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MEADOW BROOK BAPTIST CHURCH - ADVENT 2020 - CHRIST PREEMINENT

# Christ Preeminent

*An Advent Devotional Guide from John 1:1-18*

By the Meadow Brook Baptist Church Staff

2020

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*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ~ John 1:1-5*

In these 5 verses, John has laid out a basic timeline of all of history. John reveals five key characteristics of the eternal king Jesus that show us the beginning, middle, and end of all time. The first of these is found in verses 1 and 2. John tells us that Jesus was in the beginning. Before all things, before the creation of the cosmos, Jesus was. Jesus was in the beginning. John then gives us the second characteristic when he tells us in verse 3 that Jesus is the creator. There is nothing in existence that was not made by him. Jesus is wholly and entirely king of creation.

The third characteristic given to us by John is found in verse 4. John tells us that Jesus is the giver of life. Not only did God create all things but he sustains all things. The most basic and core thing that every living human has (life), is a gift from Jesus. Jesus is the sustainer. The fourth characteristic is found in the beginning of verse 5. John tells us that the light shines in the darkness. We all know that when a light illuminates a dark room, the darkness is driven away. In the same way, Jesus's life, death, and resurrection is the hope of the world which drives out darkness. Jesus is the overcomer of darkness, the conqueror of evil. The final characteristic and the final point in our timeline is found in the last words of verse 5. "And the darkness has not overcome it." Jesus wins. Jesus is in the end. There will never be a time that Jesus is not reigning on the throne of eternity. What hope we have knowing that Jesus is the eternal king in the age of the ages!

There are no longer any surprises about the shape of history and the future. John has shown us that Jesus is the king of every moment in time. Jesus is in the beginning, Jesus is the creator, Jesus is the sustainer, Jesus is the conqueror, and Jesus is in the end. Find your hope today in the fact that Jesus was before all things and will reign forever and ever. Find your joy today in the fact that Jesus is the creator and conqueror. Find your peace today in the fact that Jesus is the sustainer of your life, in whom you live and breathe.

-Connor Miller

Helpful References: Gen 1:1; 1 Jhn 1:1; Heb 1:1-4; Rev 5:5, 21:22-27, 22:12-13

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ~ John 1:1*

When John sits down to write the Christmas story, he goes to the beginning. In other words, he traces his account of Jesus all the way back, beginning before creation itself. With “in the beginning,” he intentionally echoes the “in the beginning” of Genesis 1:1. For John, the gospel is inextricably linked to creation. “In the beginning was the Word …”

What, then, is this “Word”? Or who is “the Word”? In John’s account, this word (no pun intended) is *logos*, and in the first-century Greek world, it encompassed the philosophical principle of reason giving order to the universe. John is saying Jesus is the reason and order behind history, the One by whom everything exists (as does Paul in Col 1:17), but he’s also saying more.

In the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), “the word” connotes God’s activity in creation. God speaks, and things happen. God speaks, and His word creates. The word is God’s speech, His communication, His self-expression, His revelation. As the written word reveals the character and will of God, so does Jesus Christ. He reveals God. He is divine self-expression, or the ultimate self-disclosure of God. And John locates the existence of this “Word” in the beginning, meaning the Son of God is not a creature. He was with God, and He is God.

The birth of the Savior was not the beginning of the Savior. The Father, Son, and Spirit have enjoyed perfect harmony from eternity past, creating, sustaining, and ruling over all. By beginning his Gospel this way, John says, “Listen to the words of Jesus. See the deeds of Jesus. For the words and deeds of Jesus are the very words and deeds of God.”

As we embark on this Advent journey, let’s begin by bowing before Jesus, the Logos of all eternity, who is the ultimate reason and power behind all creation and who is the ultimate self-disclosure of God. He is the coming, the arrival, and the appearing of God. He is the revelation of God personified. Let’s bow before Him. Let’s worship Him.

-Chris Jones

Helpful References: Isa 9:6-7; Eph 3:11; Phil 2:6; Col 1:15; Rev 1:8

*He was in the beginning with God. ~John 1:2*

“Mr. David, how old is God?” In children’s ministry, it’s one of the most common questions I get on a regular basis from kids. I usually answer by first asking them to help me think of things in their life that have a “start” and a “stop.” We agree that things like a favorite TV show, eating a favorite food, a school day, and our very lives have a “start” and a “stop.” We also talk about how things we can touch like rocks or favorite toys also have a “start” when they were created and will have a “stop” one day, even if they last long enough to outlast us! We talk about how these limits apply to most everything we know—except our God. Though no perfect illustration exists to help kids (or adults!) understand the eternal nature of a God who is outside of time, we usually conclude our discussion with a helpful visual. I invite the kids to join me in holding their arms out to each side, pointing to the right and left. We talk about our arms representing a never-ending timeline and how God exists forever in the past (to the left) and forever in the future (to the right). As fascinating as it is to think about eternity future, for me it’s even more mind-blowing to think of eternity past.

