

## **Sermon on Thursday, 24 December by Rev Wendy Sellers**

(Reading: John 1. 1-14)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

The first verse of the Gospel of John. The first verse of a passage of scripture we hear each Christmas, often many times. It is beautiful. It is mysterious. But it doesn't obviously seem to relate to tonight and what we are here to celebrate.

Surely, we would be better off with the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke? These tell us of a young couple, of Bethlehem, of shepherds, wise men and angels. Of an actual birth. We rightly love these stories for their familiarity as each year we retell the story of the wondrous birth of Jesus Christ in a stable and of the star which marked that event.

John's Gospel starts not with a baby, but “in the beginning”, just as Genesis does. It tells of events long, long before Mary conceived and born a child called Jesus. It tells of the beginning of time and the creation of the universe. “All things came into being through Him” John tells us. Through the Word.

John wrote in Greek and so he wrote of the Logos. This was a pre-existing concept in Greek philosophy which has no direct translation into English. Once John had used it in his Christian Community to mean Jesus Christ, it stuck.

When we say ‘the Word’, we think of language - of sounds and symbols. But Logos is much more than that. It is dynamic and full of energy, as the divine one's thoughts and intelligence create: moving from eternity and the unbounded, into time and space.

And the term Logos tells us that God's reason and creativity not only brings things into being, but holds them together. Creation is not a one-off event, but an unending process – until God chooses to end it.

It now starts to make sense why John chose this as his birth story. He identified the Logos as Christ, God's dynamic energy and intelligence come to Earth and made flesh. To John, a manger was never going to be big enough, so his opening words are set not in a stable but in the entire cosmos. Nor is there a need to discuss a birth, because the Logos is not born. He is with God, he is of God. He is not, it seems, the same as God the Father, yet in the beginning is not separate.

So why does God set free the Word? Because, it seems, the Father did not wish to be alone. He wants company. So, God draws breathe and releases the Logos, the Word, into the world like an only child. And the mission of the Word is to make the Father known, so that he, the Word, does not remain an only child. Like the Father, He has no wish to remain alone – and so the world is filled with his siblings who can also become part of eternity. And that's where we enter His story.

It seems that while there is only one Jesus and only one true son, this is not true of the Logos. The Holy Spirit too is at one with God, there at the beginning and there for all time. And the Bible tells us of other logos-like energies. Of the written word of God, of an elusive woman called Wisdom. And the desire of the Logos is always to make God known to his children.

It is John alone who reminds us that the Logos is being eternally born. His story isn't set in Bethlehem, or at least not just there. It is set everywhere. It isn't set only in the time of King Herod, but is part of all time. And beyond our imagining, it is also set outside of time and place, in eternity.

It is much easier to imagine the birth of Jesus as told by Luke and Matthew. As re-told in nativity plays and story books. As pictured on cards and in art. As sung in carols and songs. The Logos cannot easily be portrayed in play or picture. There is no appropriate costume we can dress up in.

Yet each Christmas, we hear again John's version of the nativity and this Christmas, I think we need to hear the message it carries more than ever.

A message that God is eternally at work in the world, as His intelligence and energy constantly creates and holds together. He is, reassuringly, both creator and sustainer.

A message that God's purpose is to make Himself known to us. God has no wish to hide.

A message that the power, love and peace of Christ has been pouring itself out for us for ever. God never gives up on us.

A message that the darkness can never overcome the light.

Amen