

The Wonder of the Word

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For the rest of the month, we'll be pushing against the consumer liturgy of Christmas with a Christ-centered liturgy of Advent. Over next four weeks focusing on the *wonder of the incarnation*. To join us, we encourage you to read the brief passage in the Gospel of John in advance, ask what ideas, truths, or images the Spirit of God is drawing your attention to, and to revisit them to be formed by the terrific news of Jesus. "*Wonder* is the only beginning of philosophy," Plato. Why? Well wonder moves us beyond *using* a thing to *understanding* it, from using a clock to asking how it works. But that kind of wonder only get us to science, the how, but Plato is getting at the *why*? *Why* do we keep time? *Why* does a snowflake have six sides and not four or seven? This passage solicits wonder. How? Answering three questions: Why is there something rather than nothing? Why do we experience awe? What difference does Jesus make?

Creative Word

In the beginning was the Word. John's Gospel begins quite differently than Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Where those Gospels begin with historical details to set up the birth, life and ministry of Jesus, John begins with cosmological details to show us the nature of Jesus. You could say other Gospels open up by sketching Jesus' humanity whereas John begins by sketching Jesus' pre-humanity, "in the beginning." Where have we heard those words before? Genesis, the Bible's account of **origins**. For years, philosophers and scientists thought there was no beginning to the cosmos, that the universe was eternal, but then in the 60s, a couple scientists noticed their radio antenna kept picking up a hissing sound. Thinking it was pigeons, they ran them off, but hissing continued. Eventually, they realized the sound was *Cosmic Background Radiation*, the afterglow of a Big Bang. [\[Pic\]](#) The discovery was hailed as a massive scientific breakthrough. Many Christians reeled as the Big Bang dealt a blow to the Bible's account of origins, replacing God as the origin of all things. Is this necessary? The BB and "in the beginning" don't need to be at odds. In fact, there's a fair amount of resonance. Science gives us the *how* of the beginning, but Scripture shows us the *why*. Why was there a beginning instead of nothing? Because in the beginning, there was a Word. This Word had such creative force that 14 billion years ago it created a primal cosmic explosion. If there is a God, isn't it conceivable that his "Word" could generate something like this? This is what we find in Genesis: "Then God said," light, land, water. Divine words creating. Now, pivot with me, in John's day the word for Word, Logos, was used by Greek philosophers to refer to the ordering principle of the universe. John is tapping into the Hebrew origin of the Logos, to challenge the Greek notion of Logos. He's saying, in the beginning (of the cosmos) was the Word (logos). What is it? Consider what followed: an ordered, finely tuned world. Snowflakes have six sides every single time. Did you know that if the gravitational constant of the universe were smaller, stars and planets would not have formed because the material wouldn't have been able to coalesce? And why do we know this? Math. We all hated it in school, but the deep structures of the universe are consistently represented by mathematics. Einstein worked out theories, in Math, before he had evidence. One such theory was the existence of gravitational waves, proven last year when the LIGO instrument detected *them* [\[pic\]](#). Why does the math add up? Why something rather than nothing? Because the thing was more than a bang; it was an ordering Word, in

the beginning with God. Verse 14, the Word became flesh. Jesus is behind the universe through whom “[all things were made](#)” (3). Why something than nothing? Because that’s what artists do; they express themselves. God expresses his glory through the beauty and order of all things in Jesus Christ, *the Creative Word of the cosmos*.

Divine Word

But why do we experience awe over these things, the orderly, finely tuned universe? Because [the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.](#) Jesus **was**, repeated four times. What does was tell us? He *was* there in the beginning of everything, in the beginning of time. Before that moment time didn’t exist. He was before “[everything that was made.](#)” He was, and then space and time. Shorthand: he’s *eternal*. He’s not just the creative Word; he’s the eternal Word. The unmade, eternal Word makes everything. Think about this; it means Jesus predates your greatest accomplishment and your highest thought. He’s older than dirt, and has wisdom to go with it. If there’s any perspective that matters, it’s his. Without it, all our thoughts are just firing neurons conditioned by time and cultural bias. But John says we can think true thoughts because [the Word was God.](#) Jesus, very God of very God: cosmos creating, eternally existing, always relating with the Father and the Spirit, as God. This accounts for our awe. He’s the reason we marvel, the reason we follow directors, actors, musicians, authors. Why we *adore*. If there is nothing truly great behind the curtain of the universe, then why do children ooh and ahh over Christmas ornaments? Why do I love to watch snow fall? Why does a drive through the Hill Country stun every time? Because Jesus isn’t just the creative Word; he’s the divine Word, the bright and burning Sun, the fountain of life and beauty. What’s our appropriate response? Worship. Adoration. Marvel. Wonder. Every good and glorious thing that fills our heart with wonder is meant to be traced back to the Word, where we kneel and worship. And there’s more! [in him was life and the life was the light of men](#) (4). This can be taken literally and spiritually. Life *literally* comes from the Word, “[he upholds all things by the word of His power](#)” (Heb 1:3). Did you know that if the electromagnetic constant were slightly larger, stars would not be hot enough to warm planets? And if planets aren’t warm, organic life can’t be sustained, we don’t exist, and flowers don’t bloom. Remove the sustaining power of Jesus and life wilts, the petal fades, its bursting color, gone. Nobel Laureate Svetlana Alexievich comments, “[When I see a garden in flower, then I believe in God for a second. But not the rest of the time.](#)” Beauty is his signal. Life emanates from Jesus, *and the life was the light of men*. See, it’s not enough to see the flower, to marvel at its beauty; we have to trace its light, which brings us to our final question: Does Jesus make a difference?

