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**Scripture Text: John 1:1-5**

**Sermon Title: *The Eternal Word***

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**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.**

**Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.**

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## ***The Eternal Word***

### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles with me to the Gospel of John, the first chapter, beginning with the first verse.

Today I begin an Advent series of messages from John's Gospel, considering the first 18 verses known as the Prologue, or introduction. These 18 verses have been called the most profound in the entire Bible. Doing justice to such lofty Scripture is quite a challenge, which can be achieved only as the Holy Spirit is our teacher. One professor noted that "an entire seminary semester's course could be taught on these 18 verses" (Borchert, 100), but I'll spare you that!

John's Gospel is less biographical than the other gospels, and is more of a thematic presentation of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God. In comparison with the Gospel of John, Mark's gospel begins with the preaching of John the Baptist. Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus' earthly line traced from Joseph back to Abraham. Luke's gospel has the most about Jesus' birth and early childhood, with his baptism and an earthly genealogy that goes from Joseph back to Adam.

But John goes back much further than Adam when he speaks of the “genealogy” of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. John speaks of Christ as the Word, the Eternal Son, who was without beginning. Matthew and Luke begin in Bethlehem, but John’s Gospel “begins with the bosom of the Father” (Maclaren, 1).

The first five verses are a “sort of prologue to the prologue” (Whitacre, 49). John takes us back to eternity when there was no time. These first verses of John sound a lot like the first verses of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Yet, John takes us even further back before the creation of the heavens and the earth. There was a “time” when there was nothing but God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Follow the reading of our text for this morning, **John 1:1-5**.

Today I want you to think with me about the eternal Word. John uses the Greek word, *logos*, to express the nature and mission of the One his gospel is all about—Jesus Christ. To the Greeks who would read this gospel, *logos* represented a philosophical concept of the essence of the meaning of life. The *logos* to them was the unity of all thought and the answer to all philosophical questions about life.

To the Jews, on the other hand, *logos* was a translation of the Hebrew word, *dabar*. The word to them meant the creative and redemptive power of God that moves at his divine will (Psalm 33:6). The Jews understood also that the Word was the source God’s message to his people through the prophets (Hosea 1:2), and also his standard of holiness (Psalm 119:11. *LAB*, p.1869). As one notable scholar says, “No doubt the English term ‘Word’ is an inadequate rendering of the Greek *logos*, but it would be difficult to find one less adequate” (Bruce, 29).

To first century Christian believers, the Word was the message and power of salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. John says Christ is the eternal Word, the hope of all men, the answer to all questions, and the ultimate solution to every problem.

This Advent Season finds the world in a condition of turmoil and uncertainty. In some parts of the world there is war and strife and total social and economic turmoil and human misery. In even the more stable parts of the world and within the more affluent nations, such as Belgium, there is a sense of unease and of uncertainty about the future. How this world needs to hear the message of the eternal Word of God, who not only speaks about life, but speaks eternal life into the hearts of those who believe in him!

I want us to look at these opening words of John’s Gospel and try to grasp some of the meaning of the eternal Word, and how this Word can not only inspire and comfort us, but can change our lives. As John speaks of the Word, he describes the character and activity of Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate at this season of the year. In Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection, God spoke a word and he continues to speak a word that creates all life and that conveys his light of life and salvation.

“An eight-year-old girl expressed it well. When asked why Jesus was called the Word, she said, ‘Because Jesus is all God wanted to say to us’” (Yancey, 918). The message of these verses was explosive and exhaustive, and so it is for us today.

Let's note, first of all...

### **The eternal Word of life (verses 1-3)**

In verses 1-3, John says that the Word...

*Is the divine Co-Creator of all life*

These opening verses of John's Gospel give us a lofty portrayal of Jesus Christ as the eternal Word of God. It is a key passage in our understanding of Christology, the teaching of the significance of Jesus Christ. And these opening verses of John leave no room for any understanding of Jesus that is less than the eternal and divine Son, who shares equality with the Father.

John the Evangelist held to the strict monotheism of the Jews, so when he said the Word was God he expressed the mystery of the Trinity, that the one God manifests himself in three Persons. Christ, though a distinct person, is of one essence with the Father in a perfect unity. When John wrote that the Word was God “Nothing higher could be said” (Morris, 76). The divinity that belongs to the rest of the Godhead belongs also to Christ (Tasker, 45) which is what Paul says:

“He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:15-20).