John’s statement that, “He was in the beginning with God,” follows the established claim that Jesus (The Word) *was* God in verse 1. So, whatever we say about God the Father’s eternal nature can also be said of Jesus, God the Son. Jesus was very open about His eternal nature and relationship to God the Father. An answer He gave to the Jews who questioned Him fell on hostile ears: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58). And when His disciple Phillip said, “Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us,” Jesus told him “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Paul points out in Colossians that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (1:15) and that “in Him (Christ) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” (2:9).

This Christmas season, be reminded, and help any younger ones in your life understand that Jesus, God’s Son, didn’t “start” with His birth as a baby who would be laid in a manger. He was with God in the beginning! And He is God. Jesus Christ is “the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8).

-David Eanes

Helpful References: John 8:58, 14:9; Col 1:15-17, 2:9; 1 Jhn 5:20; Rev 1:8

*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ~ John 1:3*

We are creatures of habit. We like our schedules and routines, but we get out of sorts when we are forced unexpectedly to change. This year, 2020 has certainly forced unexpected changes. While there's nothing wrong with schedules and routines, one of the many beauties of Advent and Christmas is the opportunity it presents to step out of our routines and shift our perspective.

In John 1:3 John is proclaiming that God is the creator of all things. From the beginning, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have existed and created everything known to mankind. As the King of creation, all things have been made through Him. So, what does this have to do with our circumstances, and how does this relate to Advent and Christmas? The foundation of the Christian faith is the One whom John was preparing us to know. God's son, Jesus, came to earth in human form for the purpose of redemption. The declaration of creation being through God is significant because it changes our perspective. If our view of creation (nature, animals, buildings, furniture, technology, etc. . . . and most importantly, all human life) is rightly placed through the lens of recognition that everything we can see, touch, smell, and taste is created by God, it should cause us to act a certain way.

Advent and Christmas provide opportunity for us to step out of our fast-paced lives. We take time to be with family and friends. We decorate our homes in ways that help us change our perspective and be reminded of what and why we are celebrating. The challenge is for this perspective to not only exist during Advent and Christmas but to exist when the decorations are back in the attic and we return to our regular schedules. The constant awareness of God as creator of your life, all other lives, and all things should change not only our perspective but our actions as well. We exist to glorify God. This begins with the understanding that we were made by Him and for Him.

As we celebrate the coming of Jesus, be reminded that that all of creation was made by God. Look at your family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, your physical possessions, and all things as God's creation. Celebrate with joy and reverence that through Jesus Christ, we were made for His pleasure and purpose. Live as one who has been created uniquely by God and given the greatest gift... Jesus Christ.

-David Vaughan

Helpful References: ; Ps 33:6; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16

*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ~ John 1:4*

We all know the song we have sung for many years, “This Little Light of Mine.” We know all the words and can sing it without thinking, but how many times have we sat and dwelled on the words. Really dug deep to see what it means. This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. What is our light? Do we actually let it shine all the time?

In our verse today, John is telling us that in Christ was life, and the life was the light of men. He is making it perfectly clear that our light is Christ. How amazing is that to think about. I have the light of Christ IN me!

Jesus uses his light to expose the sinful nature of man. He also uses the light to lead and guide us on the path that he has prepared for us. The life of Jesus changed mankind forever. His life on earth was short, but the light of His being has shone brightly from even before time. His light is the light that brings knowledge, comfort, peace, and awareness into our lives. It is our choice to dwell in the light or in the darkness. When we have those dark days, we feel lonely, desperate, and unnerved, it is our own stubbornness and ignorance that leads us into the shadows. All it takes is moving back into the presence of Jesus to see His loving light again.

During this time of the year we are so focused on the birth of Jesus. He came into this world to save us. That is a weighty statement. He gave His life in a horrible death for each one of us. Why would we not want to abide in His light and let it shine for all to see? The decision is ours to make. We can truly be changed by the life and death of our Savior and allow others to see the wonderous light that Christ brings to our lives. We cannot let anything this world has to offer blow it out, and our hope in this is that Christ himself will not let it be quenched.

Just like the star that lead the wisemen to Jesus, we can use our light to lead others to the everlasting life. Let us worship Him, the giver of life, our sustainer, our redeemer. He is our eternal light and no darkness will ever overcome the light of Jesus Christ.

So, let your life shine in gratitude for the light Jesus brought into the world.

