1st Advent 28-Nov-2026

We Have Seen His Glory

John 1:1–18

Turn to John 1 please. This is the first Sunday of Advent. "Advent" is an old word for "Coming." Advent refers to the four Sundays before Christmas, when we talk about and remember the birth of Jesus. We remember Jesus coming to earth. Traditionally, "Advent" includes the Lord's second coming, which has not happened yet. We remind ourselves that Jesus has two important comings to this earth, one has happened, and one hasn't yet. But it is mostly his birth.

Today we'll read the beginning of the Gospel of John. Matthew and Luke tell us about the birth of Jesus, and John knows those stories, but John tells us where Jesus came from before he was born.

John 1:1–18 is called John's "prologue." John's prologue is actually like giving us his conclusion to his Gospel at the beginning instead of at the end. John and his brother James were disciples of Jesus. John's Gospel tells us his story of Jesus. The prologue tells us what John understood about Jesus after following him, but John tells us his conclusion at the start. The rest of the Gospel shows us why John believes these things about Jesus. So, John 1:1.

1 The Word of God and Creation – John 1:1–5

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.

"In the beginning." That's how Genesis 1 begins. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. John means, "in *that* beginning was the Word." When God created the heavens and the earth, the Word already existed. He was already there, in the beginning.

The Word was with God. He was not apart from God, he was not a competing God, he was with God. God and the Word were together. And, *the Word **was** God*. His essential nature was the same as God's. He was the same species as God himself. And then some repetition: he was already there in the beginning, with God.

All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that has been made. Back to Genesis 1, all the things that God made were through the Word. God and the Word worked together in creating. God used the Word to create.

In Genesis 1, God made everything by speaking. God made things by his words. *God said, "Let there be light," and there was light*. John 1 makes that speech of God a separate person, who was there, with God, at the beginning, and was himself God.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The biggest human problem, by far, is death. We fear it, we deny it, we try not to think about it, we do many things to delay it. We shall all die, and we don't like that at all. But the Word has life in himself, and that life is the light in the darkness. The Word is the answer to the end of life, because he has life in himself.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. That word "overcome" can also mean "understand." The darkness cannot conquer the light, and the darkness cannot understand the light. The Greek word can be taken either way, and John probably means them both. The darkness cannot master the light, cannot grasp the light. The darkness cannot destroy the light, and cannot figure it out.

2 The Witness to God's Word by John – John 1:6–8

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 Gospel of John was written by John, son of Zebedee. It never actually says that, but that's the early tradition. These verses are about John the Baptist, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. John the Baptist was a Spirit anointed preacher, and turned many Jews back to God. Jesus lived with a lot of rejection, but it would have been far worse if John the Baptist had not turned so many back to God.

The kingdom of God began in two stages. First John the Baptist turned thousands of people to God, and then Jesus called them to follow him. Without John the Baptist, Jesus would not have had the followers he had. All Four Gospel begin with the strong ministry of John the Baptist.

John was so effective and powerful that quite a few people thought that John himself was the light, the coming great one. John the writer corrects this. John the Baptist was not himself the light, he came only to witness to the light.

3 The Reaction to the Word of God in the World – John 1:9–13

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 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 true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. And how is that going to go? Overall, not well. The people of the world met their Creator. He walked and talked in front of them. They watched him and listened to him, but did not recognize him.

"He came to his own" probably means that he came to the Jews, his own people, but it could just be another way of describing the world, because if the world was made through him, it belongs to him. In any case, his own did not receive him.

Think about this. The Word could have been recognized, but not welcomed. "We know who you are, you're the one through whom we were made. We don't want you here." Or the Word could have been welcomed without being recognized. "We don't know who you are, but we want you here with us." But in fact neither happened. "We don't know who you are, but whoever you are, we don't want you." That was the general position in the first century, and that is still true.

Yet to all who did receive him, those who believed in his name (they accepted what he said about himself), he gave the right to become children of God.

Imagine God's delight, that in the middle of a world that did not recognize or want his Son, there were some who received him, took him to themselves. They looked at him and they saw light, and they wanted that light. This is us, people. All of a sudden, we here are in John's prologue. We received him, we looked at him and saw the light of the world. We wanted him.

He, the eternal Word, gave us the right to become children of God. That sounds like adoption language, but it keeps going: *children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God*. That's not adoption. Adoption is one of the biblical pictures of us becoming God's children, but that's not the picture here. Those who receive Christ become God's own birth children.