In our time there is a crucial need to understand the significance of Jesus as the divine and eternal Word of God. Today, in this post modern age, there is a movement that affects even the traditionally evangelical world—the push toward equalizing all religious traditions and faiths in the name of openness and “tolerance.”

For example, in recent years there has been a widespread effort, in the wake of the violence of the militant extremists, to understand the teachings of Islam. Although we need to be informed of the beliefs of those we seek to evangelize, we must avoid the direction some so-called Christians are making to find a common ground with other world religions. It's one thing to be tolerant of others and allow them the dignity of their own religious beliefs. But we must never relinquish the basic claims of the Christian faith, including the claim that Jesus Christ is the only way of eternal salvation.

Many cults claim to be Christian yet have a minimalist view of Jesus Christ. Ask a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness what he/she believes about Jesus and his full deity and equality with God the Father. Inquire of them and others, and even some so-called evangelicals if they believe Jesus is the only Sovereign Lord, the Eternal Son of God, and the only way of salvation. You will find many who claim to be Christians who do not hold the high view that Scripture, and namely our text for today, portrays for Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Son and the Word of God. And, despite the claim of Muslims that Christians believe in more than one God because we believe in the deity of Christ, we believe in the absolute unity of the one Triune God in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Christ is the eternal Son, equal with the Father and thus the Co-Creator of all that exists. Verse 3 is echoed by Colossians 1:15-17: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

He, with the Father, was the co-agent in creation. Paul, in Romans 1, says Christ was active in creation to reveal his moral attributes and glory in such a way that even without Scripture, man is without excuse in not knowing there is a God to whom he must give an account. Scripture makes clear that God is the Creator and man is the crown of creation. Mankind is not the random result of chance evolution. (McGrath, *TDD*).

Scientists are claiming to have succeeded in "creating the world's first cloned human embryos, a controversial advance intended to speed the development new medical therapies." But researchers like Robert Lanza at Advanced Cell Technology in Worcester, Mass. admit that this step could "hasten the arrival of the first cloned baby." This is a dangerous trend of playing God with what is his singular prerogative as God the Creator. The hubris of our scientific culture makes the proud aspirations of the builders of Babel pale in comparison, and God's judgment will intervene now as in that Genesis account.

We are as the crown of creation, fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). Although we share biological similarities with the primates, we alone are made in God's image with the capacity to know him, commune with him, and consciously obey, serve and glorify him. The eternal Word spoke your life into existence, and your mortal life is precious in his sight. And, in Christ we are redeemed to have a glorified body in the resurrection, when we will fulfill the potential God has ordained for us since before the creation of the world.

Jesus, the eternal Word, is the divine Son who creates all life, and who also...

*Is the giver of eternal life*

God alone is the rightful Creator, and we alone are made in his image, with the capacity to know and relate to God in love and freedom of will and obedience. We are the crown of his Creation, and the object of his delight and unfathomable love. The Bible is the story of God's love affair with mankind. He created us to glorify and

enjoy him in perfect fellowship. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says in response to the question, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "That we might glorify God and enjoy him forever." Yet we in Adam have all fallen, and are sinners by nature and by choice, and fail to fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

The Word, the logos, Christ, had the same purpose in creation as in redemption: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (10:10; Hull, 214). The gospel is the story of God's unrelenting love in sending his Son, the eternal Word, to bring us life and salvation. Jesus came to live and primarily to die as our suffering Servant, and as the substitute in bearing the punishment and hell we deserve to suffer for our sins. The Good News is that through our repentance and faith, we receive the free gift of salvation from sin and a home in eternal heaven. For the repentant heart, God creates in us and gives the gift of eternal life.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans about the life-giving power of the Word, as he quotes Deuteronomy: "But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:6-10). The Word who gives eternal life, is Jesus Christ, who is near to all who will call upon his name (Romans 10:13). He is already in your heart and in your mouth, so all you and I must do is simply call on him to give us eternal life. Saving faith is nothing we produce for ourselves. It's all of God, and all about his gracious working within the hearts of those he is calling to himself.