-Kelley Young

Helpful References: Ps 27:1, 36:7-9; John 8:12-30; 2 Tim 1:8-14

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ~ John 1:5*

We are people who walk in darkness. Indeed, we live in a land of deep darkness. We set sail in life with great aspirations. We have good hopes and dreams for ourselves and for those we care about, but often these hopes and dreams are sunk by the hard rocks of reality. When these hopes are shattered, are we to conclude that God has forgotten us? Are we to conclude that the dark night will consume us and the dawn will never come? God's Word and work in history remind us that no darkness will ever overcome the light. Isaiah 9:2 reminds us of the hope Christmas brings. There is reason to remember and rejoice because God promised, "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone." God fulfills his promises and turns Isaiah 9:2 into its completed parallel in Matthew 4:16. Those who think the darkness will never end can look to the great dawn that came at Christmas. One theologian has described advent as, "the dawning of indestructible joy." Jesus is the light of indestructible joy in a land of deep darkness.

Christmas is a celebration of the reality of John 1:5. That even on our darkest day, "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." The phrase "has not overcome it" can also be translated "did not comprehend it." It is likely that God inspired the beloved apostle to have the connotation of each phrase in view. The light of Jesus shines into our dark world but some love the darkness rather than the light because their works are evil (John 3:19). They reject the light and in darkness don't comprehend it. C.S. Lewis famously remarked on the tragedy of this reality by saying some people stubbornly prefer making mud pies in the slums because they don't take hold of God's offer in Christ of a holiday at sea. God's light is not only rejected in darkness, it is resisted. In the rest of John's Gospel we see a struggle of darkness doing everything it can to try to quench God's light. Darkness seems to get the victory in John 19 with Jesus' body buried in a tomb. But then we see the triumph of John 20 and the resurrection! No amount of rejection or resistance can overcome God's light that still shines and will shine. This is our hope everyday and every Christmas. Lord, help us to look to Christ our light. And as we do we can rejoice in the truth that, "the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day (Prov 4:18)."

-Austin Burch

Helpful References: Ps 27:1; Isa 42:16; 60:19-20; John 3:18, 14:6; Rev 19:11-16

*“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.” ~ John 1:6-8*

John came as a witness to the light and to also bear witness to others around him about the light. He was faithful to his task of proclaiming the gospel of God (Mark 1:14), calling all to repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15), and preparing them for the coming of Jesus in order that all might believe (John 1:7). What an example for us to follow today! Heralding—or proclaiming—the Good News so others may believe in Jesus. How hopeful it is to consider that the same gospel which John proclaimed is the very same gospel we proclaim today! This gospel bears light so that all who hear it may see the light of God (Ps 36:9).

As Jesus’ disciples, we are also to herald Good News about the light. We are to faithfully proclaim the message of hope and love to all so that they may also repent and believe. We must continue to prepare and equip ourselves with the word so that we can herald this Good News and sow the seed to our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and classmates who need to trust Christ as their Savior and Lord. Have you identified your lost family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and classmates? Would you consider creating a list or updating your list of people who are close to you but are spiritually lost and do not have a relationship with Christ? The message that we proclaim has mighty power to save. How precious is this message that shines light into the darkness, let us proclaim its beauty and its power to our friends and neighbors. As John bore witness to the light, so let us bear witness. For the message we bear is an objectively glorious and splendid light to the world. Begin praying for the salvation of those on your list regularly asking the Holy Spirit to provide an opportunity to herald the Good News to each of them during this Christmas holiday season.

-Kevin Bolin

Helpful References: Matt 28:18-20; Luke 10:25-37; Heb 1:1-4

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ~ John 1:6*

In a court of law, a witness testifies, and the decision of the judge or jury often depends upon the credibility of the witness. Is his account rational? Is she trustworthy? Do the facts add up?

In God's account of the gospel, John the Baptist is a key witness concerning the coming of Christ. He was "sent from God," meaning John was God's witness. He was not God. He was not the Word made flesh. He wasn't the source of life and light. He was *sent* from God, a messenger of God, to proclaim the truth about Jesus.

The prophets are God's witnesses, sent to proclaim God's truth. John proclaimed the truth about Jesus. He declared Christ's arrival, Christ's mission, and Christ's worth.

John the Baptist ministered in a particular way at a particular time, so to some extent his ministry was unique. We might say, sort of like the choir's unique role in our church gatherings—leading in worship and calling us to prepare to hear and respond to the word of the Lord. However, their role and John's role are not altogether different from the role other witnesses sent from God have played. The apostles, the prophets, the people of Israel, Christian missionaries, preachers, are all to be witnesses that call for faith in Jesus.

During this Advent season, may we hear the call of God through his witnesses, such as John the Baptist. Let's listen to their witness. Let's hear their call for repentance and faith in Christ. Hear their call to follow Christ, and then, church, let's join their mission. Let's join in telling the world that our Savior has come.

