

Bringing Light into a Darkened World
Session #3: Fulfillment of the Prophecy
WNCC UWF Retreat, Harrell Center, Lake Junaluska, NC
June 14, 2024, 7 PM

John 1:1-5

CEB

¹ In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
² The Word was with God in the beginning.
³ Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.
What came into being
⁴ through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.
⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

“In the beginning.” Where have we heard those words before? Yes, they were the first words of the book of Genesis but this time, they point to a time before the creation of the world and the cosmos. At the beginning, the Word existed. Then we learn of the relationship of the Word with God; and, ultimately, we learn the identity of the Word as God. With these words, John affirms that the Word is

fully God and thus represents the self-expression of God. In this prologue, John sets up the foundation of the theme that runs throughout his Gospel: “When one sees Jesus, one sees God; when one hears Jesus, one hears God. The oneness of the Word and God means that the revelation spoken and enacted by the Word is indeed the revelation of God.”¹ In verse 3, John underscores this unity when he writes: **“Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life,”** [*John 1:3-4a, CEB.*] Hence the role of the Word does not end with the moment of creation but moves on to the ongoing, life-giving character of the Word for us today. “Jesus Christ, The Living Word, [is] the one who brought the cosmos into being, the one who will bring creation to completion, and the one who lives today.”²

The God who said, “Let there be light,” and confirmed that the light was good continues to care for God’s good creation and humankind by sending Jesus, “The Word Made Flesh” to be **“the light for all people.** [John continues his witness saying:] ⁵ **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn’t**

¹ Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. IX*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 520.

² Kimberly Bracken Long, “John 1:1-14: Homiletical Perspective” in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1*, eds. David L. Bartlett * Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) 145.

extinguish the light.” [*John 1:4b-5, CEB.*] We normally hear this text during worship on Christmas day in the dark of winter where in some parts of the world there is very little sun and in our hemisphere days are short. Let us think back to the season of Advent and Christmas,



When I was in high school, the youth at my church were responsible for planning and conducting the 11 pm Christmas Eve service. Rev. Ed Ritter was our youth minister and he taught us about the patterns of worship and invited us to be creative. The text for the service was the one we just heard from the Gospel of John and we decided to emphasize the light Jesus brought into the darkness when He was born. After everyone was seated, we planned to turn out the lights in the sanctuary and then carry the Christ

candle down the main aisle leading the procession of the youth choir and the worship leaders. I was selected to carry the Christ candle and lead the procession. It was a big deal and we practiced to make sure the procession and the whole service would go smoothly. The problem was we practiced during the day and even with the lights out, the sanctuary was full of natural light streaming through the stained-

glass windows. On Christmas Eve at 11, it was very different. It was dark. **[Go to black slide & turn out the lights.]** As we lit the Christ candle, **[light the candle]** I anxiously realized I could barely see anything by holding the candle in front of me as I had been instructed and had practiced. And those behind me couldn't see anything since my body blocked the light. As I began to move forward into the darkened sanctuary, I raised the candle so the flame was over my head. The light spread pushing the darkness back. I could see and those behind me could see. As we continued to move down the darkened aisle, the acolytes lit the candles at the end of the pews after I passed by and the light continued to spread overcoming the darkness. **[Show the sanctuary slide again.]** As we moved into the chancel area, the rest of the lights were turned back on and the darkness was totally dispatched. **[Turn the lights back on.]** We then continued with the joyous celebration of the coming of Jesus, "The Light of the World." This experience of bearing the light of Christ into the darkened sanctuary has had an enormous impact on me so that I still remember these details almost 60 years later.

The darkness exists. It is real and terrifying. Darkness and the shadows it produces makes the light more visible but, as I learned that Christmas Eve, the best news is that the light of life will persist and

prevail. In the midst of the worries of the world, of illness, sickness, and doubt, Christ's light still shines.

The question for us now is how can we be light-bearers? How can we live lives that point to Christ and testify to God's light and love in the world? "Do we greet the stranger, visit the sick, and care for the needy in ways that show our lives have been changed by God's love for us by the light that banishes our



[own struggles with] darkness? Have we taken time to call an [old friend], go out of our way for a [grieving neighbor], or do something for the important people in our lives that would say [to them], 'You are God's gift, and I see God's light in you?'"³ Have we participated in preparing meals for the hungry, building beds for children who have to sleep on the floor, or protesting injustice by seeking ways to change the systems of society so that our lives reflect the true light that radiates grace and truth. These are all challenging questions but the good news is that we are on a journey of transformation where we can learn and unlearn what is needed alongside other sojourners in our communities of faith such as

³ Aaron Klink, "John 1:1-14: Pastoral Perspective" in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 1*, eds. David L. Bartlett * Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) 142.

The United Women of Faith in settings locally and in sacred places like Lake Junaluska. In our communities, we can find love and support for our dark times, we can be strengthened for our journey as we grow in understanding, and we can be empowered for putting our faith into action in word and deed. May it be so for all of us “light-bearers.” Amen.