

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

John 1:1-18

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book): Years A, B, and C - Christmas Day, Text: John 1:1-14 (15-18)
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary): Years A, B, and C - Christmas Day, Text: John 1:1-14

The Gospel of John has no Christmas story. John's prologue (as this section is called) begins not with history, but with eternity. Years ago, a movie was produced titled, *"From Here to Eternity."* John's Gospel begins with the coming of God's Son *"From Eternity to Here."*

The first three verses give us poetry, not the kind with rhyming endings, but the kind of biblical poetry found in the Psalms. Various statements form parallel lines of thought with further developments, usually reaching a climax. The first five verses might be translated and set out the following way:

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 was not anything **made**
that was **made**.

In Him was **life**,
and the **life** was the **light** of all people.

The **light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness
has not overcome it.

Each group develops a new but related thought: the Word as God; creation through Him; life and light through Him. Only Verses 6–8 and 15 (the verses that speak of John the Baptist) do not have a clear poetic form.

Verses 1:1-5 (From Eternity): The first verses sound familiar; they recall the beginning of Genesis, "In the beginning when God created the heaven and the earth ..." However, the "beginning" here in John is not the beginning of time; it belongs to eternity which transcends time.

The Word has always existed with God, and has always been God. In the eternal realm, He has always been at God's side. After all, He Himself is God! Jesus did not become a person when Mary gave birth to Him; He only became a man — *in addition to being God*. He is now, and always will be, God and man in one Person.

Jesus is the One through whom God spoke to the prophets to reveal Himself and His will. He is also the Word through whom God created all things. Since He was God's agent at creation, everything has life in the Son of God.

But the description of the Son as Life and Light reminds us that Jesus gives life and the light of God's truth in a final sense. True life, what John often calls "eternal life" (see 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36, etc.), only comes from faith in Jesus after He has enlightened our minds with the truth of God.

No mention is made of the Fall described in Genesis, but the word darkness recalls the truth that fallen humanity loves the darkness of ignorance and sin rather than the light of God's saving truth (see 3:19, 20). Nevertheless, this dark world has not been able to snuff out the light, even though it put to death the Son of God. Rather, the light now shines more brightly, and the Word rings out more clearly.

Verses 1:6–8 (The True Witness): Jesus the Word was and is God; John the Baptist was only a man. While the Word was always "with God," John was "sent by God." John's role was to be no more than the first witness who defended Jesus' claim to be the Son of God and the Light of the world (8:12). Refusing the spotlight, John pointed away from himself to Jesus.

Why is this humility stressed again in v. 8? It is interesting to note that well into the second Christian century, there were disciples of John the Baptist who claimed that he was the Messiah and the Light. John's Gospel wants to reject any such idea once and for all.

Every time that John is mentioned, he is placed below Jesus, and his servant role is emphasized (see Acts 19:1–5).

Verses 1:9–13 (The True Light): Here the stage is set for the drama of the God’s Good News. Not John, but Jesus, is the true Light. But the tragic irony of history is that the world that Jesus has created does not recognize Him. His own people, the Jews who have the Hebrew Scriptures, do not welcome Him with open arms as they should. From the beginning, He is attacked, rejected, and accused of being a fraud.

But is Jesus’ story all tragedy and doom? Certainly not! There are those who believe in His name — that is, believe in all that He is and represents. Faith in Jesus gives the disciples the right to be called children of God — not merely products of human birth; blood, flesh, and will of man all describe the normal sexual process of conception and birth. A child of God is one who has been reborn by the will of God and the power of the Holy Spirit; see 3:3.

Verse 1:14 (Glory Revealed): Magnificent words! God stopped speaking to humanity as an invisible voice. The Word became a Person whom people could hear and see and touch. The timeless Son became a little baby — all to show us God’s grace and truth and to give us a glimpse of God’s own glory.

Israel and Moses were terrified at the vision of God’s glory at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16–21 and Hebrews 12:18–21). The prophet Isaiah was struck with fear when he saw the glory of God in the Temple (Isaiah 6:1–5). But there is no fear in the vision of God’s glory seen in the Father’s only dear Son. Grace, truth, glory: all have been seen in Jesus who was crucified and Who rose from the dead to show that God’s glory is to forgive sinners and to restore them to His way of life — as revealed in His Son, the forgiving Savior and Servant Lord.

Amazingly, in the person of Jesus, God “tabernacled” among us in the flesh. Furthermore, when we look at Jesus’ life and listen to His words, we see and hear God’s grace (redeeming love) and truth (faithfulness to His promises).

Verse 1:15 interrupts the flow of thought from v. 14 to v. 16, and seems to be drawn from v. 30. This verse points to the preliminary servant role of John the Baptist. In the first words that he speaks in this Gospel (repeated in v. 30), John points to the superiority of

Jesus. In the ancient world, the “one who comes after” is the slave or servant who walks a respectful distance behind his master.

However, Jesus is the servant of God (Isaiah 53), but not the servant of John the Baptist. He submits to His Father, not to John.

Verse 1:16: Jesus ranks higher than John because “He was before me” in the sense that He has always existed — long before John was born. The Older One has the greater authority. Jesus repeats this argument in 8:58, “Before Abraham was, I Am.”

Verse 1:17: Jesus the Messiah was and is greater than Moses. Moses was a servant of God, but not the Son who possessed the fullness of God; see Hebrews 3:2–6. The Law that God gave through Moses did not give the final picture of God’s grace and truth. This revelation came only with the Son who knew the Father perfectly.

Verse 1:18: To be *in someone’s bosom* denotes to be in the closest possible relationship with that person; see 13:23–25. Jesus is thus above the Law, and this is what John’s prologue suggests from its very first verse. The Jews believed that the Law was always with God, that the Law was the light of humanity, that the Law revealed God’s glory. John says, “No! If we are to see God, we must see Him in Jesus, the Son of God. Only in Him is there the ‘fullness’ of God” (see Colossians 1:19, 2:9).