

# Quiet Wisdom and the Word Made Flesh

*A sermon at Holy Eucharist on the Second Sunday of Christmastide, 2026*

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*John 1:10-18*

*He was in the world; but the world, though it owed its being to him, did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people would not accept him. But to all who did accept him, to those who put their trust in him, he gave the right to become children of God, born not of human stock, by the physical desire of a human father, but of God. So the Word became flesh; he made his home among us, and we saw his glory, such glory as befits the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. John bore witness to him and proclaimed: 'This is the man of whom I said, "He comes after me, but ranks ahead of me"; before I was born, he already was.' From his full store we have all received grace upon grace; for the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart, has made him known.*

Following our lectionary, we hear parts of the first chapter of John's gospel often through Christmastide. This is not by mistake. Our images of Christmas owe much to Luke and Matthew. The journey to Bethlehem, a full inn, lodging in a stable, angels in the sky appearing to shepherds, and so on. But it is through John most expansively that we are given a sense of these events, not as happenstance, but as part of something God has been working at for a long time. From the very beginning, in fact.

When we hear John mention the Word, it is easy to attach our English language ideas about what that means. It's a collection of sounds that we've given a particular meaning and an important part of how we communicate. But John, of course, isn't writing in English. He's writing in the Greek of 2,000 years ago. John's  $\lambda\circ\gamma\circ\varsigma$  means something quite different from the English "word," even if it does have a capital W.

$\lambda\circ\gamma\circ\varsigma$  might refer to a single word, but at the same time it refers to the rationale, the logic, the whole idea behind that word. When we hear John speak about the Word being with God and being God, John is describing a kind of summary of the way in which God has ordered every created thing. As if we could take the vastness as intricacies of God's plan and collect them in one unit that we might have a chance at comprehending.

As if this weren't heady and complex enough, John goes on to say then that the Word became flesh and made a home among us. The  $\lambda\circ\gamma\circ\varsigma$  of God, present from the beginning, is now dwelling among humanity as a baby, newly born in circumstances that none of us would have chosen for God's appearing in our flesh.

This is all a lot to take in and the consequences of God's self-revelation in this way are going to be driven home again and again in the

stories we hear between now and Ash Wednesday. It's fruitful territory for study and reflection as we read through some of the examples of God's manifestation to humanity and are reminded that these sorts of encounters with God demand a response.

Fortunately for us, we don't have to start from scratch when we think about what it means to encounter and live with God in this way. The group of books of the Bible called "wisdom literature" are a help to us in understanding divinity, virtue, and how they intersect with each other in human experience. These books are generally understood to include Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom, Sirach, some psalms, and some of Baruch.

We can hear similarities in how John talks about the *λόγος* and how these ancient authors talk about Wisdom. Proverbs 3:19 describes God founding the earth through Wisdom, while John describes all things coming into being through the *λόγος*.<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 8:22 describes Wisdom being present at the beginning of God's creation; John tells us the *λόγος* was with God in the beginning.<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 8:27-30 describes Wisdom working with God to create the heavens and the waters; John tells us that without the *λόγος* no created thing came into being. Just a few minutes ago, we heard a reading from Sirach about Wisdom's search for a place among humanity and John tells us that the *λόγος* became flesh and made a home among us.<sup>3</sup>

John does not explicitly tell us that he is linking the tradition of Wisdom in the Hebrew scriptures with his telling of the good news of Jesus, but it is difficult to think of these similarities as mere coincidence. There is something about

Wisdom, being present but unnamed in the New Testament, quietly working away at her role in God's plan, which may feel familiar to many. As Sister Mary Coloe, a Roman Catholic New Testament scholar says, this "resonates with the experience of women in church communities today who are present and active, but their contribution and leadership [are] unrecognized and unnamed."<sup>4</sup>

There is something about this parallel between the story of Wisdom, the story of Jesus, and the description of the Incarnation in John's gospel. When John describes this moment, he says that the *λόγος* became flesh, not man, not even human, but flesh. This is a term both broad and deep. It includes humanity, in all of our wonderful diversity, but it also situates the incarnate Word as part of the larger divine order.

After all, what enfleshed being exists without a connection to the rest of creation? Where would any of us be without the plants, animals, minerals, and so on that surround us? To be flesh is to be part of this vast, connected order that God has instituted. To be enfleshed is not only a reflection of a deep indwelling with humanity, but a profound rootedness in the great system of relationships that is God's creation. This is an important revelation about God's order, about God's logic, about God's *λόγος*.

As we see the end of Christmastide coming and with it the packing away of angels and shepherds for another year, we would do well to consider quiet Wisdom in her endless work among us. Over the next seven weeks or so, we will hear the stories of a season of illumination, where God's presence among humanity shines so brightly that it cannot be ignored. The Incar-

<sup>1</sup>John 1:3

<sup>2</sup>John 1:2

<sup>3</sup>John 1:14

<sup>4</sup>Mary L. Coloe, *John 1-10*, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2021), 8.

nation at Christmas; the Manifestation to the Gentiles at Epiphany; the Presentation in the Temple; the Baptism of the lord; the Transfiguration on the mountaintop. Each of these and the many smaller encounters between them demand that we consider our response. Are we the faithful shepherds, urged by Wisdom to look up and heed the words of the angels? The magi, hearing Wisdom's voice to return home by a different road? Are we Herod, ignoring the work of Wisdom in our midst and seeking to put down God's unsettling appearance in our lives?

May you be blessed with signs of God's dwelling among us; may you be blessed with ears to hear Wisdom's voice when she speaks; and may you be blessed to be the home of both words and acts that reveal God's Wisdom to others.