-Chris Jones

Helpful References: Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1; 4:5; Matt 3:1-3; 11:7,10; Luke 1:13-17; 3:16; John 1:27

*He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ~ John 1:7*

Toward the end of John's Gospel in John 20:30-31, he states that his purpose in writing the book is for his readers to believe that Jesus is God, and by believing have life in his Name. This also seems to be the purpose of John the Baptist's witnessing as he bore witness of the coming Messiah. The desired goal as we faithfully share the gospel is to see each person believing in Christ and repenting of his/her sin. But, as you are aware, the results are out of our control. The Father is the one responsible for the results. And we can be certain that the Father will work through this gospel. John here describes a message that contains the very light which can cause dead hearts to beat and dry bones to rise (Ezek 37:4-6).

In the parable of the growing seed in Mark 4:26-29, in order for the kingdom of God to grow, the sower must faithfully sow the seed, not knowing how it grows. He believes the harvest will come in due season, but he must first abundantly sow the seed. The promise is still true that the kingdom of God will grow as the seeds are sown! We must faithfully sow the seed to those around us who need to hear the message of hope and love this Christmas season. Imagine if the sower (you and me) never sowed any seed. Would the kingdom of God grow? Yet it is God who gives growth (1 Cor 3:6). How kind and gracious is the God of all providence that He allows His church to take part in redemption. For we are witnesses to the light, that all might believe.

Father, may we continue to be faithful witnesses, sowing the seed, and trusting You with the results. The harvest is truly plentiful, but the laborers are few (Luke 10:2). Help us keep our eyes focused on the harvest, believing Your promise that it is truly plentiful. In Jesus' name. Amen.

-Kevin Bolin

Helpful References: Ezek 37:1-14; John 20:30-31; Acts 1:1-8; 1 Cor 3

*He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ~ John 1:8*

Years ago, I remember working through the Experiencing God bible study by Henry and Richard Blackaby and Claude King, and the quote that still resonates with me is, “Identify where God is working, and join Him.” This quote still reminds me of a couple of questions I continually ask myself today, “How do I know where God is working?” and “Do I truly believe this?”

Clearly, John’s role was to bear witness about the light (vs. 8) and faithfully proclaim the gospel with others that the Messiah was coming. His role was not to save anyone, or to make anyone believe, but to simply proclaim the truth, believing the Holy Spirit would draw others to the Father. I realized my role, as a follower of Christ, is to faithfully proclaim the Good News, and leave the results to God! The harder questions for us to answer today is, “Am I willing to adjust my weekly schedule to join God where He is already working?” And, “Am I willing to set aside my busy agenda today in order to intentionally share the gospel with my neighbor, coworker, or friend, leaving the end result to God?”

In Birmingham, God is working. In North Africa, God is working. In South Asia, God is working. Lives are being transformed and the Holy Spirit is drawing many to a saving personal relationship with the Father. The Lord chooses to use us, as His children, to sow the seed of the gospel, and he reminds us to leave the end result to Him! May we live today and each day this Christmas season, believing He is at work all around us.

We praise You, Holy Spirit, that You are still working all around us. May we faithfully abide in You anticipating and adjusting our weekly schedule to sow the seed and join where You are working. Help us, Lord, this Christmas season to see where You are working, and trust You as You continue to provide opportunities to be obedient to the Great Commission task. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

-Kevin Bolin

Helpful References: Exod 40:34-38; Dan 2:20-23; John 3:30; Rev 21:1-8

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ~ John 1:9-13*

“O come, O come Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.”

I imagine that most everyone is familiar with the text above as a very common Advent hymn that is sung yearly during the Advent season. As with all hymns that are common or perhaps even expected, it is important that we not allow its familiarity to cover the meaning of the message of the text.

In the New Testament, Jesus is known as the true light and the beginning of John’s Gospel declares that this light, Jesus, is coming. Light cannot be overtaken by darkness. In fact, the opposite is true. Light always conquers darkness. When we sing the opening lines of the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” we are singing of the Light of the World to come and conquer the darkness. In John 1:9-13, God not only declares that Jesus, the true light was coming into the world but significantly declares that He is coming for all people to know and walk in the light. There is a lesser known stanza to the hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” that is not included in many of today’s hymnals. This stanza gives voice as to why the light was coming.

“O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our heavenly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery.”

God sent Jesus as the light of the world to conquer darkness for all of humanity; however, there is responsibility on our part. John 1:11-13 tell us that while God’s desire is for all people to know the light of Christ, not everyone accepts this gift. For those who believe, we have assurance that accepting God’s gift of light in Jesus Christ allows us to become children of God. We also have a responsibility to carry the light and to share the light with all people all the time. Unfortunately, for those who do not accept Christ, they place themselves on a path of eternal misery. Therefore, we pray singing:

O come, Desire of nations, bind All peoples in one heart and mind;  
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease; Fill the whole world with heavens peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

-David Vaughan

Helpful References: Isa 9:1-7; 60:1-22; Ezek 37:15-28; Luke 2:8-21

## The Light has Come

12/11

*The true light which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*

~ John 1:9

One of my favorite travel games for long car drives involves everyone agreeing on a certain word that's fairly common in song lyrics—not too common (like “love”) but not too far-fetched (like “unwittingly”). Once everyone agrees on the word, each player takes a turn and sings a little part of any song whose lyrics or title contain that word. After a few rounds, as soon as someone cannot think of another song with that word, that person drops out. Play continues, and the winner is the last one standing—not literally standing in the car seat, of course!

