

Exod 03-12-21a

Let's begin our worship this morning by taking a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, so that we are prepared and receptive for what God has for us from His Word. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for this day. We thank you, especially in this season of the year, for the Lord Jesus Christ, the love that you expressed toward us and that He expressed in the plan of salvation, and partaking of our flesh and our life, and living in the fallen world and coping with our fallen natures, and ultimately bearing all of our sins in His own body on the tree.

We thank you that you are a God that is compassionate, that expresses love in action, and we know that we are called to conform to your image and to follow your example in loving one another. We thank you for the country in which we live. It gives us the opportunity to learn and grow.

We thank you for the time in which we live where we have the opportunity, the wisdom of the accumulated studies of countless generations of Bible scholars and teachers is available to us. We have technology, we have access, we have your Word in the clearest form and most readily available ever in history, and we know that you are giving us these benefits and these blessings as a challenge and as an opportunity, and we pray that we will recognize it as such and be motivated, be reminded to fulfill our calling and our opportunities in this life. We pray for those that are in our government, for those who are concerned with the security of our nation and our citizens, that in the time when the terrorist threat is real and we have military forces both at home and abroad that are in a heightened danger that you will bless and continue to protect.

We thank you for the fact that we have had such a long time without further attack. We pray that you have blessed our security and intelligence services with the ability to find and root out and thwart those. We pray that you will continue to bless us and preserve for us an environment in which we can grow in grace and the knowledge of the Savior.

We ask your blessing again on our study this morning. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to the truth. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. In light of the season, we don't often do holiday specials, but sometimes we do, and this is one of those times. So turn with me to the Gospels.

I suspect that in many, many churches the passage in view is from the first part of the Gospel of Matthew or the first part of the Gospel of Luke, and I have just enough perversity in my nature to go to the Gospel of John instead. So let's go to John chapter 1. We are reminded of the story of Jesus' birth, the announcement to the parents of John the Baptist and his birth, and the signs that foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah and the coming of the messenger. We know the story of the announcement to Mary, the trip to Bethlehem, the announcement to the shepherds, and then at a somewhat later time the arrival of the wise men, the persecution and

murder of the babes two years old and under by Herod.

All of that is very familiar to us from our lives over the years and the Christmas season. The Gospel of John also begins with the account of Jesus' arrival on this earth as the Savior, but it is told more from God's perspective where the Matthew and Luke accounts give us our side, the human perspective. So I thought it would be an interesting study to look at the Christmas story from God's point of view.

So you might call this God's Christmas story. In John chapter 1 and verse 1 we have a very well-known but not always well-understood verse. 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 nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of that light that all through him might believe.

He was not that light but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me. And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ.

And they asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the prophet? He answered, No. Then they said to him, Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. Now those who were sent were

from the Pharisees. They asked him, saying, Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water.

But there stands one among you whom you do not know. It is he who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. These things were done in Beth-Avara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Well, this is the Christmas story. It's not always recognized as such. But the outline of the first chapter of John divides into three parts.

The first of which is found in the first five verses. And this is the pre-existence of the Word. Then in verses 6 through 13, we have the coming of the Word into the world.

And then following, we have the results, the reception that the Word receives. So, we go back to verse 1. In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

There is a lot of controversy, not just among the Jehovah's Witnesses and others who try to re-translate this based on the Greek order of words, where you have, in Arche, ein halagas. Ein, here, is the imperfect, active, indicative. This means ongoing action in past time.

There were some who tried to say that all this verse means is that Jesus existed before Adam, but that he came into being as the Father was developing a plan for the human race, because he is a begotten Son, and so on. There are some who think that in eternity past you just had God, and you didn't necessarily have the Trinity, and God sort of generated the Son to interact in human history. There are different heresies.

Some of them are called modalism, or modal monarchianism, and different things. If you ever see references to modalism, M-O-D-A-L-I-S-M, in theological terms, this is the idea that God is basically a single person and a single God, but he wears three different hats, three different masks, and he's in a different mode when he's operating as God the Son than he is when he's in the God the Father mode or God the Spirit mode. But he's really the same God.

He's just either peeking around the barrel, over the barrel, or around the other side of the barrel, but it's really the same God, and we, in our tiny minds, just see him as three different persons. This is a heresy that was identified and refuted in long days ago. When you take church history, you have to go through all of this.

