

25 December 2022 Christmas Day John 1:1-18 Pastor Fraser Pearce

It's not uncommon for people to express doubts
About the existence of God,
Or the goodness of God,
Or God's care for human beings or for creation.
It's also not uncommon for people to express anger
At the very idea of God:
How can we talk about a kind and benevolent Creator,
When we see so much injustice and needless suffering?
I've heard the celebrity Stephen Fry speak in this way,
And maybe you find yourself listening to him
Or people like him, with understanding.
It doesn't take a great deal of empathetic thinking
To understand this doubt, and even this anger:
Indeed, the book of Job could be said to be
A biblical exploration of the questions, doubts, and even anger
Of human beings in relationship with God.

But then there's the human being Jesus.
With all our questions, doubts, and even anger,
When we encounter Jesus, the Son of Mary,
The carpenter's son from Nazareth,
When we hear his teaching,
When we hear about his life, his suffering, his death,
When we hear about his resurrection,
Something within us is moved away from doubt, to faith,
And away from anger, to peace.

Today I'm proclaiming Good News from God's Word:
This human being, Jesus of Nazareth,
Does not only teach us *about* God,
But *is* God in the flesh.
In him, we see exactly what God is really like.
So today, if you have questions, or doubts,
Or even anger at the very idea of God,
Receive the Word of God,
And God will give you faith for your doubt,
And peace for your anger.

Let's listen to how the Gospel for today begins: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

These words begin the *prologue* to John's Gospel.

It's like the overture being played before the curtain is raised –

The main themes of the Gospel are being presented in summary form.

John says **In the beginning was the Word**

This can sound a little cryptic in modern English.

In Greek the Word, the *logos*, does not just mean the spoken word,

It means something like rationality, order, and structure –

The sort of thing that Stephen Hawking was hoping to find

At the end of *A Brief History of Time*.

But it is evident that St John does not think that the Word

Is simply an idea or a concept, such as a physicist could discover.

Rather this Word is something personal,

Something that can be described using human, personal pronouns,

It is *someone* divine.

St John goes on to describe the place of this Word

With God the Father. Listen to what he says: **He was in the beginning with**

God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Before there was time, there was the Word,

Before there was creation, there was the Word,

It is through the Word that all things have come into being. Let's pause here.

In the creation narrative in Genesis, how does God create?

It's through speaking his word.

And what is his first word in creation? **Let there be light...**

God's Word is performative, when God speaks his Word

Light comes into darkness

We can tap into the meaning of this teaching

As we think about what it is like to be in darkness,

And then to have light enter in:

We start to see and understand the reality around us,

We do not grope and stumble, but walk with confidence.

St John is saying that the Word brings light,

A light that cannot be overcome by darkness,
A light that gives us life with God.

St John goes on to say this about the Word: **He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.**

Both the world and his own people did not know or receive the Word:

In other words, the light that the Word brings
Is not a light that can be seen with human eyes,
Rather, it is a light that illuminates by faith.

Think about one analogy for light in this sense.

Let's say a young couple come to the altar

To be joined in holy marriage.

They do not know what the future will bring,

It is shrouded in darkness.

They come using their reason and their experience:

They know they are attracted to each other,

They know that marriage is for life,

But they trust what they can't see, the words of Jesus:

What God has joined together, let no one separate.

This word of the Lord Jesus brings in the light of God,

And illuminates the path of married love.

Indeed, the course of true love never does run smooth,

But where there is the word of God received in faith,

There God's light shows the way forward.

St John brings out the power of faith in God's word as he goes on: **But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.**

To receive the Word is to believe in his name:

That is, it is to *trust* him:

To trust that in him we have God's forgiveness as a gift;

To trust that in him we will be raised to new life in the body;

To trust that in him we have the way to God the Father opened to us

So that we, as human beings, may share in the life of God.

As St John says, it is by trust in him that we have power,

That we have authority to live as children of God:

That we can call on God as Father just as Jesus does;

That we can stand with confidence before the Father as Jesus does;
That we can receive each other as brothers and sisters as Jesus does.

All of this, not because we can reach up to God,
But because God has reached down to us,
And reached down to us not with a teaching
Or an ideology, or even with a spirituality,
But with a flesh and blood human being.

Listen to what St John writes: **And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.**

This creative Word of God became flesh,
Assumed humanity, became a human being.
And this is what we celebrate at Christmas:
That the little baby wrapped tightly to comfort and to warm him,
The one who lay in Mary's arms,
This is the one who reveals to us the glory of God,
A glory, that St John says, is full of grace and truth.

We human beings don't naturally trust God.
Even though the evidence of a creator is staring us in the face,
We cannot bring ourselves to have confidence
That the one who created us cares for us, loves us,
Or is close to us to help us, especially in our suffering, in our loneliness,
Or in our hopelessness.

But the Lord Jesus Christ is one of us, a human being,
And he shows us the favour of God, the grace of God.
He was willing to share in our suffering,
And, in love for us, take on the burden of our sin, our shame,
So that we can trust that God does not will to harm us,
But to draw us to himself, to come into the life of love.

St John says that God is love, and it is Jesus, the Son of Mary,
Who is the eternally-begotten son of God,
It is Jesus reveals to us the glory, the truth, and the grace of God.
So, let's receive him in faith, and live as children of the Father,
Showing love for each other,
And sharing in the power of the Lord's resurrection. In Jesus' name. Amen.