The Word, Jesus, is the One who has created in us the awareness of our sin and our need for him. He creates the longing to know God and to receive his forgiveness and to share his life. This eternal life he gives is not just the duration of this life ad infinitum, ad nauseum. It's a new kind of life altogether.

Back in 1976 there was a stir on the part of scientists who thought they might be able to lengthen the average life expectancy to 400 years. At that time, our family was living in the Cleveland, Ohio suburbs and Dorothy Fuldheim was a popular columnist for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* newspaper. In an editorial she proposed that such an idea was dreadful. She asked her readers to try to imagine living 400 years and planning and attending family reunions; buying and maintaining automobiles; paying insurance premiums, saving for retirement, and being married to the same person for 400 years!

Eternal life is a new kind of life. It's primarily a relationship with God in Jesus that changes us totally. It's a life that grows more Christlike and thus more joyful with each successive day and year. Jesus gave the parable of the need for new wineskins for the new wine of his life in the Spirit he gives us (Matthew 9:17). He changes us radically from the inside out, as he makes us his new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). When Jesus gave the miracle of changing the water into wine at

the marriage feast, he was demonstrating his transforming power to make all things new (John 2:1-11). This doesn't mean that conversion immediately erases some personality quirks and character flaws. Conversion is a process of continuous change, and the more we seek God's fullness and live by his word, the sooner and more complete the transformation. It's a matter of working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13).

So, it's possible a believer in Jesus is still a bit obnoxious in his or her disposition, or maybe inclined toward depression. But think how bad he or she would be apart from the grace of God, and remember that God is still at work, and a lot of "construction" needs to be done. The Word is still at work in doing his creation and new, re-creation. It's a bit irritating to have to wait in traffic slowed by construction. Just try to think of the nice new road that will result. Think also that your life is on the way to improvement and the life of your Christian brother or sister is also under construction and God is fitting him/her for heaven. And if you could see that fellow believer who irritates you as he or she will be in heaven, you would be tempted to bow down and worship that person.

And, of course, our eternal life that has now begun is a life that is consummated in the kingdom future, and that will continue forever, without end in the renewed heaven and earth. It's a new quality of life as well as quantity of everlastingness. I can understand that for many, and even for some professing Christians, immortality would be a dreadful concept. That's why for them all their ideas of heaven are carnal. They think of heaven as more and better things, and having their own way, much as they have tried to do in this life. But eternal life in heaven will be to be totally immersed in the life of God, and for him to complete what he has already begun in us. If there isn't something of God's life in you now, there won't be in heaven. You have no hope for heaven. Hebrews 12:14 says that without holiness no one will see the Lord. Some professing Christians would not enjoy heaven in their present spiritual condition. It would take true conversion for them to enjoy heaven

Let's note also that Christ is the eternal Word of life but also he is...

### **The eternal Word of light (verses 4&5)**

Our Advent candles we are lighting these four Sundays of the Advent Season are symbolic of our spiritual preparation for celebrating Jesus' birth as the light that has shone in the darkness (Isaiah 9:2).

In verses 4 and 5 of our text John writes, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood (overcome) it." John is saying that as the eternal Word, Jesus Christ, is the...

#### *Light that explains God*

To the Greeks, the logos/word meant the meaning to life, the "soul/essence" of the universe. The logos/word was that which explains life, solves mysteries, and explains the "what" and the "why" of life.

The great ancient Greek philosopher Plato was lecturing a group of his students/disciples and said wistfully that perhaps some day there might come forth from God a word, a *logos*, “who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain” (Boice, 40). He was longing for the *logos*/the eternal Word.

In verse 4, John says that Jesus is God’s way of explaining Himself. This is what we read in Hebrews 1:1-3a:

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

As the little girl said, “Jesus is all God wanted to say to us.” In Jesus Christ we see God perfectly. Jesus told Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). In Jesus we see perfectly the character of the Father, in his holiness and love. We see him most clearly and perspicuously in the cross (Philippians 2:5-11).