But some of it is based on misunderstanding this verse. In the beginning was the Word. Look at that imperfect active indicative.

Indicative means this is a declarative statement, and we've heard it so often. You know, you hear things sometimes so often that they don't really convey their original sense anymore. I was mentioning to the girls the other day that when something goes like it's supposed to, and we say, well, that worked like a charm, we don't even stop and think what that means.

How does a charm work anyway? What is a charm? What do you mean it worked like a charm? Do you use charms, and they work well, and this worked just like that? You know, we don't stop and think about the import of the words anymore, and there are dozens of expressions. You know, you say, well, I went to the meeting, and they gave me the cold shoulder. We say, cold shoulder? Stop it.

What is it? You mean they kind of turned the shoulder with poor circulation? Or it was an expression of coldness, and their shoulder was, well, this goes back. You can look these up in books where when a guest showed up that wasn't high on the list of VIPs, other people got the thigh and got the good cuts of meat, and usually what was left was the tough meat of the shoulder, and by the time they got around to carving that up, it was cold. And so the unwanted guest, the one at the foot of the table, got the cold shoulder, got the poorest cut of meat that had cooled off idea.

But I say all that to say this. When we hear this verse, we've heard it so often, in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. We just blow right on past.

We say, well, yes, Jesus preexisted His incarnation, and we don't stop and think about these three statements. John begins his gospel. If you ever read the sort of in-house conversations among authors, or if you look at the prizes, in fact, there is a prize awarded among science fiction authors for the cleverest opening line.

All authors recognize that the opening statement of a book is the most important line in the book. That's what sets the tone. That's what sets the stage.

There are many famous opening lines of books that I could quote to you. You can probably think of some. This is the opening line of John's book.

He chooses to say, you think about John. Here's John the Apostle. He's got this story of Jesus to tell, and he sits down with a blank manuscript.

In all likelihood, he did not write this himself. I've been doing a study of the way documents were generated in the ancient world. So much of the telling of information was done verbally, and writing was kind of a secondary invention to preserve what was said orally, verbally.

It was viewed that way, so much so that people did not read silently. There was no such thing as reading to yourself in Jesus' day. The act of writing and learning to write and learning to read was inextricably linked with speaking and saying.

It was just seen as a means to accurately say what you needed to say. But books were not widespread. They were in the hands of people who would proclaim them to others, and so they viewed the words on the page differently than we do.

They were a means of speaking, not a means of gaining private information. And men that learned to write would speak out loud as they wrote the words. And someone who read always

read, not only moving their lips, but speaking the words.

We know this because it was said a couple of hundred years after Christ, Augustine was greatly impressed because he met a man who read silently, who read to himself. And it was so remarkable that Augustine decided he would try to learn to do that himself. And before his life ended, he was able to read to himself and get the gist of something.

But he wrote about it and remarked on it, and others remarked on it because it was so highly unusual. It just was not done. And so when you think about the composition and the recording of our New Testament books, not even considering the Old Testament, but just looking at the Gospels and the Epistles, these would have been spoken by the Apostles to an Emanuel who would write down what was spoken.

That's why the Gospel of Mark is such a close reflection of the preaching of Peter. Because Mark listened to what Peter said and wrote it down. After he had heard Peter tell these stories so many times, he could tell them himself.

And so he would speak out loud the story that Peter told as it was written down, and either he or a scribe wrote it down. But that was the job of the scribes. They were the speaker writers.

And this was the only way manuscripts were generated until, like I say, a couple of hundred years after the time of Christ. So John sits there with this blank manuscript needing to be filled, and he's probably pacing up and down, perhaps on Patmos, perhaps somewhere else, with a man ready with a quill and an inkwell and a blank parchment, perhaps. And he's pacing up and down, and God the Holy Spirit is there with his inspiring presence.

And as John maps it out in his mind how he's going to begin this, he says, Well, in the beginning, what is in the beginning? Where do you start the story of Christ? Well, the story of Christ does not begin in the manger in Bethlehem. It doesn't begin even with the ministry of John the Baptist. It begins before time.

It begins in the presence of God. It begins in the holy realms of God's dwelling. Because in the beginning was the Word.

