

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Incarnation; christology; manifestation; salvation; soteriology

## Closing Prayer

We praise you, gracious God,  
for the glad tidings of peace,  
the good news of salvation:  
your Word became flesh,  
and we have seen his glory.

Let the radiance of that glory  
enlighten the lives  
of those who celebrate his birth.

Reveal to all the world  
the light no darkness can extinguish,  
our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
in the splendour of eternal light,  
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers · Christmas<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

## Christmas Day

*25 December*

### Principal Service readings

#### Set III

Isaiah 52.7-10

Jerusalem restored

Psalms 98

The final coming of the Lord

Hebrews 1.1-4 [5-12]

The final revelation of God's glory

John 1.1-14

In the beginning was the Word

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *In the beginning*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup>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.

## Comments and Questions

The beginning of the fourth gospel is one of the densest passages of the New Testament, combining the author's christology and theology. There is a movement from pre-existence (1.1-2) into creation (1.3-5), then through the story of the human condition until the high point of the incarnation (1.6-14). The prologue then concludes with the reception of the incarnate *logos* (1.15-18).

Within this passage can be discerned the statement and re-statement of the same message. Thus:

- (a) The Word is announced or described (1.1-2; 1.6-8; 1.15)
- (b) The revelation brought by the Word is coming into the world (1.3-4; 1.9)
- (c) Humankind responds (1.5; 1.10-13; 1.16)
- (d) and the object of belief is described, only Son of the Father (1.14; 1.17-18)

This is telling the reader who Jesus is and what he has done, but there remains the question of how did this action of God in the human story take place – to be laid out in the gospel that follows.

At the beginning of the passage a parallel is established with the biblical account of the beginning of the human story in Genesis 1.1. Even before this beginning, the author declares that the Word 'was' (1.1), thus pre-existing the human story. The Word pre-exists not for its own sake but in relation to God (1.2). The Word doesn't just exist, but exists to say something, to communicate. The author avoids identifying too closely the Word with God (1.1).

The Word broke into the human story and made life an ongoing possibility (1.4). The life that is light broke into the human story in an event that happened in the past, the effects of which are still part of the present story.

<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

The hints of the Word's involvement in historical events continue as a historical figure with the name 'John' enters into the story (1.6). John has, importantly, been sent by God. John the Baptist was a great figure, but he was not the light: he came to bear witness to the light (1.7). The true light is differentiated from John (1.9).

The Word came into the human story only to be rejected by his own people (1.11). However, there is a positive response from others and they received a blessing or enlightenment (1.12-13). The glory that was seen was 'of the only Son from the Father' (1.14).

## Quotations

### 1

God so loved us that for our sakes he, though whom time was made, was made in time; older by eternity than the world itself, he became younger in age than many of his servants in the world; God, who made man, was made man; he was given existence by a mother whom he brought into existence; he was carried in hands which he formed; he was nursed at breasts which he filled; he cried like a baby in the manger of speechless infancy – this Word without which human eloquence is speechless.

St Augustine of Hippo, 354–430

### 2

'While gentle silence enveloped the whole earth, and night was halfway through its course, your all-powerful Word, O Lord, leaped down from your royal throne in the heavens.' In this ancient text of Scripture, the most sacred moment of time is made known to us, the moment when God's all-powerful Word would leave the tender embrace of the Father and come down into his mother's womb, bringing us the news of salvation. For, as it says elsewhere in Scripture, 'God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,' declaring: 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' And so from his royal throne the Word of God has come to us, humbling himself in order to raise us on high, becoming poor himself in order to make us rich, becoming human in order to make us divine.

Julian of Vézelay, c.1080–1165