If we played a similar game with Bible verses rather than songs, and I were to ask you to think of a verse in Scripture that mentions the word “light,” I bet many of you would start with the same verse that immediately comes to my mind—“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14). This is a beautiful word picture Jesus uses to describe His followers in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Perhaps others, immediately think of one of several verses in John 1 that contain the word “light.”

In verse 4, John used “light” and “life” in close connection with each other, writing “In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men.” “Light” and “life” being in close connection with each other can also be found in the Old Testament: “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Psalm 36:9). Jesus gives spiritual illumination, leading us to life in Him. Jesus offers us abundant life, and we also read that Jesus is “the life” (John 14:6). Similarly, we find in John 1:9 that just as Jesus is the giver of light, He Himself is “the true light.” In summary, Jesus Christ is the Giver of light and life, and He also is the light and the life. In other words, Jesus gave us Himself!

John 1:9 is a pivotal verse of the chapter in that it speaks of the Incarnation—Jesus coming in the flesh, into the world. Let the many lights you see this Christmas remind you that Jesus, the True Light that gives light, came to give Himself to us, and for us—to save us from sin and offer us abundant and eternal life. And let’s pray that you and I will shine Christ’s light in our life for all to see: “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

-David Eanes

Helpful References: Matt 5:13-16; John 14:1-14; Phil 2:12-18;

*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ~ John 1:10*

You could place a young child in a room with the hundreds of women, many that look like his mother, and more than likely the young child will be able to still pick out his mother from the crowd. The infant intuitively recognizes its dependence and connection with its mother. Contrary to this, humanity rebelliously abandons its life-source in a suicidal attempt at autonomy and independence. We proudly declare we are the masters of our fate. We are the captains of our souls.

It is no wonder then that when our creator took on flesh and walked among us we did not recognize him. John 1:10 declares this shocking reality that, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." The corruptness of humanity is exemplified in the tragic irony of this verse. The creator came to his creation but the creation did not know Him. Humanity as a whole has veered so far from its intended function that it cannot even recognize the one to whom it owes its existence. This is a humbling reality.

The presence God of can often feel distant and hidden from us. We cry out, "where are you Lord?" This verse reminds that in those moments it is more certain that we have turned away from God than that he has turned away from us. We've gone our own way and turned away from Him so long that now we are unable to recognize the Lord who has power to heal our diseases, forgive all our sins, redeem our life from the pit, crown us with steadfast love and mercy, and satisfy us with the good (Psalm 103:4-5). Oh the depths of our blindness and need. God create in us new eyes to see you, new hearts to love you, and new voices to proclaim your glory.

-Austin Butch

Helpful References: Psalm 103; Luke 24:13-35; Rom 1:18-32, 3:9-18

*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ~ John 1:11*

Often, once people sense their guilt before God they start to initiate a plan where through their own efforts and will-power they will get back into God's favor. This phenomenon explains every other form of religion outside of true Christianity. But despite the best efforts of humanity Romans 3:12 still declares the sobering truth, "all have turned aside; together they have become worthless no one does good, not even one." Isaiah declares that even our own best attempts at righteous acts amount to nothing more than filthy rags before God (Isa 64:6).

If there was any group of people who could have pulled off earning their own righteousness it would have been the Jewish people. They were the only people of the true God, they had God's law, His prophets, His covenant, His adoption, and of them and to them came Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus himself declared, "salvation is from the Jews." But in Romans 10 Paul prays for Israel because despite all of their benefits they are still in desperate need of being saved from God's judgment. Paul declares that they have a religious zeal but not according to knowledge. They don't submit to God and His righteousness. Instead, they try to establish their own. This captures the horror of John 1:11, "He (Jesus) came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."

Israel was marched through the Red Sea on dry ground by God. They watched city walls crumple as they followed the instruction of this God. They were fed by his hand in the arid wilderness. Yet when their God put on flesh and stood before them, they did not receive him. This shows us how blinding self-righteousness can be. We need to remember the Biblical refrain, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Ps 138:6, Prov 3:34; 29:23, Matt 23:12, Luke 1:52, James 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5). We need to acknowledge our desperate need and helplessness before God. Jesus declared that those who are well have no need of a physician, he came to heal the sick (Mark 2:17). He also declared that he came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). We must acknowledge we are lost before we can be found. We must admit how sick we are before we can be healed by the great physician. Only the poor in spirit inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3). It goes against our sinful instincts, but we must empty our hands of the tools we use to try to build our own righteousness so that we can receive the righteousness of Christ. Then we can sing with hope and wonder before the gracious throne of God, "nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

-Austin Burch

Helpful References: Ps 138; Isa 64:1-7; Rom 5:12-21

*But to all who receive Him, who believed in His name, he gave them the right to become children of God. ~ John 1:12*

This verse embodies the gospel of Christ. To all who receive Him, as Father, Guide, Counselor, King, and Savior, and believed in the name of Christ our Redeemer and constant Protector, we are given the right to become His children.