Now, he could have said in the beginning was Christ or in the beginning was Jesus, but that would not really be accurate, would it? Because Jesus didn't have the name Jesus until he was born in Bethlehem. He was not the Mashiach, the Anointed One, in eternity past. He became that in his incarnation, but in the beginning, who was he? So John casts about in his mind, well, can't really say Yeshua.

Can't really say Mashiach or Christos, Jesus. What will I say? Well, he is halagos. He is halagos.

Now, lagos was a word that was used in Greek. It was used in Greek philosophy. Its literal meaning is word.

But a lagos or a lagon, depending on which case you put it in, also serves many of the same functions as the noun does in Hebrew, *dabar*, which means not only a word but an issue. The word stands for an idea. It represents something.

In the same way that name means much more than identification of someone, it encompasses their reputation, their essence, their being, their character. Well, a word has behind it an idea. It's a representation of something.

So the ultimate idea, the ultimate expression of something, is this pre-incarnate, pre-historic word. So what kind of a word is it? If we just stopped right here, in the beginning was a lagos, well, we don't have any information about that lagos. Lagos is a container for an idea or a set of ideas or a concept or some other locus of meanings.

Words become meaningless. We have songs, you can think of, from the last 30 or 40 years that have words in them that have no meaning. Sometimes even when they purport to have meaning, they don't.

But I remember a song called *Gaduron Ron*, and I have no earthly idea what that song is about. Words are only significant. They are like vessels.

We had a study recently about *skeuos*, about being a vessel, and the vessel is meaningful as it relates to its contents. Lagos is meaningful as it relates to its contents. So we need to read further.

En arche ein halagos, in the beginning was the word. Now this imperfect active indicative for the verb to be is imperfect because it is an ongoing existence in past time. An imperfect, if I had the word *go* and I put it in the imperfect in English, I would say, well, he was going.

It implies a process or an ongoing state. We were living in California. It's a span of time.

It's not a snapshot. It's a state. And because it's an imperfect, it means that however far back before the beginning you want to go, the Lagos is there.

You can't get the Bible to say that God generated the sun for a specific purpose related to human history and that there was a time when he just didn't exist at all. In the beginning, most people would recognize this as Genesis 1.1, in the beginning. Well, in the beginning, when God created the heaven and the earth, the Lagos already was.

The Lagos was in existence. This states a very important truth. The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, is not a part of the created universe because in the beginning of creation he already was.

And, of course, as we go further, we find out that he had to be because he is part and parcel of the act of creation and the power of creation. So, in the beginning was the Word. Now, we need to know more about this Lagos.

And the Word was pros ton theon. Once again, this is the imperfect of eimi, e-i-m-i, which is the word to be in Greek. Lagos ein pros ton theon.

If you remember some of your Greek, pros means face to face, something that is in front of something. Progenosko means knowledge beforehand. Proorizo means to mark out beforehand.

Pros, or pro, has the idea of something that is before, something that is in front of. So, the Lagos was before the face of God. He was in front of God.

Now, what does this do to modalism? Can God run around and be in front of himself, if he is the same person? John lives in a day when the early forms of heresy are already blossoming. You find that when people are trying to defend a point of view theologically, they will go back and say, well, see, the early church believed, or the early church did this, or the early church fathers said or wrote. Early doesn't mean better.

People were messing up the Word of God even as it was being spoken. Jesus barely got the words out of his mouth before someone twisted it. The apostles barely got the church age truths out and disseminated before they were being twisted.

Peter is still alive and writing, and he says, you know those letters that Paul writes? There are many things that are hard to understand, and people twist them to their own destruction. So, early doesn't necessarily mean better. And it was an early heresy, the Gnostics, G-N-O-S-T-I-C-S.

Gnosticism was a perversion of Christianity that took the Lord Jesus and tried to push him into Greek philosophy and make him a concept and make him related to knowledge, better living through knowledge. Today we have this movement along with better living through chemistry. People think, well, it's education that we need.

And you have Oprah and other people going to Africa and underdeveloped countries and saying, you know, the way to fix this poverty and the way to fix this disease and the way to fix this one out of every three having AIDS is education. Let's fund schools. Let's get some schools started because knowledge is the answer.

