

Call to Worship

Deuteronomy 29:29 says: "*The secret things belong to the Lord our God. The revealed things belong to us and to our children forever.*"

The revelation of God foretold by prophets became word made flesh – Jesus, who came to live among us and remain with us. Let us worship God whose name and nature we know through Christ, and let us praise Jesus, the amazing gift of God.

Prayer of Invocation

We raise our eyes to you, renewing God, and pray that once more you guide and direct our worship. Make our words your words, our song the song of heaven, our silences a rich soil that your vision may be planted within us, and our prayers a reflection of your will for our lives. This we pray in your name. Amen.

Living the Word

John 1:1-18

Common English Bible

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"

Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Beginning

Alpha and Omega, letters of the Greek alphabet, the first and the last.

How many of you remember your beginning? How many of you know your ending? How many of you do not spend a lot of time thinking of either of these? You have to know that at some point there was a beginning for you and you have to know that at some point there will be an ending of life as we know it. But how that all comes about for each of us is one of the mysteries of life.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says: "*The secret things belong to the Lord our God. The revealed things belong to us and to our children forever.*" Often when someone has a secret we try to pry it out of them. We like to know the answers behind the mysteries of life. God has many mysteries for us that we may not know during this lifetime. Even so, God has given us insight if we pay attention and use the tools (ie. The Scriptures and

Christ's life); tools that reveal some of the mysteries of God, the ones God would have us know and share through the generations.

The Gospel of John starts with some mysterious poetry: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God, in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made.* The insight is that 'the Word' being referred to is Jesus.

Jesus was there in the beginning. Even before God started to create the heavens and the earth as described for us in Genesis, Jesus was with the Creator from the very start and will be to the end. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega.

Light and Life

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Jesus is the light and the life. We are given light as we ask to be guided, each step of the way. The light is something that we can hold on to when darkness comes into our lives. We are given life as we stumble through our humanity, and again and again are forgiven, to be able to move forward another step of the way. Jesus is God's way of reconciling with us all through history and into the eternity to come. The light has not and never will be overcome by the darkness. New life is offered to us each time we ask for it.

Glory

Emmanuel - God with us. The God that no one had ever seen, gave us a part of himself. Just as all humans arrive, our Savior arrived in the form of a new born baby. Nothing is more defenseless and vulnerable, as a human at the beginning of their life. If they are not cared for, they can't and won't survive. Even so, God came to us as Christ in that way.

Jesus is of God – the Son of God. John says [he is] *"in closest relationship with the Father, and has made him known."* Jesus knows how to listen for, and to God's voice. So did Joseph and Mary...that is how an unwed mother and her unsure husband in a stable of animals, were able to begin the life of the Son of God, Son of Man.

History is a wonderful way for us to not repeat the same mistakes, but we now know that often the historians have written the story, not as it happened, but as they would like to remember it. As we look back at our lives we see and tell others what we want to remember. We have named this looking back through 'rose colored glasses.' Seeing things not how they were, but how we wish to remember them.

Much of the Old Testament is really difficult to understand. What was God doing? There is a lot of miserable slavery, fighting and war. God's chosen people keep getting knocked down, yet a remnant always pulls through to live God's story. The Hebrew people are a part of our story – our history. We can learn about those people by following the remnant of them on their journey, yet we may not have all of the insights into the 'whys or hows' of that part of the story.

We haven't experienced what life was like for God's people in the Old Testament, or why so many suffered and died in the ways that they did. But because of the New Testament story that we have, we can see the Old Testament by looking back through 'God lenses', which have been un-smudged for us by Christ. Jesus came to make God's story clearer for us with the truth.

Grace and Truth

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. Do we not recognize Christ because we haven't taken time to be with him and know him? By not knowing Christ, we miss the opportunity to know what God would like to reveal to us out of the mysteries.

...to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

If Jesus is really God on earth, then God came to experience what it means to be human, including the suffering, agonies of every kind, as well as the joy of relationships and life. Then God is not far off in the clouds above, but with us, in every breath and every thought. This is the truth of God which has been revealed to us through the life of Christ. God is with us.

Star

The decision and life-long journey for us is a moral decision to receive Christ and to be a Child of God. It is the determination that God IS and we know that, through 'the Word' who is light and life for us. Jesus, who comes in glory as the truth we can hold on to and hope for.

These verses of the Gospel of John are just the beginning of the story. To find the insights God has given us of the glory, truth, light and life of Christ, we have to explore the whole story as it unfolds. Then, as different parts of the book have different meanings at different parts of our lives, we have to keep in touch with the Word - Christ, and his story as it unfolds more and more insights for us.

The Three Wise-men: Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar, The Magi followed a star. They were not Hebrew, but they studied many scriptures, including those of the Hebrews. They wanted to know more about the mystery of a King foretold to be born in Bethlehem. Their curiosity was enough to have them travel, probably for months to get to the King.

How long had they been waiting and rereading those words before making a journey like that? To see a King that would not even rule over their part of the world during their lifetime or for centuries after? There was something that kept them searching the things that were written, seeking more insight as God would have them find. Today is Epiphany and we celebrate the journey that they made and the insights they received as they gave their gifts of Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh to the baby King. This day is not about the gifts you give, but about the gift God has given you and will continue to give you as long as you keep searching and seeking the insights that are open for you.

Barbara Brown Taylor, Professor of Religion, Piedmont College says this: "Almost everyone has a word that he or she has been given as a gift, to be brought to life. For one person the word is 'compassion.' For another it is 'justice.' For someone else the word is 'generosity.' For another it is 'patience.' Until someone acts upon these words, they remain abstract concepts – very good ideas that few people have ever seen. The moment someone acts on them, the words become flesh. They live among us so we can see their glory."

We will never know all of the beginning, nor the ending...but we don't ever journey alone. When you are feeling those negative feelings of shame or guilt or loneliness, you just have to pick up your Bible and remember the Word: the Glory, the grace and truth, the light and life. When you are starting to see some light or life of Christ interacting on your journey, you need to continue to explore, to find what insight God would have you know.

We are unable to know the full understanding of God's glory, grace and truth or the light and life we are offered until we seek them out through the life of Christ within us. Are we willing to stand in the light of Christ as it continues to shine in the darkness of this world?