*DEVOTIONAL*

December 31 – January 5

*God Became Human*

**Monday, December 31 John 1:1-5**

*“In the beginning the Word already existed”*

 In the first verse of his gospel, John establishes that the Word existed before the creation of the world. In that creation God made “the heavens and the earth” including humankind. Now, John’s Gospel will record the spiritual re-creation of men and women, the giving of life in darkness where there is no hope. This parallels the thought of Genesis 1, in which God breathes life into the nostrils of inanimate Adam.

 The Word existed with God, and the Word was God. Thus, the Word did not come into being nor was there ever a time when the Word was not. Whatever we can say about God, we can and must say about the Word. The deeds and words of the Word are the deeds and words of God. This is the theme that will be echoed throughout the Gospel. So, who is this Word? As John will reveal when we continue to read his Gospel, the Word is Jesus. John will introduce us to Jesus time and time again, and in each case he will be revealed as the Son of God, the divine messenger from the Father who is himself one with the Father.

*You gave me physical life, Lord, and you have given me spiritual life. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 1 Genesis 1:1 – 2:3**

*“In the beginning God created”*

 Genesis begins with a simple but majestic account of God bringing order to the cosmos. Out of formlessness and darkness God calls forth matter and light, a task described in six days of creation. Then, on day seven, God takes up his residence and history begins under his exclusive sovereignty. Avoiding the myth-laden concepts of the ancient world and disregarding any attempt at scientific sophistication either ancient or modern, the text charts a course of theological affirmation that results in a picture of an ordered, purposeful cosmos with God at the helm, masterfully guiding its course.

 The cosmos functions just as it is designed to function - it is “good.” People are portrayed as the pinnacle of creation - their creation is “very good” - endowed with dignity as those made in the image of the Creator. They are made in order to serve God, not as slaves but as partners, whom he delegates to do his work in the world. They enjoy his favor (blessing), and he provides what they need (food).

*I praise you, Creator God, as the One whom I serve. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 2 John 1:6-9**

*“God sent a man, John the Baptist”*

 In this section John emphasizes the true nature of the Baptist’s ministry. John the Baptist came as a witness to tell the truth about what was happening as the Word enters the world, in order that the world might believe that the Word was indeed sent by the Father for its salvation. As if in a courtroom, evidence and witnesses will come forward to verify the truth of Jesus’ case. John the Baptist is the first of these witnesses. We will see this more completely in verse 19 and following, where the Baptist (as forerunner to Jesus) speaks directly to Judaism’s leadership about the identity of Jesus.

 But here we have a foreshadowing, a hint, that John (and others like him) will enter the Johannine stage providing insight into the meaning of Jesus (see examples of this in John 5:31-37, 39; 8:18; 10:25; 15:27; 19:35; and 1 John 5:6-11). Essential to John’s mission is a denial of his own significance: “He was not the light.” This will reappear in a triple denial in John 1:19-24, suggesting that John’s main role is simply to glorify and identify Jesus.

*As a witness to you, Jesus, I will tell others of the purpose of your coming. Amen.*

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**Thursday, January 3 John 1:10-13**

*“The world didn’t recognize him”*

 Despite the presence of the Word in the world; despite his creative work making the world and leaving the marks of general revelation, still, the world failed to recognize him. The focus of God’s revelation has been Judaism, the spiritual birthplace of the Messiah. And the great irony of the Gospel story is that *even here*, where readiness and receptivity should have been keen, there was rejection. Still, the light has its followers; Jesus has his disciples. Even though his own people – adherents to Judaism – spurned his message, those who did receive him obtained power to become God’s children.

 Those who follow the Word, who believe and thereby obtain divine power, will share in divine birth. This is John’s understanding of conversion: deliberate faith joined with divine transformation. In other words, there will be a powerful transformation of those who align themselves with the light instead of the darkness, who cling to the Messiah instead of the world. Having experienced physical birth, they will be reborn spiritually.

*By grace through faith in you, Lord Jesus, I have been born again. Amen.*

**Friday, January 4 John 1:14-15**

*“The Word became human”*

 John 1:14 is one of the most important verses in the Bible. The Word did not just appear to be human; *the Word became human*. This Word dwelt among us and revealed his glory. The verb used here for dwelling literally means *to tabernacle.* In other words, as God had dwelt with them in the tabernacle (the portable earthly dwelling place of God among the Israelites while they journeyed in the desert), now Christ is the “tabernacle” of God’s dwelling in the world. Hence the glory of God, once restricted to the tabernacle, is now visible in Christ.

 This experience of glory is concrete. It is not a mystical vision or an inward illumination. The glory of God took up tangible form, one that could be seen and heard and touched. Further, this glory was not merely a display of power. For John the deepest irony is how glory is to be found in suffering and humiliation, for in this Gospel, the cross of Christ is again and again described as Jesus’ glorification. His signs and miracles showed his glory, to be sure, but it is in the cross that the mysterious, unfathomable glory of God is to be found.

*You became one of us, Lord, to show us the way to the Father. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 5 John 1:16-18**

*“Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*

When John uses the word “grace,” he has in mind the generous work of God in sending his Son, which results in our salvation. Grace is found in God’s coming and working despite the hostility and rejection of the world. Grace is not merely an attribute of God. It is experienced when someone enjoys his goodness. It is the recipient who knows grace, not the theologian who has studied it. Thus in verse 16 John emphasizes our experience and reception of this grace as its chief value.

 Another important word for John is “truth.” Most simply it is the opposite of falsehood, but John sees truth as penetrating far deeper. Truth is the self-disclosure that alone comes from God; truth is not just what is right, but what is divine *and this is right*. Jesus describes himself as the truth (John 14:6). Therefore, the becoming human of the Word silences the fraudulent voices of the world whose truth claims are opposed to God. Christ is fully God, and in himself he reveals the grace and truth of God.

*As I come to know you, Jesus, I come to know grace and truth. Amen.*