As the divine God/Man, Jesus showed us exactly what God is like. He is the embodiment of holy love. His presence with us tells us about his love and grace. He was willing to be “God with us, with us sinners he had come to rescue. In Islam, their god they call Allah asks that his followers give their sons to die for him, in jihad or whatever the cause. That is the incentive for suicide bombs. In contrast, in our Christian faith, God gives his Son to die for us.

James Vance was on a preaching mission to soldiers during World War I. In attendance at the Protestant service was a young Jewish soldier, who had taken an interest in the gospel of Jesus. A rabbi was sent to conduct a Jewish service and the soldier then asked him about the expected Jewish messiah. “The Christians believe their messiah has come in Jesus, and we still wait for our messiah, the rabbi explained. “But, rabbi,” the soldier asked, “when our messiah comes, what will he have on Jesus?” (Vance, 50ff).

Jesus Christ is the perfect representation of God. He is God in the flesh. As Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). And to Philip Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

As the Eternal Word, Jesus is the light that explains God and also is the...

*Light that dispels the darkness*

John says, “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (or, “has not overcome it.” Verse 5). This verb (*katalambano*) can have a double meaning, to grasp with the mind, i.e. comprehend, or grasp with the hand to destroy or defeat (Burge, 56).

The world of darkness is the world under Satan's control and opposed to God's rule. It is the world of sin and unbelief that holds people in its grip and sway.

These days we hear the names of terrorists and dictators as evil men, and surely they and their cohort terrorists are in the grips of Satan and evil. But we must recognize that all people, regardless of how respectable and altruistic, are under the influence of the same power of evil that has terrorists and brutal dictators completely in its grip.

But Jesus has overcome and broken the power of the darkness. During his earthly ministry Jesus witnessed the overthrow of Satan and cast out demons and reversed the power of death (Luke 10:18). All these were signs of assurance that he would overcome and break Satan's stranglehold on the world.

Apart from grace, those under the spell of Satan and in a state of sinful rebellion cannot understand the light and truth of salvation in Jesus' name. Even their wills are in bondage apart from the grace of God who sends forth the Holy Spirit to convince and convict of sin. Apart from the initiative of our saving God, we are dead in our transgressions and sins and are without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:1-10; 12).

Apart from God's intervention, we are doomed in a titanic struggle against the forces of the darkness (Ephesians 6:12). Apart from God's rescue through Jesus you are as captive to Satan as much as any prisoner is being held by his captors. We are dependent on the light of God's Word shining on our minds to give us understanding. As Paul told the Corinthians, apart from God's light the message of salvation through the cross of Christ is foolishness to the Greeks, Paul's synonym for pagans. And the cross is a stumbling block to the Jews, his synonym for the religious (1 Corinthians 1:23). Jesus said the language of faith would be unknown by the unbelieving, and only by grace had the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God been given his disciples (Luke 8:10, etc).

We often hear what a spiritually dark place is Belgium. Every place, apart from God's Word and light is hopelessly dark. Even as a small child, I came to the awareness of my spiritual need and darkness. And God's light shone in me to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The eternal Word is the sovereign God of life and light who has no need of us. I agree with AW Tozer's comment that "Some of our missionary (and I might add evangelist) appeals are getting close to that same error (that God needs our help!): that we should engage in missionary work because God needs our help" (Tozer, 40). God is quite capable of giving life and shining his light into the darkest corners of the world, and we are simply called to join him as his instruments. We need *his* help!

The lost cannot understand their condition of darkness apart from the light of the Word. And even we who are believers depend on the light to show us our need to confess and forsake sin and to grow in holiness. And, as children of God we too become his lights in a dark world. Jesus said "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Interestingly enough, he also said of us, "You are the light of the world. A city on a

hill cannot be hidden.” And, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14 & 16).

One of the banners displayed by the citizens of Calcutta at Mother Teresa’s funeral proclaimed, “Mother, you were a source of light in this world of darkness.” Even though she experienced a veil of darkness over her spirit while she gave of herself so sacrificially, she radiated the love and light of Christ in the darkest streets and corners of Calcutta and wherever she ministered to the poor and dying.

“Through embracing her interior darkness, Mother Teresa became a ‘saint of Darkness.’ Jesus’ call “Come carry me into the holes of the poor.---Come be My light,’ urged her ‘to give [herself]—without any reserve to God in the poor of the slums and the streets” (Teresa, 334-336).