Just as John 3:16 tells us, whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. God is saving His children from the certain death which comes from sin by providing His son to save us. The price for such an unbelievable gift is trust in Him. Believe in the sacrifice and have faith in the creator of our very being.

To be called the child of God is not just a title, it is a privilege, an honor, the greatest gift we as humans could receive. We as parents know the love and pride we feel for our own children. We hurt when they hurt, we rejoice when they accomplish something. That is how our heavenly Father feels about us. He sent His very Son to take away our sin. What an awesome statement that is. Jesus gave His life for us.

But being called the child of God is not something we can take lightly. It is not a statement that we can fluff off and move on. It brings duty to Christ. We must use the title to bring others into the family. We need to share the story of the sacrifice of Jesus which atones for our sins and brings us into the family of God. We need to do this through our actions and words. We need to live as we are children of God. Bear the death and resurrection of Jesus to each and every person you meet. We have been declared righteous by God.

During this Advent season, let the precious baby Jesus be your beacon to show the love of Christ. Allow the name child of God to resonate in everything we do. Share the gospel, be the beacon of light that draws others in, and do not let the sacrifice of the perfect One just be on the back burner of your heart. Let us always remember that we are part of a family that will allow us to spend eternity with our heavenly Father.

Thank you Father for calling us your children. Thank you for the gift of your Son.

-Kelley Young

Helpful References: Rom 8:12-16; Gal 4:28; Eph 5:1-2; Phil 2:12-18

*Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ~ John 1:13*

The language of birth leaves the object of that birth in a passive role. The baby takes part in the birth in the same way that a novel takes part in being written and a meal takes part in being cooked. When we give awards to a book for wisdom or wit, are we giving honor to the book itself or to its author? When we give thanks for the tastiness of a meal, do we honor the food or its cook? In the same way, in the process of birth it is not the baby who is congratulated, but the one who begot the baby. As children of God, we cannot take credit for our birth. In this same way, we are taught that our birth as Children of God is a passive birth. Man cannot take credit for his adoption into the family of God.

The Children of God have only their Heavenly Father to thank for their position as children of heaven. We are taught that our flesh and blood war against the King of heaven (Rom 7:23). New birth, that is heavenly birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:5), is the work of God. But since this spiritual birth is in many ways shrouded in mystery, let us turn now and give proper honor and glory to the Eternal Father who adopts, redeems, and sanctifies his children.

God has chosen to be a Father to all those who believe in him. The role of father cannot be overlooked. Familial relations are some of the closest relationships we will have in this life. Those familial relations of flesh and blood are mysteriously important to humanity. This is proven when an adopted child longs to meet his biological parents even though his only tie to them is his blood. But as highly as humans value these blood relations, John teaches us that our new status of being born of God ties us to Him eternally. The God of heaven has become our very real father. He who teaches his children to be like Him. He who protects his children no matter what, even if that means His own death (Phil 2:8).

Our new birth teaches us about the power of our Father to transfer us from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col 1:13). Our new birth teaches us about the self-sacrificial love of the Father who bore the punishment of the iniquity of his children that they may be called righteous (Isa 53:4-6). And our new birth teaches us about the infinitely gracious generosity of our Father who offers to wretched sinners the title of beloved heir and valued child (John 1:12; Rom 7:24-25).

-Connor Miller

Helpful References: Isa 53:1-12; Zech 2:10-14; John 3:1-15; Rom 5:6, 7:1-25; Gal 5:1-15

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.*

~ John 1:14-18

Christmas is a celebration of God taking up residence among us. The One who was with God in the beginning ... the One who made all things ... the One who reconciles God and sinful humanity ... “became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The Creator became a creature and lived among other creatures.

We sing this truth every Christmas: “Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive her King ...” The Lord over all has come to earth as a baby boy to live among broken, hurting, lost, and self-centered creatures in need of redemption.

God’s presence is not limited to any particular place. There is nowhere we can go to escape the presence of God (see Ps. 139:7-12). Even so, when God called and set apart a particular people—the descendants of Abraham—to be His people, He resided among them in a particular place (see Ex. 25:8-9). God chose to dwell among His people in the tabernacle (and later the temple), in a particular way. Only certain individuals on certain occasions could enter into God’s presence, because God’s holiness precludes sinners from barging into His presence.

