfishness or pride or evil or sin. But what it is, is darkness. The Book of Genesis says that the heart of every human being is bent toward evil continually. Romans says that not only are we enemies of God, but that we're living in a world of darkness. Ephesians 5:8 says it very clearly: we are full of darkness.

And even if we don't want to admit that, we've all got those dark corners in our lives that we prefer to keep in the shadows. We all have those thoughts that we would never want to be exposed for the world to see. Every one of us has a moment or a lifetime of moments that we wish we could just take back, because we saw that darkness come out. The condition of our souls, on our own, is dark. We need a light.

And the Bible tells us there is a light, and that light entered into the darkness. Here's how. **In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God.** The Word spoke and all of creation came to life. And He created us, human beings, in His own image, through Himself and for Himself.

But we chose darkness. But rather than leaving us alone in the dark, the Word descended into the darkness. And the first sound that the Word made on earth was the cry of a baby. The Word took on a human voice. Years later, the Word would use that voice to invite people to follow Him. He would speak into the darkness and tell people, "In me is light. Your sins are forgiven."

Once, the Word spoke and He pierced the darkest depths and He brought a little girl back to life, and all it took was a whisper. He said, "Talitha Koum"—"Little girl, get up."

His voice breached this dark cave where His friend Lazarus was buried. As soon as death heard His voice, it fled, and Lazarus opened his eyes and he walked out of that tomb, out of darkness. It probably took him a moment for his eyes to adjust to the light. And when they did, he saw His friend, His Creator, and His Savior.

On the cross, the voice of the Word sliced through the very fabric of existence when He cried out, "It is finished!"—because it was. Because He is life and light, and death and darkness cannot overcome Him.

This is why Jesus was born. This is what Christmas is all about. This is what we celebrate. Jesus infiltrated the dark to bring us into His light. He stooped down into death to bring us back to life. And Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Do you believe that? Do you believe it? Are you following Him? If you follow Jesus, the Word, the Light of the World, if you know that your heart is darkness, but you've placed your hope and trust and your life in Him, then one day He says you'll hear His voice, the voice that created you, that has known you for all time. And His voice will welcome you home into His presence. And there won't be any darkness—only His light.

If you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus your Creator to also be your Savior, or if all of this is kind of new to you, or you grew up going to church but it was all about what you had to do and you never heard about what Jesus has done for you ... if you want to know more about what it means to follow Him, I would love to meet with you this morning. Any one of our church staff would love to spend time sharing with you what it means to follow Jesus. If you'd like to learn more, please stop by that welcome table in the lobby and say to someone, *Hey, tell me more about Jesus.*

If you are already following Him, then cling to this truth: you are not walking in darkness. You're not in the dark. You're walking in His light, so let's live like it. Grace, this December, this Christmas season as we approach December 25th, when our affections are so easily drawn toward distraction, let's take time to wonder. Don't be like a stressed-out dad at Disney who's too busy and worried and focused on the wrong things. Don't miss the magic. Choose to be a child.

And you can do that by spending time with the Word, in His Word. Take some time each day and study John chapter 1. We're going to be there all month. You can read it, you can meditate on it. Take it slowly. Maybe between now and Christmas Day you say, *I'm just going to memorize one verse as a time.* Spend time with the Word—with Jesus.

Most of this month, whether by choice or maybe your spouse's choice, you'll be listening to Christmas music, for the next twenty days. We just sang one of my favorite hymns. Just listen to these lyrics:

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings
Risen with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give us second birth

As you sing songs that are saturated with the truth of Jesus—you sing them in your car, you sing them in your home, or here at church, let's just sing them as they are. They're prayers. So, let's pray as we sing them. Let's contemplate these words that point us to the Word.

Or maybe this year it's time to start a new tradition. And you can light a candle. And as you light that candle, read John 1:1-5. Turn out all the lights in your house and just light a candle and read John 1 by candlelight with your spouse, your kids, your grandkids, with your roommate or your friend, or just by yourself. Light a candle and read the word and use that light to reflect on Jesus.

I recently read the story of Robert Louis Stevenson, the Scottish author who grew up in Edinburgh in the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when gas lanterns were just recently invented. They were brand new. And they didn't come on automatically at night time. You had to go light each and every one individually. This was someone's job. They were lamplighters. They would climb a ladder, they would lift the lid, they would light the torch, they would close the lid, climb back down, and move their ladder on to the next one, and the next one.

One night as the lamplighters were working, Robert Louis Stevenson, as a little boy, had his face pressed up against the window and he was watching them do their work, one after another, light after light, illuminating the dark city. After about an hour of just watching this, he finally peeled his face away from that window and said, "Mom, Dad, look, it's magic. They're punching holes in the darkness!"

Jesus punched a hole in the darkness. He takes hearts that are cold and dead and dark and He shines His light into them. And He brings us back to life. That's the Gospel. That's the good news of Jesus. He was. He created. And Jesus is our life and light.

Would you please pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we thank you for who You are. God, help us to remember the truth that You love us, You care for us, You created us. God, You descended into darkness for us. Help us to remember that, to walk around in that light. God, we pray that any sort of distraction or things that might draw our attention away from who You are, God, that You would be a light in that darkness. Help us to follow You more and more closely every day.

God, we pray that we would turn everything about ourselves over to You, that we would walk as children of the light, that we would take time to wonder at the beauty and the majesty and the glory of a God who knows us and loves us. We thank You for Your Son and the gift of salvation that He brings. And we pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.