



Sermon – December 5, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

John 1:1 – 3, 14

Luke 1:30 – 33

Colossians 1:16

Hebrews 1:2, 2:14 - 15

Mark

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me. We're going to spend our time back in John 1 this morning. John 1 at the very beginning of the book. John 1 and verse 1. If you're a guest with us this morning, welcome home. We love to gather around God's word and as we do once a month, after the message we're going to be partaking of the Lord's Supper. So I want to remind you, if you haven't already gotten your elements, to make your way to one of the tables during the response song so that we can ready, not just to hear God's word but to taste and see that He is good as well.

Now before we jump into the message, I have some exciting news to bring to you as a congregation because today we get the chance to introduce to you our candidate for College Minister. As many of you know, Wes Wilkinson, our long time college minister, was called away by God to become the next pastor at First Baptist Pflugerville in the Austin area. And over the course of that time, we've been seeking who God would lead us to as the next person to step into this ministry. And I'm so excited to introduce you to him in just a moment. We know that we have an amazing mission field here in Bryan/College Station with 70,000 students on our doorstep at both Blinn and Texas A&M. And our heart's desire is that we can continue faithfulness in our college ministry, to reach and to disciple that next generation that is coming through our doorstep each day. And that's why we went through a full search process. We had over 20 candidates that came through the process with a resume, a questionnaire. We even interviewed a handful of them. And we brought our candidate forward from our staff to be vetted by our committee, to later meet with the deacons. We even circled back to do some additional vetting once some questions came up about the doctrine of salvation. And this morning I'm excited to let you know that our committee is bringing a unanimous recommendation to you as a congregation for our next college minister. You'll see a picture of him up on the screen. If you haven't yet met him, his name is Patrick McGinty. And maybe you've met Patrick or his wife Katherine because they're here and apart of our congregation.

The first time I met Patrick was on the sidelines at Auburn University when the Aggies were playing against the Auburn Tigers as he was serving as a head yell leader back in the Fall of 2014. And over the last 7 years, the Lord has really knit our hearts together in love. We got the chance to serve for 2 years together up in Nashville at the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and alongside each other in our church up there in Franklin, Tennessee. And Patrick is continuing history with our college ministers of stepping out of the student ministry space into the college ministry space. Just like George Jacobus and Wes Wilkinson before him. Patrick has been, over the last couple years in San Antonio, working in a bivocational student ministry leader role at his young church plant Crossway Bible church.

So to catch you up on where we've come from and where we're going, earlier this week we sent out a church-wide notice to all of our members about Patrick as our candidate. Then this past Wednesday night we had the opportunity to interview him as a congregation and do some Q & A on our Wednesday night service. And if you haven't yet checked that out, you can find that video up on our candidate webpage along with a whole lot more information about Patrick and about the job. And we want to encourage you to do that because where we're going from here is that right after the service, Patrick is going to be joining our college students in our College Gathering to bring our message this morning. And if that's something, if you want to be young at heart again, we want to invite you to join us over there. If you want to come and listen to him preach this morning, you're welcome to do that in the FLC gym and join us. And then also, he'll just be around after that's done, when the life groups are letting out, in the back of the FLC gyms jut for a little meet and greet, if any of you haven't yet had the chance to meet him and want to get to know him. That's all building towards this coming Wednesday when as part of our service, our Wednesday evening equip class, we will have our churchwide vote for members as part of that as well. We're excited to see what the Lord is doing.

And it comes right at the heart of what this passage is driving us to. John 1. Remember last week when we kicked off this Advent series, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Now this week, what we're going to find is that John is calling us to behold the word of God who enters into the mess of the world through the Christmas story. And I want to draw your attention to the first 3 verses of this passage where you hear the apostle John in his own way speak about the coming of Christ as Christmas. Here's what he says:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this time, we're coming to you because the world around us is feeding us words all the time, speaking to us, shaping us, forming us. But right now in this moment, God, we are coming to Your Scripture, longing to hear a voice from You. That still small voice of Your Spirit speaking through Your word. Would You help us see Jesus, the word of God, more clearly in a way that not only reshapes how we understand Christmas, but our entire lives as well. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, back in 1985 when Billy Joel and Christie Brinkley had their daughter, they gave that daughter a name that wasn't very common during that time period. But over the 30 years since then, it took off in popularity, peaking around 2015 with 6,000 girls in the United States receiving this name every year. But what happened is, coming out of 2015 the usage of that name began to plummet. And the reason for that is because that was the name given by Amazon when they introduced the Echo system to alert and to activate the system. Do you know what that word is? Alexa. Nobody, all of a sudden, wanted to name their daughters Alexa anymore after that was happening. And as that name declined in popularity, it escalated the popularity of a different phenomenon happening. Where consumers like us could speak things into existence with just our words. So when you're there having your morning coffee, you could speak the weather report into existence. And when you're waiting for the kids to come home on the school bus, you can speak your favorite song into existence. And when you're going through that bedtime routine and you need something to entertain your children, you could speak a good "knock knock" joke into existence. There is a power of words that this has put on display and popularized for us. And as we turn our hearts to John chapter 1, here's what he's going to show us this morning. There is a deeper and more significant power of words on display in the way that God is at work in the world. And what he's going to show us here this morning is that the power of words to shape our existence doesn't come primarily from our own words but from his words. And that the word of God that John speaks of here in this text is something that shapes our understanding of Christmas. Because what John is going to show us is that the word of God is not a phrase, but a person. It's not a statement, but a Savior. It's not a message, but Jesus, the word of God.