Triumphant Word

The *creative Word* tells us why there is something instead of nothing. The *divine Word* why we wonder. The *triumphant Word*, why Jesus makes a difference: “[The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it](#)” (5). Darkness, light, triumph. Darkness, we need the light because we live in the shadow of our broken selves. We often feel the darkness over the holidays. Unplugged from routine, our passions can get the best of us. Holidays surface old hurts. They even send us into relationship with people we’d rather avoid: *We’re only staying at your mother-in-law’s for an hour, not a minute more! I don’t care; we are not getting uncle Billy a present, after how he’s treated us! Relational darkness.*

The life became the Light of Men *because we are born in darkness*. And we're quick to identify the darkness out there, slow to find it in here. As if darkness is a social phenomenon, but Christ is not like secularism, which tries to deny darkness by whitewashing sin, chalked up to negative influences. But we know it's a cop out, it's why call for accountability and justice. We don't want to admit the darkness is inside. But it is, it's why a seemingly good, family man like Matt Laurer can fall. The darkness doesn't respect position. The light of Christ comes along and exposes *our* darkness, shines the light revealing we all possess a *sinful* capacity to make the headlines. And if we think we don't, we're even more deluded than we know, drunk on our shadow. But there is a Light, the true Light, and he has broken into this world. But to feel its warmth, we have to admit our inner darkness. We have to emerge from the shadows. John writes: "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness" (8:14). You can't be the light and harbor hatred toward others, no matter their political position, racial follies, or moral failures. In his sermon on the Mount, Jesus says hatred is calling others names. Why? It's demeaning them. It's harboring self-righteousness as we peer down on others. It's refusing to forgive fellow strugglers. Or hanging out with that family member smugly thinking I'd never make the mistakes you've made, hold the political position you do. In the recent words of Bono, "The hypocrisy of the human heart is where a lot of the trouble of the world starts." See, to get out of the darkness, you gotta be bathed in the **light**. Tipping the toe won't do. Growing up my parents often prayed their three children "would walk in the light." What did they mean? Surely, they wanted moral purity for us, but if that was their only prayer it wasn't answered! You see, the light is stronger than our moral constitution. It has the power to purify, to cleanse, to heal" But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7). Walking in the light isn't just being good; it's bringing our darkness to Jesus over and over, and to one another, to experience his cleansing, purifying light. Is there something you need to confess to Him? Where are you harboring darkness? Where do you need to let the light in? When my daughter was sick and confined to the house for a week, we decided to go outside together. When we did, she said, Daddy the light hurts. I told her, that's because you've been in the dark so long. Once you get used to it you'll see it's a beautiful day. Coming out of the darkness can be painful, but once you do it the light can cleanse you. See, the Word became flesh, a package of light inside of Mary, stepped out into the world, and suffered for our darkness under clouds of judgment at the cross, so we could experience the cleansing joy of the light. *This* should provoke wonder. Jesus, knowing everything he knows about you and me, says let me do it, let me die in their place to triumph over their darkness and bathe them in the light. Thank God the eternal Word didn't remain behind the curtain, but sank down into the womb of Mary, suffered the sorrows of humanity to shine his light into our darkness. And you know what, *the darkness did not overcome it*. It's sometimes translated "comprehend" but that loses the triumph of the light. You see, those who walk in the light now, will walk in Jesus final triumph over darkness, where in Jesus' new world there will be no need for a sun or moon because his glory illumines it forever. It's coming. Keep walking, keep confessing, keep hoping. Don't just tip your toe; jump head first into the wonder of the Incarnation.