

**St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA**

**The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge**

**Church Year C**

**Date: 1/3/16**

**Season: Christmas 2**

**John 1:1-18**

“In the beginning.” An interesting way to start John’s account of the life of Jesus. “In The beginning.” Does it remind you of another story of beginnings? “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” The first Creation story in Genesis. So, John is going to start his gospel with another creation story. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”

The Greek term for “Word” is logos, and it means Wisdom. The divine Wisdom creates the World and permeates the World. And just as in the First Creation story, the divine Wisdom brings light out of the darkness.

What a contrast to the other three gospels. The main event at the beginning of the of Matthews and Luke are stories of Jesus’ birth. In Matthews we hear the angel’s announcement to Joseph of the meaning of Mary’s unexpected pregnancy. Luke offers us a detailed description of Jesus birth in a stable. It’s where our nativity scenes come from. Mark begins his story with Jesus already an adult and appearing at the river to be baptized by John the Baptist. No description at all of Jesus’ roots.

It’s only John who takes us all the way back to the beginning of the whole show and tells us that the one who will eventually become a human being and carry the name of “Jesus” has been here from the very first. Just like in Genesis where God speaks creation into existence, John does the same thing here. “In the beginning” there was God and the Word and Creation belongs to God’s Word. Life and light, the wonder of Creation, and the resilience of light that shines in the darkness speaks to the power of the Word.

But darkness still exists. “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” John sets up the theme of rejection and acceptance which we’ll hear throughout his gospel. The choice will be clear: to accept the Word and participate in a new relationship with God.....or not. For those who accept the Word, the divine Wisdom

who is Jesus, they will become children of God. Children who aren't controlled by their circumstances or by others. Children who aren't defined by their hurts and by what they don't have.

Our circumstances, our hurts, our lack of this or that, may **describe** us, but those things don't **define** us. What **defines** us is that God has called us to be God's children – children of light – children who are worthy of love and respect and who will work with God to care for the world.

But who is this God? It does sound a little abstract so far, I know. I mean, how do you imagine God? Our default position may be to think of God as a bearded old guy sitting on a throne in some distant place called "Heaven" pulling all the strings that make the world go around according to some inscrutably arbitrary plan. NOT according to John. He first acknowledges the dilemma, saying, "No one has ever seen God." Right, We long to see God, to know God, to touch God, to have God in our lives. And God solves the dilemma by becoming one of us. Want to see God? Look at Jesus. So the rest of John's gospel is going to be one long story showing how God works in the world.

Feeding the hungry. Giving the thirsty a drink, healing blindness and shame. Jesus becomes one of us to show us that. And to show us that we can be part of that life. That we can **choose** to be light.

And there's another theme of John's gospel that we see right here in the beginning. We have choices to make. To be part of the light or part of the darkness. It's what Jesus will say over and over when he talks about eternal life. In John's gospel "eternal life" happens now. It's not somewhere off in the distant future after our physical bodies have become exhausted. Eternal Life, life with Jesus, begins **now** with the decision to trust in the Word. To understand . It's not about giving mental assent to an abstract proposition. It's about trusting our lives to the one who has given us life. And then following his example. Feeding, healing, offering wisdom and compassion, offering our lives. **Participation** in Jesus' life is the beginning of eternal life. There's John's gospel in a nutshell.

So here we are on the first Sunday of the New Year. A time of new opportunities for new beginnings. Yet, you'll be excused if you think the new year doesn't feel all that new. Hatred, violence, injustice, greed, poverty, general misery, dominate the headlines and your newsfeed. Seems like the same old same old.

But John's gospel tells us there's something deeper at work. It's the eternal nature of God. I ran across something the other day from the Bishop of Atlanta, Bob Wright, that really speaks to this.

How can the “new” break through in this cycle of violence and mourning and pain? Bishop Rob offers a glimpse of the eternal nature of God in contrast to the pain and worries of a world that is passing away. “God,” he says, “is holding steady with patience, like a man hanging on a cross, until you and I finally come alongside God in day-to-day extreme expressions of love. Maybe God’s plan for “new” involves you and me finally becoming sick and tired of being sick and tired. Finally thirsty enough to try new. To do new. To be new.

I like that. Begin the new year acknowledging that you’re sick and tired of being sick and tired. And then jump in. Do something to bring the “new” to life. Feed someone who is hungry. Love someone who needs to be loved. Care for someone who’s been forgotten. Don’t hang back. Jump in. Participate! You don’t have to be part of the same old same old sleepwalking through life. We have a choice to make, John reminds us. To be children of light or children of darkness. Children of light live in active hope for the future God promises. Children of darkness live in anger and complaint and despair. On this day of beginnings, where will you choose to live? Amen.