

We heard the Prologue from St John's gospel two High Masses ago, on Christmas Day. It's the gospel of the day for this Second Sunday of Christmas, perhaps because the Lectionary divines thought that not enough regular worshippers will have attended on Christmas Day to hear it. Whatever the reason for it twice in two weeks, this is a marvellous opportunity to explore this magnificent passage once again—with thanks to Fr Marc for the first exploration on Christmas Day.

The book Genesis, the first book in the Canons of Scripture in the Hebrew Testament, begins with the words "*In the beginning*". St John's Prologue also starts with "*In the beginning*", but in quite a different context. The words in Genesis talk about the work of God in the beginning of the created order—"*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.*" This is the story of the work of God at the beginning of the formation of the created order.

When we come to the Prologue of St John's gospel, the beginning isn't something which God plans and builds, it goes back before all time began. The words "*In the beginning*" for St John reveal the essence of everything: God was there before all time began. St John begins with

the story of God and Jesus Christ in heaven rather than in the work of a created order. More importantly, the Word, with an upper case 'W', is mentioned first—in the beginning was the Word: the Word existed with God before creation or even before time. The Word with an upper case 'W' refers to Jesus Christ: *In the beginning was Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ was with God and Jesus Christ was God*. We notice immediately that God and Jesus exist before anything else and are one, together. That does not mean that they are the same person; they are two persons, but one and the same divine nature. Immediately we glimpse how the doctrine of the Trinity evolved—God in three persons, blessed Trinity, as the hymn says.

We're alerted, also, in those first five verses that Jesus, the Word, was in the beginning with God and it was through Jesus that everything that was made, was made. We hear that the Word is the life and light of the world and that darkness has not overcome that life and light: this reference is not the darkness covering the deep as in Genesis, but the darkness of the hearts of human beings.

Then we hear about John the Baptist, a man sent from God. He was not that life and light, but one who came to bear witness to it. He testified that the life and light were coming into the world. The major and minor prophets of the Hebrew Testament had proclaimed the need for repentance and of One coming from God, but John the

Baptist told the people to prepare for the Lord Himself. They were to prepare the way for the One whose advent was upon them *now*, rather than at some time in the future.

We hear that the Word, through Whom everything was created, was in the world and the world didn't know Him, but to those who did know Him and believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God, not through any human agency, but through God's gift. The Prologue finishes with the words, *"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a Father's only son, full of grace and truth."*

This wonderful Prologue becomes for us an encapsulation of all the themes of St John's gospel. It's the whole of God's story with us: Jesus was the agent of creation; Jesus came to earth to be one of us and to reveal the love of God for all people; some rejected Him and others believed in Him; those who rejected Him cast Him away in death, but the Passion and Resurrection proved that the darkness did not overcome the life and light of the world. The Passion and Resurrection are the culmination of the Nativity.

One of the most important passages in the Prologue is the statement that **to those who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God.** The issue for *us* is who are the ones who

received Him, who believed in His name, and were given power to become children of God? The answer, of course, is all of us. If we were not children of God and did not believe in His name, why would we be here this morning, worshipping that same God in Jesus Christ?

St Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians—the beginning of which forms our first reading this morning—states that God has blessed us and drawn us into redemption by adopting us in Christ. By faith in Jesus, believers are now participants in the very life of God. We have been chosen—literally “called”—to live for the praise of God's glory. We live for the praise of God's glory every time we participate in the Blessed Sacrament.

There is a particular moment in the Mass which reflects our being children of God, believing in His name, and living for the praise of God's glory. It comes in the Sursum Corda—that beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer when we intone the words which Sursum Corda means, “Lift up your hearts.” We respond with the words, “We lift them to the Lord.” This is critical for us in our worship because in that moment something spiritual rivets us: in that response—we lift them to the Lord—we rise above temptation, above fear, above sin, above the noise of the world, and place our hearts, which we have lifted up, into the hands of God. This is our moment to let go of everything which occupies our whole beings and

give ourselves to God as Jesus gives Himself to us in His body and blood. This is the blending of heaven and earth—we have accepted being made children of God and have been enlivened and sanctified in that acceptance by having the Creator and Redeemer of all people give Himself to us in the Blessed Sacrament.

Just as Christ is the bringer of the word of God, as we hear in this Prologue to St John's gospel, Christ also *is* the Word of God—upper case 'W'—the living Word through Whom all things were made and in Whom they have their being. Christ is the messenger and the message. So in this Eucharistic act, Christ provides the food and at the same time *is* the food. Through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit Christ makes that bread and wine to become His body and blood for us. This is the moment when, as the Church Fathers say, the Church leaves the earth and stands before the throne of God. "Lift up your hearts." "We lift them to the Lord."

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

In the name of the + Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**