So here we are, John 1, there's a sense in which this is the front porch of the entire book. It's going to give us this theme, this setting to fix our eyes on Jesus from the very beginning. This is a Christ-centered Gospel and yet the name of Jesus is never mentioned even one time until verse 17. And the reason for that is because the primary descriptor of Jesus in this opening prologue is: the Word of God. And here's what's going to happen this morning. What we're going to find in John 1 is that the reality that Jesus is the Word of God shapes the Christmas story in three significant ways. And I want you to notice the first one with me back in verses 1 and 2. Where it shows us that Jesus is the Word of God who precedes the Christmas story. So notice what happens here. It starts with:

¹In the beginning was the Word

And if you're familiar with your Bible, there is an echo right here of Genesis chapter 1 in verse 1. Remember? In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. That's an intentional introduction by John. But John is shifting our attention, not away from the act of creation, now to the author of creation. He's describing that author, that Messiah, that Savior, that Word who was there from the beginning. And we'll see several things about this Word of God. It shows us there in verse 1 that the Word of God exists before the Christmas story in eternity with God. That's why it says there, in the beginning was the Word. That word, was, is the key portion of the phrase. There was never a time when the Word of God, Jesus, did not exist. He existed in eternity with God. But think about this term, word. During that time period, it would have been a common philosophical category for reason or for principles. But that's not the focus of John's message to us. Instead, he is picking up on the biblical theology of the word that we see all the way back to the beginning pages of Scripture. Do you remember how God creates the world in

Genesis 1? He speaks the world into existence. Over and over again it tells us: and God said, and God said, and God said, and God said. There is a voice that brings about the creation. And what John 1 is showing us is that voice, that Word, is not just a phrase but a person, Jesus himself. The one who existed eternally with God. And what that means for us this Christmas season is that the Christmas story doesn't just begin with a child in a manger. It begins all the way back from the dawn of time, even before that. For all eternity, God was setting the stage before even the universe was born because Jesus is eternal with God from the very beginning. But notice how the text goes on there. He's not just in eternity with God, notice that He's also in community with God. That's what it says in the middle of verse 1.

and the Word was with God,

You see that word, with, right there? The more literal translation is: to or towards. And anytime you ever see it in the New Testament in this kind of setting, it is talking about a deep connection of people who are close together. And so wrapped up in this one phrase is the idea of the community of God. That from the beginning God exists as one in nature, three in persons, united together in community through the Trinity. That's also why verse 2 tells us that He was in the beginning with God. It is signaling both the personhood of Jesus and the intimate fellowship and connection and relationship that He experiences with God the Father from the very beginning of time. For all of eternity there is a community with God. This idea of community is not like back when you were coming to school at Texas A&M and you went with a potluck roommate you didn't know. You coexisted. You survived. You endured. But this picture here is not one of coexistence, but connection, deep fellowship, rich community. There's this idea of that bound up in the Christmas story, captured from the very beginning of John's gospel. But I want you to notice another thing there in verse 1. Jesus exists before the Christmas story, not just in eternity with God, not just in community with God, but also in equality with God. So notice the end of verse 1 there. It says to us that the Word was God. In all the Bible, this is one of the key verses on the deity of Jesus, on the nature of the Trinity. It is not just, John is saying, that Jesus has some divine attributes, instead what he is declaring is that everything it means to be God is bound up in Him. The Word was God. That's the image that John is giving to us. And if you'll hold your Bible here and slide over with me to Luke chapter 1, I want you to see the way that these three characteristics show up in the Christmas story itself. Eternity, community, equality are all captured here. Look at John 1 beginning in verse 30. Here it is that the birth of Jesus is going to be foretold. And when the angel, Gabriel, speaks to Mary and explains how she will give birth to the Messiah, listen to what he declares to her beginning in verse 30.

