



**LIVING WORD
EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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Who is the Lamb?

St. John 1:1-17

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Considering our lesson from John 1, it makes sense to me to keep on today with our look at sharing our faith with others. A couple of weeks ago I pointed out that the solution to the objections and hostility we so often face in our evangelism is not to defend ourselves, but to show Jesus—to introduce people to the One they don't know, but so desperately need to know. The more they know who he is and what he's come to do, the more their objections will be answered. Last Sunday we looked at John the Baptist's witness as Jesus came to him and he declared to the people: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" That was all about Jesus *mission*—what he came to do. Our Christmas lessons today show us Jesus himself—*who he is*—and that's just as important. These first verses of John are a creed of sorts—a creed before *the* Creeds were ever written.

Let me start at the end of the lesson—verse 17. John tells us:

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through *Jesus Christ*.

What's the significance of the words "Jesus Christ"? A lot of people think that "Jesus" is his first name and "Christ" is his last name. That's not it. St. Matthew, in his

gospel, tells us the story of how Jesus got his name:

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20-21)

"Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua that literally means, "The LORD saves." What better name for the one whom St. John tells us is also "Christ"—another Greek word, but this time a title that means "the anointed one"—the same meaning as the Hebrew word "Messiah"—the title of the One whom God had promised as far back as the time of Adam and Eve's first sin, who would come to destroy sin and death and to restore sinful men and women to fellowship with God.

"Jesus Christ". He is Jesus the Saviour and the Christ—the promised and long-awaited Messiah. His human name, Jesus, tells us that he has come to save. His divinely given title, Christ, tells us what he's come to save us from: from the consequences of our sins.

But how can Jesus save? Now look at verse 1. This is why it's so important that we not only understand ourselves who and what Jesus is, but that we share who and what he is with others.

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

If we miss these words or if we don't get them right, the whole Christian faith falls apart. At the core of every heresy and every cult there's always some doctrine that undermines these very precise and Holy Spirit-inspired words of John. In the face of those who claimed Jesus was just a man, these words affirm that Jesus is eternal—that he existed before God began to create. In the face of those who denied the divinity of Jesus, these words affirm that he is God. And in the face of those who taught that the Trinity simply described God existing in three "modes" these words affirm that Jesus is not merely God, but has existed for all eternity *with* God—with the Father.

This is important because no one else could save us. If Jesus were just a man, he'd have the same sin problem we do. If he were only God, he could not satisfy the requirements of the law on our behalf—he wouldn't be one of us. Only one who was *both* fully God and fully man could be Jesus and Christ—could be Saviour and Messiah.

And we might ask, why does John call him the "Word"? He calls him that as an affirmation of his eternal divinity. If Jesus and Christ are his earthly name and title, "Word" is his "divine" name. It identifies him as the Second Person of the Trinity. Look again at verse 1:

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

This really struck me as I was preparing to preach on this passage last year: That Jesus in his pre-incarnate state was known as the Word tells us something about

God. He's not the *Deed*. He's not the *Thought*. He's not the *Feeling*. No, Jesus is the *Word*. As much as God's deed and thoughts and feelings are important, we need his *Word* if we are to be restored to him. The first two verses of our Epistle lesson from the book of Hebrews tells us:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but 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.

Our God has never intended to be unknown to us. He created humanity to know him and to be in fellowship with him, and when we fell into sin and broke that fellowship, he began communicating with us through his prophets, giving us the Scriptures, that the fellowship might be restored. Our God is a God who *speaks* to us, who *tells* us about himself. Not only that, but it is the power of the Word that brings life. By the power of the Word God created the cosmos. By his Word written, we know God himself and we know his ways and expectations. And by his Word now Incarnate in Jesus, he offers us a means to be restored to the life we lost through sin. Jesus, the Word Incarnate, is the culmination of God's revelation to us. He is the last and final Word and the Word by which God comes to us, makes himself clearly known to us, and draws us close.

John says in verse 3:

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

But in verse 10 John also writes:

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

Instead of living in gratitude to our Creator, we've all rebelled against him. We've sinned and made him our enemy. He gave us life and we've chosen death. And yet because he loves us, he isn't willing simply to let us chase after death. He wants to restore us to himself. And so he became incarnate as one of us—to speak to us again, this time to call us back to himself, to shine his light into our darkness and to offer us the life he created us to enjoy. John says in verse 4:

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

That's who Jesus is. From there we get into his mission and ministry. From there we make the jump to John the Baptist's declaration: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." But brothers and sisters, if we don't have it right in our understand exactly who the Lamb is—that he is eternal-God-become-man, that he is God's Word to us, and that he not only bears God's light and life, but that he *is* light and life because he is God—if we don't have *this* right—then he can never fulfil his mission of being the perfect and once-for-all sacrifice for our sins.

So as we celebrate Christmas again this year, think of what Christmas means in terms of sharing your

faith with the people around you. Remember that it's not just a sentimental holiday about a baby in a manger. It's about God becoming man to save sinners and it's about the Good News that by his blood offered at the cross our sins can be forgiven and our bodies redeemed from death—if we will only believe and trust. Amen.