John now declares that this same divine presence of God, which was especially located in the tabernacle, has come to dwell fully in the man Jesus. Through Jesus, God came to dwell, or to pitch His tent, among people. He came to dwell among us, making God known to us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Incarnate God, meaning God in human flesh. The God of eternity stepped into time so that we may live in eternity with Him. Through Jesus, God’s grace and truth intersect with our lives.

Christmas is a celebration of grace and truth, marking God’s coming to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Christ came in order to go to the cross and give His life as a substitutionary sacrifice in our place, so that by the grace of God, we can receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Him. For this reason, we celebrate God’s coming, for His coming impacts eternity.

- Chris Jones

Helpful References: Ps 139:7-12; John 14:9-10; Gal. 4:4-5; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ~ John 1:14*

This verse speaks volumes about Jesus' person, nature and mission. John the Evangelist first tells us that the Word—noted in verse one as God—became flesh. During the Advent/Christmas season, we especially remember this all-important truth, known as the doctrine of the incarnation: that in the person of Jesus Christ, God the Son took on flesh and became human. This teaching caused some controversy and division in the early church, as Gentile converts from paganism could not imagine God entering the physical realm. They believed that matter/materiality was evil, and therefore they thought that Jesus only appeared to be in the flesh. John makes it clear here and elsewhere (2 John 7) that the incarnation is a key belief of the gospel, and to deny it is to deny the revelation of God in Jesus (antichrist). As one prominent early Christian theologian wrote, "What God has not assumed (i.e., become), He has not redeemed." John goes on to say that God (Word) "dwelt" among us, using the same term used to describe God's abiding presence with the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness after leaving Egypt ("20abernacle"). The imagery here speaks to God's love, redemption, and patience. Just as God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, passed over His people in His wrath, and led them into the Promised Land despite their failings; so also Christ rescued us from slavery to sin, cleanses our sins and averts God's wrath upon us, and enables us to enter God's heavenly kingdom despite our shortcomings. We may even say that he metaphorically walks with us through the wildernesses/trials of this life.

John notes that this Word made flesh has His own glory, something only properly attributed to God. This fact speaks to the undeniable truth that the Word made flesh is himself God. John also identifies this one as the only-begotten of the Father, which speaks to Jesus' unique status as God the Son. Lastly, John speaks to the mission of Christ when he refers to him as full of grace and truth. Grace speaks to his mission in saving our souls even though we don't deserve anything but condemnation, and truth speaks to his mission in revealing God the Father to us, most notably His holy, just, gracious, faithful, loving and sovereign plan. Let us commit anew to trusting Him each day as we reflect upon His person and work.

-John Laing

Helpful References: Eph 3:17-19, Heb 1:2; Rev 5:1-14

*(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”)* ~ John 1:15

John the Baptist proclaimed Christ to those who came out to the wilderness to hear his preaching. While he called the people to repentance, his primary mission was to exalt Jesus and to point the people to Him as a proper object of faith and trust. He did this by identifying Jesus in a variety of ways that inspire worship and adoration. Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 35), the person on whom the Spirit of God descends (John 1:33), the one who baptizes with the Spirit (1:33; 3:34), He whose sandal John is unworthy to untie (1:27), the one from above (3:31), the Christ (3:28); in short, the Son of God (1:34; 3:35-36). John’s testimony calls us to worship Christ, whom the Father has exalted, and to proclaim His glory to those we encounter in a wilderness of sorts.

Not only did the Baptist testify of Christ, but he did so with a characteristic humility that points to the exalted status of Christ. In addition to saying he is not worthy to be Jesus’ servant (i.e., the reference to untying Jesus’ sandals), John told his disciples that his own ministry must take a back seat to that of Jesus (3:30) because his role was to prepare the way for Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation (1:23). In referring to himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (cf. John 1:23, Isa 40:3), John proclaims the deity of Christ. Isaiah’s prophecy is about preparing the way of the LORD as He makes a way for the Judeans to return to the Promised Land from a 70-year exile in Babylon to be the people of God as foretold in the covenants. John prepares the way for Jesus, who fulfills God’s covenant promises to Abraham, Moses and David by creating a new humanity—spiritual descendants of Abraham—in Christ, the new Adam and the promised Davidic king.

Similarly, in today’s verse, John’s humility proclaims Jesus’ exalted status as God himself. Jesus, who comes after John, is preferred because of His eternal divine nature; He existed before John—before the foundations of the Earth—as God the Son, just as John the Evangelist states (John 1:1, 2). Christ’s eternity, His exalted status, and His fulfillment of God’s covenants, should lead us to worship and adore Him.

