

Receive the WORD !

There's an old Norwegian joke. And it goes like this. How do you make Lutefisk? Well, first you catch some fish. Then you soak them in lye for hours and hours. Then you find some boards and nail the fish to the boards. Then you plant the boards in the sand by the ocean so that the salt air can cure them. Then, after all that, you take the fish, throw them away and eat the boards. Translating the words of the bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into english is much like this. Sometimes what is lost in translation is the meaning.

We find that challenge before us this Christmas morning. In the opening words of the gospel of John we read: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* John tells us that in the beginning the word existed. And notice, the word, ‘word’ is capitalized. What is this ‘word’ that John speaks of.

There have been books and books written about this one word. But, let me try and summarize. In greek the word *λόγος* describes everything that separates humans from animals. It's the ability for logical, rational thought. It's the ability to move others and have them move you. It's the ability to imagine and dream. And John tells us that in the beginning this ability not only existed. But it started somewhere. Someone was the beginning of thought, creativity and everything that separates us from the animals.

Now, notice what John is doing. John is introducing us to Jesus. But, unlike the other gospel writers, John doesn't spill the beans right away. He assumes that you have imagination and a heart and a brain. And so, he introduces you to someone. And, bit by bit, detail by detail, he lets you put the puzzle together.

And what's the first detail. There was a being—someone who was the source of thought, emotions and imagination. And what else do we learn about this *word*? He was with God and he *was* God. This is a thought, that if we are think about this at all has just stumped us. It has just crushed our tiny, puny human brains. This *word* was both face-to-face with God and at the same time God, himself.

And as if John hasn't given you enough to think about for the rest of your lift right there, he continues. He tells us: *“John 1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”*

This word was powerful. He created everything that exists. And not only was he powerful, but he was also caring. John tells us that in him was the life. Now, here John explains what he means. What is this ‘life’? It's the light for men. In other words, Jesus gives hope, comfort and meaning to the lives of us humans.

Now, if we were living in a different time in history, here is where we would stop. Here is where we would stop and ponder these thoughts for a long time. Jesus is the source of heart and mind and imagination. Jesus created everything. Jesus is the one and only one who gives us hope and light and meaning in our lives of darkness. But, I will leave that for you as homework because there are more wondrous details to ponder in these words.

John tells us: *“John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* If you were to read these words in John's time for the first time, they would shock you. There this *word* was. He is the source of thought, emotions and imagination. He created everything. He gives us humans hope. But, then, what does he do? The WORD takes on human flesh and blood. Why would the creator become what he created? Why would such unchained, unbound power restrict and confine himself in a human body? And, as if we weren't shocked and amazed by this enough, John adds at the end of the verse: *“We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* The one full of grace and truth came and pitched his tent with us. Wow! That is an amazing thought!

So, John introduces us to the WORD. And then he amazes us by telling us that the WORD was born as as one of us. But John continues by amazing us with another fact: *“John 1:10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”*

The WORD was born. But we too were born. He was born in flesh and blood. And we were born out of God. And notice how, as soon as John says this, he clarifies what he is saying: *“12 Yet to all who received him, to those who*

believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

What does it mean to be “born again”? Notice how John answers the question. First he tells us what being born again is *not*. And he gives us three of these ‘nots’. First: Not by blood. You become a Christian by being born into the right family with the right privileges. Second: Not by a human decision. You don’t become a born again Christian by deciding for Jesus. And third: Not by the desire of a man. You aren’t born again by who you are married to.

Now, notice what John is doing. There is nothing you can say, feel, ask or earn to become a born again Christian. The only way we can become born again is if God gives us a new birth. And that brings us to another question: Why do we *need* to be born again? Notice how John speaks about the world and everyone in it: *John 1:10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."*

The Creator came to the humans he created and how did they respond? When Jesus was born did they rejoice? Were there parades in the street? Were there kings and armies bowing down to their creator? The answer is very clearly ‘no’. No one recognized him. No one welcomed him. No one cared about him. We were not looking for Jesus because we are sinful. When we are born, we take on human flesh and blood. But we also take on sin. This sin separates us from God and life with him. We needed Jesus to reveal himself to us. We needed Jesus to save us. We needed Jesus to give us a new birth so that we would be with him in heaven, not apart from him forever in hell.

And there we find our second amazing fact. John introduces us the the WORD and amazes us by telling us that God was born as a human. Then John amazes us again by telling us that even though we were born into spiritual death, Jesus gave us a new birth. And now we are no longer children of death and darkness. Now we are children of God.

How can we possibly grasp all these mysteries and gifts? How can we possibly thank Jesus for what he has done for us? The answer is very clear. Receive the WORD. Welcome Jesus. Welcome him by gathering together with your brothers and sisters in Christ not just on this Sunday, but every Sunday. Thank him by setting aside time to read and ponder his word on your own, by yourself. Thank him talking to him. Thank him in your prayers. Receive Jesus, the WORD. Receive him because Jesus was born as one of us. Receive him because we are born of him. Amen.