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 Redwoods Presbyterian Church
 Larkspur, California
 John 1:1-18
 "Privilege of the Prologue"

The Prologue to John's Gospel just read is the lectionary passage for the day. It's a privilege to preach on the prologue because it's one of the most fascinating and beloved pieces in the Bible. It is quite daunting but accessible. Since it uses metaphor and simple factual data one can perhaps understand the Jesus birth story better than Matthew and Luke who tell the story through a virgin mother, dreams, angels, astrologers and a stable, although every telling is quite amazing.

It might seem strange that shortly after entering the New Year we still focus on Christmas. The liturgical calendar lists today as the Second Sunday after Christmas Day.

I spoke to a person in the middle of December who said that she was enjoying the Christmas season so much that she wanted it prolonged. I mentioned that we have in worship two weeks of Christmas after Christmas day. The person would love Charles Dickens who wrote: "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all year."

We want the meaning and carols of Christmas to go on just as San Francisco Giants president, Larry Baer, wants the feeling of last year's win to continue through the year. He said: "If there is a way to harness the love, energy and spirit from the November 3 Giants World Series Victory Parade and infuse it into daily life in our communities; that would be my wish (for the new year)."¹ He was describing Redwoods Presbyterian Church each Sunday and what we carry into our families and communities.

The sermon today will be expository in form because that's how the text struck me when I heard it read at the Lessons & Carols service at the San Francisco Theological Seminary in the middle of December. I was struck with the interplay of metaphor, factual data and philosophy.

I believe that all of life is imbued with the spirit so when the text makes a historical statement in verse six, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John," I see this as spiritual. A man sent from God is spiritual so maybe this isn't the best example.

Put another way: I walked hand in hand with Suellen along West Cliff Drive in Santa Cruz, felt the breeze on my face and watched waves washing ashore and seagulls flying and scooping with abandon. There's not an ounce of God-talk in the sentence and yet the experience is spiritual. We feel God's presence in our relationships and surroundings.

There's fascinating back-and-forth of the ethereal spiritual and the historical spiritual in John's prologue. John leaves no doubt about Jesus' identification with God and on the gift we are given when we believe in Jesus.

¹ SF Chronicle, 12/29/2010

Word is mentioned three times in the opening verse of the prologue: first as itself in the beginning (“In the beginning was the Word”), then as something with God (“and the Word was with God”) and then as fully identified with God (and the Word was God”). The something with God is expanded upon in the second verse. “He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” John makes the point that Jesus pre-existed with God at creation, that somehow Jesus was an agent of creation and is still that agent – now, an agent of creation and recreation.

John tells us that Jesus remained in the Godhead until an opportune time when God would send him as God’s human self to earth. The times were dark according to the text and Jesus came as an indistinguishable light: “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.”

Part of the darkness was a people’s inability to recognize God’s presence in Jesus. “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.” It’s tragic that God has been present in every age and people have not recognized God or accepted God.

This is a message for every age and for us to be more effective in communicating that God is here and God cares. Still, as with Jesus, there’s an inability it seems for people in dark places to turn and move towards the light when they first encounter the light.

And yet, there are fortunate ones. “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.”

The analogy is of people wandering in the dark and once or twice or three times being introduced to Jesus and in believing in him they are given power to become enlightened children of God.

After all this wonderful theologizing John speaks of the Word in the world. “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.” Heaven and earth meet in this verse. We take John at his word and appreciate the affirmation and gift that follows: “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

The Greek for “Word” in the prologue is “*Logos*” which means word and reason. It’s the masculine form of the noun. Scholars point out that Hebrew literature states that “Wisdom” (Greek: *Sophia*, the feminine) was also present in creation. Jesus was a wisdom figure in the traditional biblical sense. He was present with God in the beginning as reason and wisdom. He was God’s *Logos* and *Sophia* with God and as Word become flesh he was the incarnation of this divine *Logos* and *Sophia*.

John caps off the prologue with a comment about Hebrew law given to Moses and its relation to Jesus and finally Jesus' role to make God known. "The law indeed 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 close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

The primary message here is a Reformed one – Reformed as in Protestant Reformation – where we are saved, or made whole, by God's grace through faith. There is nothing we can do to earn God's grace. It is freely given. The law is important and we do our best to keep it but it's limited. Ultimately, we are made whole by God's grace through faith in Jesus.

Finally, Jesus makes God known through his words and actions of compassion, caring, peace and justice. You look at Jesus and you see God.

It's a privilege to be prologue people who believe in Jesus Christ. We are at the beginning of a new year and on a new path to follow Jesus. We will see Jesus building his ministry through the year and see how God builds ministry in our lives and church. We go into the New Year with God's grace and truth in Jesus. We are fortunate. Amen.