³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Look at the way these characteristics show up back in verse 32 at the beginning. He will be great. No one's great, other than God the Father. Israel knew that. And so when Gabriel declares that greatness, he is declaring the equality of the Word of God. And then it goes on, he'll be called Son of the Most High. There is this sense of community, this deep, rich fellowship as if in a family. And then down in verse 33, he will reign over the house of Jacob

forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. An eternal kingdom. From age to age, Alpha and Omega, this is the Word of God that God has sent to us at Christmas. Well, let's think about this for a minute. If this Word of God that comes to us at Christmas is in eternity with God, is in community with God, is in equality with God, if all those things are true so what? What difference does that make for your life today in 2021? What does that have to do with us now? Well, here's what I know about this Christmas season. The Christmas season is a time for many of us of great joy. An amazing holiday. All the fellowship, all the fun, all the food, all the gifts, all the connection together. There is deep joy. But I also know that this season is one of deep sorrow. I remember seeing a friend of mine this week who is down. I could tell he was struggling. And when I checked in with him to see how he was doing he said, "Man, December's always the hardest month for me. Nearly 10 years ago I unexpectedly lost my dad and I just pray every year I can make it through the holidays." Maybe you feel that sorrow too. Not having someone you love next to you for the first time. Not having the family dynamic you hope to. I don't know what it is that might be churning that sense of problem, that sense of loneliness, that sense of challenge, but here's what I do know. If Jesus existed before the world began, then He existed before your problems began. And if Jesus is the demonstration of what true community looks like, then in your deepest loneliness, in your deepest longings, in that sense of loss of community that you feel, He is there with you and for you. And if Jesus is equal with the Father, then your challenges, your sorrows, your despair is not equal to Him. He is greater. He can sustain you. And the reason He can do that as John 1 shows us first is He is the Word of God who precedes the Christmas story.

But I want you to notice how this passage goes on now down in verse 3. We see a second big idea about the Word of God here. We also see that Jesus is the Word of God who prepares the Christmas story. So notice what it says there in verse 3.

³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

See, John 1:3 reminds us that the Christmas story doesn't start in a cradle, but at creation. That John is showing us that the responsibility for creation is not just the God of the Word but the Word of God, Jesus Himself. He is preparing for the Christmas story in His creation. I came across a pole this week that asked Americans all over the country, "When is the proper and appropriate time to put up your Christmas tree?" I'm glad to report that 55% of Americans had the right answer which is, in November but after Thanksgiving. The second most common answer was, 20% of people said, once December 1st hits. Anytime in December. There were 17% of you who, percent of you, who just couldn't wait and put it up anytime starting in November. And then there's 5% of you, I don't know if you're just hardcore about Christmas or you're just lazy, but you say, there's never a time that's too early to put up the tree. And then there's a small minority, 2%, the grinchies among us, who said, not until after December 20th. I say, bah humbug to that, right. Now why do we go through all the effort to decorate for Christmas? If you think about it, it's not really necessary. You can still have the moment, you can still celebrate Jesus, you can still exchange the gifts with nothing around you, no trees, no lights, no decorations. And yet each year, we prepare. Why is it that we do that? We prepare for what is to come by creating the setting for the environment, for the experience. It builds anticipation. It prepares the way for what is to come. And what John 1:3 is showing us is that's what the Word

of God does for us. Jesus is the creator of the universe and through His creation He is preparing the way for the Christmas story.

And I want you to see how John talks about this preparation. What role does the Word of God play in this creation? He's going to give us in verse 3 both a positive nature of the role and a negative nature of the role. So let's look at the positive side first back at the beginning of verse 3 when it shows us that he describes the reality of the Word of God in God's creation. He says: all things were made through Him. So it's not just that the author of creation uses His words to make all things, but that the Word of God Himself is actually the author of creation. He is the one who makes all things. But then look at the negative side of it at the end of the verse. He also describes the totality of the Word of God's role in creation when he says: and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In other words, Jesus was involved in the creation of all things. There is nothing we see, nothing we experience that came into existence apart from Him. And this is not some concept that is just only here in John chapter 1. Instead, we see the role of Jesus in creation in several other spots. For example, what we find is in Colossians 1:16. It tells us about Jesus:

¹⁶For by him all things were created,

Or Hebrews 1:2 says:

²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.