Perhaps our text is better translated, “and the darkness has not overcome it” (as in the English Standard Version).

The resurrection of Jesus means that Christ is Victor over all the forces of the darkness. And, we who belong to him are on the winning side. Because of the light of the gospel, death itself holds no threat to us. And, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

As followers of Jesus we must be faithful to pray for our fellow believers who are suffering for their faith. All around the globe, particularly in countries where freedom of worship is not protected or even provided, we must pray for believers who are being persecuted and even martyred for their faith. What about these believers in North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Cambodia and many other places? Are they victorious? Yes, indeed. The Word gives them grace to be faithful witnesses, even unto death. God is using their faithful lives to bear witness in powerful ways. And they realize that the final score and victory celebration awaits the day of the Lord and their being with him in glory. The Book of Revelation makes special mention of the heavenly victory and glory of the martyrs, witnesses unto death.

I read this past week about the oppression of evangelical believers in Cuba and yet was impressed by their indomitable faith and zeal for the Gospel. Open Doors reports:

“Religious groups complain about widespread surveillance and infiltration by state security agents. Pastors and Christians are sometimes pressured to stop evangelizing and to limit their activities to their own church premises. When a pastor was asked what his greatest wish was, he replied, ‘To conquer the city for Jesus Christ!’” [www.OpenDoorsUSA.org](http://www.OpenDoorsUSA.org)

The eternal Word of God creates life and conveys a light that is not understood by nor overcome by the unbelieving world. And the marvel is that God entrusts us with the privilege and responsibility of carrying his light and being his inextinguishable light to those around us.

## **Conclusion:**

Is the Light of the World, Christ, shining before you today? Is the eternal Word speaking to you? Is he telling you of his love and your lostness? As Scripture says, if you hear his voice today, do not harden your heart (Hebrews 3:7-8).

“The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
The voice of the Lord is majestic.  
The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;” (Psalm 29:4f)

God’s Word can break the most stubborn will and can bring new life to the spiritually dead. And “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). The Light can penetrate the deepest spiritual darkness and bring faith for salvation in the lives of those we deem most hopelessly lost.

The Word is accessible to all who will believe, as Romans 10:8-9 says. “‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” All you need to do is call on the Name of the Lord.

You need to call on Jesus while he is near, while the eternal Word is near. Just as with your GSM (cell) phone, you can drift out of the listen area and lose your signal. How much more crucial is our link with the eternal life and life-giving Word of God. You jeopardize your eternal destiny by not heeding and believing and trusting while you have the opportunity.

Jesus is all God wanted to say to us and he is all God needs to say to you.

Thomas’ confession at the climax of the Gospel of John is our only response to the crucified and risen Christ, the eternal Word: “My Lord and my God!” (20:28).

And, each of us must obey the Word as he speaks to us. Today he will make us new in his love and continue what he began in us a long time ago. Let’s resolve for him to fill us and make us into his likeness, finishing what he began on the day we first believed.

Let’s commit to sharing his light, to being his “pencils” he will use to show others what he is like and what he will do for them.

Whatever he leads you to do today, follow him as your Light and Lord of your life.

## **Questions for reflection and discussion:**

1. To whom does John refer by “the Word”? What would have come to the mind of his Jewish readers when reading about “the Word?” To his Greek readers?

How might the concept of the Word speak/relate to your culture?

2. Why is the creation of human life particularly sacred?

3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. When did you first become “a new creation,” and are you continuing to be made new? Would you reflect on and share now with family or your small group your experience of being made new, both as a past conversion and a present process?

4. What is God’s part in the conversion experience and what is ours?

5. In what ways does spiritual darkness try to overcome the light of Christ?

6. Can you think of a fellow (or sister) believer who challenges you to accept that he or she has been truly converted (without mentioning names!)? Should you try to appreciate that apart from God’s grace that person would be in a much worse spiritual condition, and that by God’s grace that same person will be like Jesus some day?

7. This Advent Season, pray for those you know who are in need of the life and light of the Word of God, Jesus, as Savior and Lord. Ask God to make you a faithful witness of the Light of the World, Jesus Christ.

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