I am here to tell you that the problems in Africa, the problems in Afghanistan are because of paganism. They're because of unbelief and rejection of God and the Word of God and the Son of God. And you can educate them all you want, and you're just going to have a lot of educated pagans.

It is not going to relieve their poverty. It is not going to relieve their distress. Even if their earthly circumstances rise, what have you done? It's sort of like criminals.

People say crime is caused by poverty, so let's go in and give them money and give them jobs and relieve their poverty. Well, now you just have rich criminals instead of poor criminals. Their poverty is not the problem.

It's just an excuse. In the same way, the Gnostics in ancient times believed that there was a secret wisdom, that you could gain this wisdom and get the edge, live your life to the fullest. And they almost personified wisdom in an unhealthy way where the Bible personifies it over in Proverbs and so on in a healthy way.

So when he says, It says two things. This Lagos, whatever it is, is not everything that God is and He can't be in front of Himself. The Lagos is a separate person from God in this second statement.

So you think, okay, so there are two. There's God and there's this Lagos that's in front of God until you get to John's third statement. It's amazing that you can spend hours and not ever get out of the first verse of this Gospel.

In the beginning, the Lagos was being. The Lagos was in existence. And the Lagos was in existence before the face of God, was in the company of God, dwelt where God dwells, was face to face with God.

And the last phrase says, Theos ein halagos. Now you know enough Greek that if you just transliterate that, Theos ein halagos, ein is the imperfect of eini, to be. So it sounds like in English, God was the Word.

And you have the, whatever the name of that bogus translation is that the cult people use, that's how they translate it, God was the Word. However, there are two principles at work here. One is a Greek grammatical principle that talks about where the article is and which one is the subject of the sentence and which one is the predicate nominative and it depends on where the article is.

And in Greek, word order is not as important as case and structure within a sentence. And things can float all over the sentence for emphasis. It's not merely so dependent on word order.

But here, Theos ein halagos, this goes back to what I mentioned a moment ago. In the orality, in the audibility of communication of ideas in the ancient world, a lot was invested in making sure that when this word was spoken, because most of the people in the first few hundred years after these gospels were written never read them, never saw a copy of them. How did they know what was in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and Paul's epistles and Peter's epistles and John's epistles, the general epistles and the book of the Revelation.

How did they know what was in there? Someone read it. They heard it out loud. They didn't have the luxury like you and I do of looking here and examining the order of words and parsing out individual little things.

What's amazing to me is that it was composed for a listening audience. And yet with all of our science and all of our microscopes and all of our vast learning, you can get as close to the text and as detailed and as rigorous in analyzing the text as possible. And because it is inspired by God, it doesn't break down.

It doesn't fall apart. It doesn't contradict itself. It doesn't go six directions at once.

It is internally consistent across all 66 books. It is the greatest witness to the presence of God outside of the presence of the universe itself. Because it wasn't written for people to sit and analyze word by word the way that we do.

It was written to be read. So why then is this reversed? When what it really means is in the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God.

There is a difference in the two statements, isn't there? The Word was God is not the same as God was the Word. Among other things, go back to your second statement. If God is the Word, how does He go around and stand in front of Himself? But if the Word is God, this gets back to our understanding of the Trinity.

God is three separate persons. The Father is God. The Son, the Word, is God.

The Holy Spirit is God. But if you just have the Holy Spirit or if you just have the Lord Jesus, you don't have God. God is all three members.

Personally, I don't have as big a problem with Trinitarianism as some people because I just think of it's God incorporated. It's God comma Inc. And if you have a corporation and let's say it's got three officers, well, if I have any one officer there, can I say He represents the company? Yes.

Is He part and parcel of the company? Yes. Does He define and do everything to and for that company? Yes. But Him by Himself is not the complete company.

I've got to have the other two officers. So maybe it's overly simplified, but to me, God incorporated, God is composed of three individuals that are separate and distinct. They have to be for the Lord Jesus to be before the face of God.

Now, whose face is He in front of in the second statement there? Well, God. And if He is before God, to me, this is the throne room of God and you have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and they're all looking at each other. Each member is looking at the other two.

You could just as easily say the Spirit was before God or with God. The Father was with God. The Son is with God.