In the olden days, when I was young, there was bumper sticker with eight words. "Born once die twice, born twice die once." We are born first of our human parents, and then when we received the Son we are born again, and that means the second death has no power over us.

So, the world as a whole rejects the eternal Word, through whom the world was made, and who was the light of all mankind. But some received him, and they become God's birth children. Folks, this is very good. We are the birth children of God himself.

4 Our Confession of the Word: We Have Seen His Glory – John 1:14–18

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

"*The Word became flesh*." The Word changed himself into something he had not been. "Flesh" has the sense of weakness. The eternal Word became a created being, a typically weak human, made in every way as we are, tempted in every way as we are. The Word became flesh and lived with us.

Let's make this sentence, verse 14, our own confession. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He became one of us. Can we say that we have seen his glory? What does John the writer mean by that? Does he mean he saw a bright light around Jesus? No. Jesus was transfigured once, and looked glorious, but John does record that story. That's not what John means.

I am wearing my cross and arrows shirt. The glory of Christ is this story. He came from God, he was born and lived, he was crucified, laying down his life for his sheep, he was buried, he was raised from the dead, leaving an empty tomb behind, he has returned to God the Father, and one day soon he will come back and take us to himself.

If you know that story, and you are one of those who received Christ, then you have seen his glory, because this story is Christ's glory. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul says "*we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another*. We all, with unveiled face, behold the glory of the Lord.

And you have tasted the grace that comes from Christ, and the truth that comes from him. You have received grace and truth from him. You received Christ because you knew that he was the light of the world. The Holy Spirit showed you that. If you received him, and you know the story of his life, and you know that he is the light of the world, and you have received grace and truth from him, then in a sense you have seen his glory, and this sentence is your confession of faith.

*The Word became flesh, and dwelt among **us**, and **we** have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*. This is ***our*** confession of faith.

(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.'") This is John the Baptist putting Christ first.

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. John the writer compares two great gifts of God. The first was the law that was given through Moses. That's means the first five books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The first gift was the law that was given through Moses. But now we have received a greater gift in place of the law, a better gift – grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.

Here we are confessing our faith again: *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.* We here are part of the "we all." We here have all received this grace and truth.

Here, at the end of verse 17, is the first time John actually names Jesus Christ. We know he's talking about Jesus, because we're read this before, but he's not named until verse 17.

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and who is close to the Father's heart, has made him known.

I have heard people picture what kind of person God would be if he became a human. I heard someone say that he thought of God as a man running an orphanage, who took in all the lost children. Others see God as a judge, kind or harsh. Others see God as a policeman, or as a doctor.

But it is too late, people. That kind of imagining is now useless, because God already became a human, and the human was Jesus of Nazareth. If you want to know what God would be like if he became human, read the Gospels about Jesus. Colossians says that the Son is the very image of the invisible God (1:15). Hebrews 1 says that the Son is the exact imprint of God's being. Later in John, Jesus himself tells his disciples, "if you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

I have also heard people compare God the Father to Jesus the Son. The Father is more like that, and the Son is more like this. Usually we think Jesus is a little kinder, or something like that. Again, people, we've missed it. The Son is the exact representation and imprint of God the Father. It is impossible for us to ever have a more accurate picture of God the Father than what we get by learning about Jesus.

Jesus is exactly what God would be if God became human. We cannot possibly imagine a more accurate understanding of God than we get from learning about Jesus. No one has seen God, says John, but we have Jesus who makes God known to us.

Conclusion

There is a lot of good news here for us. We who received him have become God's actual birth children. The Word became a typically weak human and lived with us here, in this world, including his birth, and his death. And, at a distance, we *have* seen his glory. We *have* received grace and truth from him. We *have* received the gift that is greater than the law of Moses, the grace and truth that come from Jesus Christ.

We have not yet seen God, but the eternal Son has shown the Father to us. We now know what God would be like if he became completely human. Thank you, Father, that the Word became flesh and lived among us.

PRAYER: Father, thank you for this opening to John's Gospel. It tells us so much about the Lord that we would never have known. Thank you for causing us to be born again. Thank you that the Word was made flesh, and thank you for showing us yourself. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.

Our Confession

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

From his fullness we have all received
grace in place of grace.
For the law was given through Moses;
But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God;
God the only Son,
who is at the Father's side,
has made him known to us.