There's nothing in this world that exists apart from Jesus, the Word of God. I remember, who knows how many times, growing up as a kid when it felt like there was nothing on TV. I'd be flipping channels, bored out of my mind, and then I would come across a show that'd completely captivate me. And it was that painting show with Bob Ross. You remember that guy? The guy with the big hair and the small brushes. And you would watch him paint this nature landscape right in front of you and the whole time you'd just be mesmerized by that smooth, soft voice as he worked so meticulously over things. And one of the things I always remember about that show is at the end of the painting, when he was completing that image, he would write down in the corner of it his last name, Ross. And that always caught my attention because my middle name is Ross. And just like any other artist, any other creator, the way that you mark your creation, the way you signal its authenticity, the way that you show it is now finished is by writing your signature on it. What John 1:3 is telling us here when it speaks about how Jesus prepares the Christmas story, is he is saying to us that the Word of God created all things. In other words, the Word of God has put His signature on every created thing in this universe. He's preparing the way. He's making all things ready. That's why if you look back at verse 3, it tells us, all things were made through Him, there is nothing we can see or experience that He did not bring into existence. And that all things includes even some of the most pivotal creations that play a role in the Christmas story. The Word of God was responsible for creating the wood that would be used for the manger at Jesus' birth as a child and the wood that would be used on that cross when He is hung as a criminal. The Word of God was responsible for bringing about the soil from which would spring forth the Frankensense and Myrrh that the wise men would bring when they saw Him and that would bring forth the thorns that would be mashed upon His head as He headed to the grave, as He headed to the cross. And that Word of God was not just

responsible for that, He was also responsible for the stars that shone over the heavens guiding those wise men to see His birth and the sun that was eclipsed on the day of His death. The Word of God is preparing the way for the Christmas story by creating all things.

But I want you to notice as we move towards the finish of today's message, that there is one more reality about the Word of God that we need to see in John chapter 1. And in order to see it, I need you to slide with me down to verse 14. Because the third thing we're going to witness here is that Jesus is the Word of God who participates in the Christmas story. So here's how John says it. Verse 14, he says:

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So notice what happens here. If you're reading through this whole portion of John 1, verses 1 through 3 speak about Jesus as the Word of God. And then from verses 4 to 13, he moves away from this theme. And then unexpectedly he comes back now in verse 14 to speak about the Word of God again and he does it in the most stunning way imaginable. He shows us that this Word of God, this Messiah, this Savior, Jesus, He doesn't just precede the Christmas story. He doesn't just prepare the Christmas story, He actually participates in the Christmas story. That's why the text tells us there all sorts of things we need to recognize about the word of God. Because John 1:14 shows us that the Christmas story displays that the Word of God is fully human. That's why it says there at the beginning of verse 14:

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

It's as if John 1:14 is the epicenter of rightly understanding who God is and how it is that God relates to Jesus. And all of these things work together. The doctrine of God, the doctrine of Jesus, the doctrine of our humanity find their intersection, their inflection point, their epicenter, right here. This is the lynchpin of the Bible's understanding of who Jesus is and who He is for us. What does it say? If John 1, verses 1 through 3, make clear that the Word of God is fully God, then what happens here in John 1:14, it makes clear that the Word of God is fully human. It says, He became flesh. That's not the typical way that you describe how a child comes into existence. Why is it describing Jesus in that way? It's because what we know is that He was born of a virgin and the reason for that is so that the corruption of sin passed down from generation to generation affecting every one of us would not corrupt Him. He became flesh. And our tendency can be to say, well if He becomes fully human, then that must mean He became something less than God. The temptation is to say, if He is fully human, He can't also be fully God. As if He somehow subtracts part of His deity when He takes on flesh. But the right way to think about, John 1:14 and elsewhere, is showing us is that the fact that Jesus became fully human doesn't occur through subtraction but by addition. He doesn't subtract from His deity. What He does is He adds a human nature. And through that human nature welcomes the limitations that come while still being fully God and the question we need to be wrestling with as we enter into this Christmas season is why. Why did God send His Son? Why did He need to become flesh? What difference does it make? And you'll see the answer to that question in the book of Hebrews chapter 2. If you want to look with me and hold your spot here, we'll come back to John 1. What Hebrews 2 is going to show us is that the Christmas story is only

possible if Jesus participates in it by becoming flesh. Notice how Hebrews 2, beginning in verse 14, talks about this reality. It says this:

¹⁴Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

So why did Jesus take on flesh? He took on flesh for us and for our salvation. He partook of the flesh so that He might become like us in all things so that He might rescue us from a slavery to the fear of death. There's an ancient church father, Athanasius, who summarizes this and says it in this way. Christ became what we are, that we might become what He is. That's the Christmas story. That's how God is at work. It's demonstrating to us that Jesus is fully human. But I want you to notice as the verse goes on that the Christmas story also shows us that the Word of God is full of glory. That's why it says there:

And we have seen His glory, glory as the only Son from the Father,

This is the first time that John mentions the word glory in his gospel. But it's going to show up throughout the entire thing. Through His miracles. Through His teaching. Through His transfiguration. Through His death. Through His resurrection. John is putting the glory of Christ on display. What is that glory? It's the sum total of God's greatness and His majesty. In other words, what John 1:14 is showing us is that the grandeur of God's glory is not seen in the majesty of the mountains He creates. It's not seen in the greatness of the power He possesses. It's not seen in the wisdom of His sovereignty that He displays. Where it's most greatly seen is in His Son that He sends. That's why it says there, we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father. The Father sends the Son comes. He takes on flesh to bring glory and to display glory to God. But I want you to notice how this passage ends. Because we see one other reality about the Word of God during this Christmas season when it shows us that the Christmas story displays that the Word of God is full of grace and truth. That's why he says there at the end of verse 14: full of grace and truth. And just think about these words: grace and truth. What the apostle is declaring for us is that the story that is about to unfold in his gospel, the story that begins with a cradle and goes to the cross so that Jesus can be later raised up and celebrated with a crown is a story that is true. Have you ever just walked into Starbucks or to Target or elsewhere and you hear during this holiday season Christmas music with Christian lyrics going on all around you and you're like, "What is happening here?" The secular culture around us spends 11 months railing on Christianity and 1 month in love with it. But the reason for that is because of a sentimentality. It just gives you all the feels, it seems significant in the moment. The foundation for that in our culture around us is the sentimentality of Christmas. But what John is showing us is that the foundation for that should be the truth of Christmas. That Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, fully God, took on flesh, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died in our place, rose from the grave. John is declaring every reality of that is true. And that's why we have something worth celebrating this Christmas. It's full of truth. But then he also says there that it is full of grace. See, Christmas reminds us that God has given us the greatest gift of all in His Son, the Word of God. The offer of forgiveness that is available to each one of us. See, God knows the darkness of your heart. He knows the shame that you carry. He knows the secret sin that is hiding in your life. He knows the reason that you didn't even want to come

in the room this morning. And that's why you watch by video. He knows those realities. He knows the darkness. And yet in His kindness, in His love, yes, in His grace He's offered us the gift of His Son. So that what was broken can be restored. So that what was stained with sin can be made white as snow. And so that we can hear that voice, that Word, calling to each one of us, make way the pass of the Lord so that we might trust in Him for salvation.

That's why it's so fitting that we come to the Lord's Supper this morning at the conclusion of this message. Because John 1:14 speaks about how the Word became flesh and dwelled among us. And as we prepare our hearts to partake of this Lord's Supper, when we eat this bread and drink this cup, we're declaring the same reality that John is here in John chapter 1. That the Word has become flesh and dwelled among us. We're not just hearing this reality through the sermon, we're tasting this reality through the supper. That's why each month we come to the Lord's table. And if you know Jesus in a saving way, if you walk with Him in salvation and baptism, this is a family meal for you. And if you haven't already received the elements, I'll invite you as we stand in just a moment to respond to God's word through singing, to make your way to one of the tables and to grab these elements. And what we're going to do when we partake of this Lord's Supper, is we're going to celebrate this reality we see here in John 1:14. This promise of the gift of Christmas that John speaks of here. And as we ready our hearts for this time together around the bread and the cup, I want you to hear these words. They come from 1 Corinthians 11, verses 27 and 28 for the need to examine our hearts. It says this:

²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment we're rejoicing in the gift of Christmas. The way that You have not just sent Your Son to us as the Lamb of God who takes away our sins, but the Word of God who is at work in each one of our hearts. And I even pray right now, God, that Your Word is at work. Your Bible tells us that it is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. And we pray that even now it is piercing us, shaping us, making us more like Jesus. We ask now as we turn our hearts to the table that You would give us a reminder in what we taste and what we see of Your goodness, of Your promise, of Your gift that we uniquely experience at Christmastime. We pray all these things in Christ's name. Amen.