They are co-equal, co-eternal. They are all present and in each other's presence. But the person that is in view here because of the Christmas story is the Lord Jesus.

So, in case someone might infer from the fact that He was incarnate, from the fact that He was born and He died in human history, that He was somehow less than God, we don't really run that risk with God the Father and God the Spirit, do we? But people tend to diminish the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ because they say, well, He was born, He died, maybe He's just a man and God sort of overshadowed Him like a great prophet. John says, no. He was in the beginning.

He was before God, in the presence of God and the Logos was God. Imperfect of Amy, once again, Aene, kept on being God, didn't stop being God, didn't turn it off and on like a switch, but the reason these words are switched, this is a common practice, it is a common feature. I'm reading a book right now called Listening to the Text because I got fascinated with the idea that so much of what was written and communicated in the days of Jesus and the apostles was oral.

I found a book by a guy who goes and talks about the techniques that were used so that listeners could latch on to what was being spoken. It's not like you let your mind wander and you can go back and read the last couple of verses. If you miss what the man said, you've got to wait till after and ask him, could you go back and... So people had to have good concentration, they had to have good focus and speakers had to use techniques to aid memory and chiasm is one of those.

Word inversion is one of the most common. Whether it is words in a sentence or concepts in a paragraph or paragraphs in a longer word, many, many times over and over again you see example after example where a list will be given A, B, C, D and then the speaker will deal with that list in reverse order. D, C, B, A and this inversion was a memory aid because you can most easily remember the most recent thing that was said and then you can go back from that to the previous one back from that to the previous one you can work your way back rather than giving a list of four or five things and then jumping back to the beginning of the list and by the time you work your way down to the end you kind of forget what the rest of those were.

So they used this inversion and this word inversion here in John 1, 1 is designed for aid in remembering what was said. The word was with God and God was the word is the way a Greek one would hear this. That's the order in which they would hear the words but they know from the ha-lagos it doesn't say ha-fe-os ein-lagos The article goes with the subject the word T-H-E is what we use in English but ha-lagos is the subject of the first statement in Arche ein ha-lagos kai ha-lagos ein prostanteon kai feos ein ha-lagos If ha-lagos is the subject of the first two a Greek person immediately identifies ha-lagos as the subject of the third statement.

It's just that simple but by reversing it it catches them a little unaware. They hear kai feos ein and they say oh, what's coming up? ha-lagos and it sticks in their mind. The word was God.

Three critically important statements about the Lord Jesus Christ important to remember at Christmas time. People talk about the little Jesus boy and this sort of thing and it almost makes me cringe a little bit because we're talking about God. When you look at the babe in the manger you're still talking about God, the second person of the Trinity who was in the beginning who was equal with God and was in the throne room with everyone else who is God and who is God.

That's verse one. There's much more that can be said about it but what we want to remember from it is there has been a loss of reverence and a loss of respect and a loss of what I would consider I think what the Word of God expresses as proper worship and adoration for the Lord Jesus and it is the mistake that the Gnostics made. It's the mistake that the Modalists made.

It's the mistake that many in the early days made of diminishing the Lord Jesus Christ because of His humanity and failing to give due to His deity. He was in the beginning. He was in the throne room with the rest of God and He is God.

He deserves every bit as much respect and worship and consideration as God the Father. He was equally involved in creation. He has equal power, equal authority in the preexistent state.

So how does that work out in practical terms especially during the Christmas season? Rather than limiting ourselves to the celebration of the Incarnation and the celebration of what God has done for us which is great and is something we I think are able to do readily. To also remember the incredible distance. You remember the song at Calvary? Oh the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary.

That gulf that we talked about looking at the Old Testament that Job recognized in meeting a mediator. The distance between heaven and earth. The Lord Jesus was willing to let go of His equality with God.

He did not consider it a thing to be clutched in the hand. He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant. And He did that at the time of the Incarnation.

Set aside all of these equalities. All of this glory. And came down to receive abuse at the hands of men.

Well we are going to pause here and take our break. Having only covered one verse. But we are going to move forward in John chapter 1 and see the rest of God's Christmas story in terms of the Incarnation.

What it meant at the time and what it means to us. But let's take a break at this point and we will return for verse 2.