

## A Personal Word, an Invitation, and a Sign

### John 1:1-18, 35-51, and John 2:1-11



*Creation  
Michelangelo, 1508-1512*

#### **John 1:1-18**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all people might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God children born not of natural descent, nor of the will of the flesh or the will of man but born of God.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, *"This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"*

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, who has made him known.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What most captures your attention as you read this passage?
2. What is the one word that is repeated seven times in the first five verses and what is your understanding of the significance of this word?
3. Novelist Frederick Buechner, commenting on John's testimony to the Incarnation, observes: *"One of the blunders religious people are particularly fond of making is the attempt to be more spiritual than God."* What do you think he meant by this? Do you agree with his observation?

### **NOTES: A Personal Word: John 1**

1. The Gospel of John is one of four written accounts of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. While the other 3 gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – share many of the same stories, (parallel gospels), the Gospel of John is different. From the very opening words, *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God,"* we encounter a gospel narrative of cosmic scope and significance. Although it will be the story of a human being in history, at the same time it will be the story of one who is divine and who preexisted with God before creation.
2. The staggering claim of John's opening chapter is: *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* Jesus is God in flesh (*incarnate*). What does this affirmation mean for our lives and the life of the world? It means:
  - a. We can see, hear, and know God in ways never before possible. *"No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known"* (John 1:18). Jesus is the "fleshed-out truth about God."
  - b. In him there is life – new life, abundant life, and eternal life. *"In him was life, and that life was the light of all people"* (John 1:4). Jesus' life is the *"light of all people"* – illuminating the meaning and purpose of life in relationship to God.
3. The Prologue introduces themes that run throughout the gospel, including: *the power of God's Word, light and darkness, life and light, and new birth*. In Hebrew scripture, the Word was an agent of creation, the source of God's message to his people through the prophets and God's law. The Word was another expression for God. To Jews the statement, *"the Word was God,"* was blasphemous. In Greek philosophy, the Word was the principle of reason that governed the world. To Greeks, *"the Word became flesh"* was unthinkable. The prologue articulates what John believes: Jesus is the "Revealer" of God. *"The Word was God, and the Word became flesh"* was gospel.



*"Behold, the Lamb of God"*  
*Master of the St. John Altarpiece (Hugo Jacobsz?), 1500-1510*

**John 1:35-51**

**Narrator:** John (the Baptist) was with two of his disciples when he saw Jesus passing by.

**John:** *"Look, the Lamb of God!"*

**Narrator:** When the two disciples heard him say this they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked,

**Jesus:** *"What are you looking for?"*

**Disciples:** *"Rabbi, where are you staying?"*

**Jesus:** *"Come, and you will see."*

**Narrator:** So they went and saw where he was staying and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John (the Baptist) had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, *"We have found the Messiah."* And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said,

**Jesus:** *"You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas,"* (which means Peter).

**Narrator:** The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip he said to him, *"Follow me."* Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, *"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* Nathanael replied, *"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"* Philip responded, *"Come and see."*

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What is your understanding of John the Baptist's reference to Jesus as "the Lamb of God?"
2. What is your reaction to the question Jesus asked the two disciples who started following Jesus?
3. What is the invitation given in this passage?

### **NOTES: An Invitation – John 1:35f**

The first words Jesus speaks in the Gospel of John are spoken to two would-be disciples who began following Jesus after John the Baptist pointed him out: *"What are you looking for?"* (i.e., "What do you want?"). John believes the deepest longing of every human heart is for God. Augustine expressed this belief when he prayed: *"You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless, until they rest in you."* John's gospel thus becomes a summons for us to travel into his story of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection to grasp the life and light of life he offers.



*The Wedding at Cana*  
Paolo Veronese, 1563

**John 2:1-11**

**Narrator:** A wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him,

**Mary:** *"They have no more wine."*

**Jesus:** *"Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come."*

**Mary:** (Speaking to the servants) *"Do whatever he tells you."*

**Narrator:** Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants,

**Jesus:** *"Fill the jars with water. Now, draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."*

**Narrator:** They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said,

**Master:** *"Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."*

**Narrator:** This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

**NOTES: A Sign – John 2:1-11**

1. As a "sign" or witness to the abundant life Jesus offers, John introduces Jesus' ministry with the miracle of changing water into wine at a wedding in Cana. Jesus, in John's view, is the giver of extravagant gifts. He came that we might have life, life abundant. He fills us to the brim, like the stone jars that were filled to the brim with water and makes what is ordinary into something extraordinary.
2. The stone water jars that contained the water that was turned to wine held between 20 and 30 gallons of water. That would provide up to 180 gallons of wine, more than enough wine for a wedding celebration, with some to spare. To John this act was symbolic of God's extravagant grace that is given freely and fully to those who believe in Christ.
3. To the Jews, John's message was *Jesus has come to turn the imperfection of the Law into the perfection of grace*. And, to the Greeks his message was: *Jesus has come really and truly to do the things (like turn water into wine) that you believed only the gods could do*. John wants readers to know that what Jesus did at the wedding in Cana he does *every day* for men and women who welcome him into life. With Jesus, life is filled to the brim and overflowing with hope.