

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.

3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4In him was life, and that life was the light of people. 5The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

6There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all people might believe. 8He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9The true light that gives light to every person was coming into the world.

10He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen the glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Creator, full of grace and truth.

15John 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.' " 16From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. 17For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at God's side, has made God known.

Do you remember what it was like in school when you had a question about something but you didn't ask it because you were pretty sure that you'd be able to figure out the answer on your own. But as you went to find the answer you got distracted by a group of friends and pretty soon all thoughts of finding the answer, indeed, even the question was forgotten as you made plans for the evening. And so you had a great time until you got to class the next day and the teacher starts talking again and you still have your question. But at this point, it's clear that the teacher expects you to know what she is talking about and so you are too embarrassed to ask your question and so you don't and before you know it, a couple of weeks of classes have passed and every time the teacher mentions this thing you have no idea what she's talking about. Have you ever had this experience?

I have but not in middle or high school, indeed I don't even know if it happened in college. The time I most remember feeling this way was during my *Introduction to the New Testament* class in seminary. The first time the professor said, "Johanine" I thought he would go on to explain the term. But he didn't. I looked around me and everyone else seemed to know what it meant so I figured I'd just look it up later but when later came, I always forgot to look it up and I think we were half way through the semester before I finally figured out that "Johanine" simply meant that something came from the Gospel according to John. Now that certainly wasn't the first, nor would it be the last, time I was baffled by something in John's gospel, the gospel from which I just read. You see, I'm more of a Matthean gal myself—you know, having to do with Matthew's Gospel. Matthew tells stories, offers long-lists of genealogies, basically recites the lessons of Jesus word-for-word—Matthew is a straight shooter. I can get behind an Evangelist like Matthew. But John—and these Johanine verses—these are a different story. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." I don't think I'd ever even read through John before going to seminary and even then probably wouldn't have had it not been a requirement. I didn't like John. Not only did the language confuse me, but I also considered John to be the main "weapon" of closed-minded, my-way-or-the-high-way, doctrinal Christians who used the book to condemn and judge other folks.

But as I've read and learned more about John, I realize how unfortunate my first impressions of it were. Wording that used to annoy and baffle me has become poetry that challenges and inspires. More than any of the other gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—John's poetry and prose conveys, and one could even say preserves, the beauty and mystery of God. "1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning. 3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4In him was life, and that life was the light of people. 5The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."

Indeed, it is that third verse, the one that is perhaps the most confusing, that is the most instructive for us on this third Sunday of Advent, this Sunday of joy. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Today I can only assume that a good deal of our joy will come from the children as they offer us a Christmas pageant. As you see in your bulletin insert, the pageant, which is based on an Australian children’s book, is about a wombat. As the play unfolds, we learn that our Divine Wombat’s only wish is to be in the annual Christmas pageant. But for some reason or another, poor Wombat is not well-suited for any of the parts he tries for. As the play progresses and the rejections mount, Wombat is feeling rather worthless, that there’s no room for him in the inn, that he is left out in the dark.

Now I’m guessing that we all have, at times, felt a bit like our Divine Wombat. We’ve felt like we don’t belong, that we don’t fit, that we’re not like the others. Perhaps you’ve been like I was in that New Testament class, too embarrassed to admit that you don’t know what you should know, indeed, you don’t know what everyone else already seems to know. And in those moments—we forget. We forget that the message of the angels, that the message of John the Baptist, that the message of Advent, that the Johanne message—is for us. We forget that it is through the Word, the Word that is Christ Jesus, we forget that it is through the Word that ALL things were made; without the Word nothing was made that has been made. In the Word was life, and that life was the light of people.” We forget, don’t we, that the light is in us, that God made us with the source of life that has been around since the beginning. Too often we have found ourselves standing in the darkness, failing to understand this message of God’s love and mercy, grace and life.

And is it any wonder, really, that even if we have understood it, we have often forgotten it, what with the winds of evil that constantly blow in an attempt to extinguish our light? When we are betrayed or left behind or left out or criticized or judged unfairly or treated disrespectfully or considered unworthy or told we’re not loved—these words are carried on the winds that threaten the light of the Word that lives within us. But the good news from John today, and on all of our days, is that though our flame is threatened, when the darkness does not understand it, still, the darkness cannot overcome it. Because it is the Word, it is the light, it is the life that has been since the beginning, and that light, THAT light is within you. That light is within me. That light is within all of creation. It is the light through which ALL things were made, without it nothing has been made. All people, all animals, all trees, all plants, all the oceans and the seas and the bays—OUR bay—within all of them, within all of us is the light of life. And though that light is threatened, it cannot, it WILL NOT go out, not in this life and surely not in the life to come. And if that doesn’t bring you joy on this third Sunday of Advent, this Sunday of joy, well then, I don’t know what will. For what greater gift is there than this?

Well, sometimes, we are led to believe that there are greater gifts than the gift of the light of life that shines within us. We’re told by the powers of darkness that there are things that matter more than the light—money, success, pride, the status quo, keeping up with the joneses, winning, not rocking the boat, earning, having, doing. And we all have succumbed to the powers. But the powers have not overcome us. And we must not, we absolutely must not allow them to overcome not just us, but indeed any part of God’s creation. We are not the source of the light, but we are the keepers of the light, we have seen the glory and know that grace and truth come from Jesus Christ and it is our job, it is our calling, it is our life’s greatest joy, to keep the light shining, to let our light of hope, peace, and joy shine not just here, but throughout all creation—to let our light shine on the tallest mountain, the deepest valley, on the biggest elephant and the smallest insects, on the air we breathe and the water we drink, on the people we love and the people it’s hardest for us to love, indeed on ALL things that have been made, for they have all been made through him, the one who gives us the right to become children of God, the one who gives us light. Thanks be to God for the joy. Thanks be to God for the light. Thanks be to God.