-John Laing

Helpful References: John 6:35-40, 10:25-30; Phil 2:1-11; Rev 7:9-17

*For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ~ John 1:16*

I don't remember where I heard or read it, but someone explained the difference between grace and mercy to me in such a simple way, that I've passed it on to children and others in my ministry. I feel like sometimes we use the words "mercy" and "grace" almost interchangeably, but there is a distinct difference in these two related blessings from above. Mercy is withholding something that's negative from those who, in actuality, deserve that negative. Mercy from God happens when He withholds the punishment from us that we deserve for our sin. Of course, we know He withholds because His Son Jesus has already suffered the punishment for our sin on the cross. Grace is giving something that's positive to those who, in actuality, do not deserve that positive. Grace from God happens when He gives abundant and eternal life to sinners like us who do not deserve it. Of course, we know He gives this life to us because He loves us and through His Son Jesus' work on the cross, He forgives and removes our sin.

John 1:16 begins with "From the fullness of His grace." This picture of grace is one of abounding, overflowing grace. God abounds in each of His qualities so much so that His grace overflows and abounds from Him. The verse concludes with "we have all received one blessing after another." God freely gives grace upon grace to those who accept and receive the ultimate expression of His grace to all people—Jesus. Jesus is the gift of God dwelling among us and dying on the cross in our place.

Because of our sin, we don't deserve anything positive God offers us, but that's where His grace comes in. God offers us the best treasure possible, even though we do not even come close to deserving it—the treasure of abundant life in Jesus on earth, and eternal life with Him when our earthly life comes to an end. Have you received this treasure—blessing after blessing—by accepting God's gift of grace to you in Jesus? Jesus is God's gift to you. Accept His gift today!

-David Eanes

Helpful References: Eph 2:1-10, 4:9-16; James 4:1-10; 2 Pet 3:18

*For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ~ John 1:17*

For many, the idea of rules or laws seems restricting or controlling, while for others it speaks of order and civility. When we read or hear the 10 commandments, too often we read or hear a set of rules: a list of “do this” or “don’t do that.” Let me encourage you to pause now and read again the 10 commandments found in Deuteronomy 20:1-17; however, when you read them, do so with the mindset of God revealing His overarching characteristic of love and goodness and read them as a gift from God. God’s laws are all about loving God and others. Do not presume a finger pointing, angry God waiting for you to mess up.

I hope you were able to read God’s law with a sense of freedom and blessing. God’s law given to us through Moses, provides the framework from which we are to move and interact within this world. We must remember that these laws were given to the nation Israel (and ultimately us) within a covenant relationship between Israel and God. Now, step back from the pages and view God’s word as an intricately woven narrative or story. This story, throughout God’s word demonstrates a pattern of laws given only to be broken by mankind. Over and over again we see this pattern. At one point before Israel is to enter the promised land, Moses tells the people that he knows that they aren’t going to follow all of God’s laws. They have proven this over and over again. As the story continues, we hear over and over again of the people having hard hearts that need to be transformed into soft hearts. If we are ever going to truly love God and love others, it will only happen through this transformation of our hearts.

In John 1:17, John is proclaiming the fulfillment of transformed hearts through the grace and truth that can only be found in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to fulfil the law which can be summed up in the command to love God and love others. Jesus states this plainly when confronted by the Pharisees. He answers them saying that the greatest commandment is to love God and the second is to love others.

Celebrating Advent and Christmas provides the opportunity to remember why Jesus came. It wasn’t so we could have another holiday or celebration. Jesus came to save you and me from our hard hearts of stone and ultimate separation from him. The fulfillment of the law and the transformation of your heart can only come through the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. Whether for the first time or the one-hundredth time, surrender your heart to Him today.

-David Vaughan

Helpful References: Deut 1:17; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:25-32; Rom 5:1-11

*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. ~ John 1:18*

Throughout the Scriptures, there are a few people who, in rare instances, are given a glimpse of God's glory: Abraham, Manoah, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel (to name a few). In each instance, however, the revelation of God was mediated through a vision or dream, or was somehow obscured (cf. Exodus 33:20). In the person of Jesus, though, we are given the opportunity to see God in a new way. When Philip asked him to show them the Father, Jesus responded that to see Him is to see the Father, because He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 14:8-9).

Christ's revelation of God is unique because of the incarnation, which is an amazing demonstration of God's love for us. As He takes on flesh, He identifies with us in our frailty and weakness (Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 4:15). The incarnation serves as a precursor to the ultimate demonstration of love in the substitutionary death of God's own son—Christ Jesus—on the cross (John 3:14-16; 15:13). The revelation is also unique because of the way Christ made God's character and nature known in his teachings and actions (John 14:10-11). In his high priestly prayer (John 17), Jesus asked God the Father to glorify him because by doing so, the Father himself will be glorified and made known; because the revelation of God through Christ will strengthen the bond of love and unity among believers, the Church (17:20, 26); and through the supernatural love that we have for one another in the Spirit, God is made visible to the world (1 John 4:12-13). May we be a revelation of God to those we encounter throughout this Advent season, particularly in the Meadow Brook community.

-John Laing

Helpful References: Exod 34:1-9; Ezek 1: 22-28; John 17