

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Happy seventh day of Christmas. We're still celebrating Christmas here in the church, the 12 days that began on December 25th, and here we are on the brink of a new year. We have this reading from the gospel of John, John the evangelist. We hear, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This whole section of John's gospel is chock full of incredibly deep meaning. Scholars believe these opening lines of John's gospel actually came from a Hellenistic Jewish hymn in praise of God and the Torah. The Torah of course is the written word of God, the words of God, the Hebrew Scriptures, the scriptures themselves, but John, who's writing here, John the evangelist is a poet and a theologian, and he is using these poetic words and imagery to say something important. The word that he uses in this text, when we read, when we read the line, "In the beginning was the Word," is an incredibly interesting Greek word. Logos.

Logos.

He says, "In the beginning was the logos." Sounds a little bit like Genesis 1, right? The creation. He says, "The logos was with God, and the logos was God." Logos was used in ancient Greece to mean two different things. Logos was used to describe discourse, particularly reasoned discourse. It's where we get our word logic from, right? When the Greeks supplied that concept to the universe, it began to have a much broader meaning, and it eventually came to describe the divine reason, which I want to unpack a little bit. Nobody knows for sure whether it was the Jewish community living in Greece that first influenced Greek philosophers like Plato, with this conception of the logos, or whether it was the Greek philosophers that influenced the Hellenistic Jews with the concept of logos, but suffice to say, they all talked about it, and the concept held layers of meaning that the early Christians, like John, grabbed onto, ran away with, and expanded on. We know that by about 600 BCE, Greek philosophers like Pericles were describing the logos in these ways: It is the divine reason. The logos is the divine purpose that coordinates the entire changing universe. Right?

This is a lot bigger than our concept of logic. John is taking that concept, and bringing it another step deeper. For John, the logos is rooted in the revelation of God. God has revealed to us in the universe from everything from the Torah, the scriptures, God's words, to nature itself, to the wider cosmos, the planets, the universe, but of course to Jesus Himself. Jesus being the revelation of God in human form, whereas the universe

reveals something about who God is to us, the Torah reveals something about who God is, God's law. It's the written word. Jesus reveals something to us about who God is, and what God is like in a living, breathing way. Jesus then in John's gospel is like the living, breathing Torah. It's God's Word made flesh. The written Word come to life. John goes on to say, "And the Word [the logos] became flesh, and lived among us," and we've seen His glory, the glory of a father's only Son, full of grace, and truth.

Here again, John is this poet. He's using a beautiful word when he says lived among us. He's using a word that would literally mean tabernacled. The logos tabernacled with us, and of course, the tabernacle is the dwelling place of God. It's the dwelling place of God among the Israelites as they sojourned after leaving Egypt through the desert. The tabernacle was with them, holding the holy of holies with the Arc of the Covenant, with the very tablets of the 10 Commandments that Moses had. That's what's in the Tabernacle: God's dwelling place among the people. Listen again to this verse with these concepts. John says, "The logos became flesh, and tabernacled among us." The only dim example I could think of to describe what's going on here is this idea of, if you think of the law as the words of God, the written words, a little bit like a script for a play, or a film, that is in suddenly brought to life when those words are given to actors, as they begin to live it out, to voice it on the stage, or in film, it's something like that. The written Word of God becoming flesh and tabernacling right here, among us.

This text is very interesting to philosophers, to theologians. Scholars like to talk about it. The intellectually curious love this stuff, and we could talk about it for a long time, but at the end of the day, we really have to ask the question of, so what? So what? Why does it matter if the logos tabernacled among us in the flesh or not? I think John is leading us into that answer when he writes, "The law indeed was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." In other words, Moses revealed God's law. Jesus revealed God's grace. Jesus as the incarnation then, like the tabernacle of God's dwelling place, God's Word, is the logos in flesh for the sake of grace. John makes it even more explicit when he says, "From His fullness, we have all received grace upon grace," because you see, if Jesus was on Earth to show us what God is like, to show us that God is grace and love, that we're the recipients of that grace and love, then that changes everything about who we are, and how we are called to live.

We need that. We need that, because as long as we are laboring under the false illusion about who God is, or who we are, then we're going to miss out on the purpose and calling of our lives. If we believe that God is an angry tyrant, always out to get us, always shaming us, then we're not going to be living the life of grace. If we believe God is aloof, somewhere out there, not here among us, somewhere out there, uninvolved, never there when you really need him, then we're not going to be relying on God when we need him. We won't be getting that support. If God is as Jesus shows us to be, if God is a God that loves us that much, loves us enough to tabernacle right here among us, to live and die for us, and to grant us this grace upon grace upon grace, then we're not only going to look to God for help when we need it, but we're going to be living lives of gratitude and service to God for the sake of that love.

The law is like that blueprint showing us how to live, but then we see when we don't keep the law perfectly, Jesus is there to demonstrate God's grace, to catch us, put us back on our feet. I think one of the best examples of this whole concept, this law and grace, comes out of Victor Hugos' book *Les Miserables*. Some of you may have heard of it. In it, as you probably know, we read of Jean Valjean, who after serving a prison sentence for stealing bread, escapes, and he's given food and shelter by Bishop Muriel, but in the middle of the night, Jean Valjean steals the silverware from the bishop. He runs off with it, but Valjean is captured. He's arrested, and he lies. He says the bishop gave him the silver. Valjean is brought back to the bishop's house, and they are ready to punish Valjean mercilessly, and he is so filled with dread, and despair of being caught. He knows he's going back to prison for life now, but instead of outing Valjean, there is this incredible grace.

The bishop says, "Oh. Yeah, I gave him the silver, but Valjean, you forgot the candlesticks." He places the candlesticks in Valjean's pack, and Valjean realizes he is free to go. This grace has freed him. He is so stunned, but the bishop leans in, and says in a low voice to him, "Do not forget, never forget that you have promised to use this money in becoming an honest man, Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I buy from you, and I give it to God." In that instant, Valjean's life of course changes, and he does vow to live that life of grace, as a gracious, loving man. Maybe you missed it, but my friends, you and I, we are all, we are Jean Valjean. That's who we are. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. We've all failed and missed the mark in some way. We've all sinned. I know I have, but in and through God's Word,

the divine logos, we have been given God's grace. We've been given grace upon grace.

Spend some time recounting the graces of God in your own life, the many times where each of us have been delivered or saved, given grace for just the next hour, or day, or week, or month, or year. All of those times we were given grace, because when Jesus was sacrificed for us, when Jesus came and tabernacled among us, and died, then we no longer belong to evil. Our souls were bought and given to God, and now it's up to us to live as honest men and women, to live that life of love and grace, to spend our lives in service to God, and neighbor, because God is that kind of God. God has made us that kind of people, should we choose to live it.

As we begin a new year, tonight at midnight we're offered another opportunity to live into that invitation of grace. The logos became flesh, and tabernacled among us for that reason, and from His fullness, we have all received grace, upon grace, upon grace. Thanks be to God.