

# **“The Eternal One Is Here, Shining Among Us”**

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

Rev. Kit B. Billings, M.Div.

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## **Scripture Readings**

Leviticus 24:1-3

John 1:1-18

## **Hymns/Songs**

“Jesus Loves Me” 169

“Hark, Hark My Soul” 951

“Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing” 69

## **Leviticus 24:1-3**

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly.

<sup>3</sup>Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall arrange it from evening to morning before the LORD regularly. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.”

## **John 1:1-5,10-18**

### ***The Eternal Word***

**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. **4** In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5** And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

**10** He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. **11** He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. **12** But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: **13** who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

### ***The Word Became Flesh***

**14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

**15** John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’”

**16** And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. **17** For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.

**Insight for Worship***True Christianity 621.3*

[3] “Read the Word and believe in the Lord, and you will see the truths that are to be part of your faith and your life. The Word is the only common source from which all who are in the Christian world draw their teachings.”

**SERMON TITLE: “The Eternal One Is Here, Shining Among Us”**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:1-5)

Over the next several weeks I will work with you in my sermons sections of *John 1:1-18*, and today I will share with you about these first five verses. These opening five verses of *The Gospel of John* are among the most inspiring and spiritually powerful words that have ever been written since human beings first began using written language some 5,000 years ago. For me, personally, the Apostle John whom I believe wrote these transformational words, pierced through the veil of reality itself between Heaven and Earth when he penned words—and through them he revealed to our world the central truths about Jesus Christ. In just a few phrases John tells us in a way that speaks to people like you and me throughout the centuries, regardless of which part of the world we come from and regardless of what century we live.

This collection of words in the first eighteen verses of *John 1* are the most spiritually adventurous and comforting words of all time. For me, at least, this is true. Let us consider together this morning some of the meaning within these beautiful words that begin in John’s special way to reveal to our world the Good News about God who came among us, shining inside of us, in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Let me begin by asking you a rhetorical question, if I may: **Are the first five verses of John’s Gospel important to you? And if they are, why are they important for you?** This morning I would like to share with you the main reasons why I love these opening words of *John* so much and how they speak to me as a Christian and as a child of God. I will share with you these three major elements regarding the opening of John’s Gospel:

- 1) John immediately connects us with the living, eternal nature of God, helping us to fathom that since the beginning of time itself, the living Word and truth of the Lord of all life...the creative force of the Lord’s wisdom from His Love...has always existed. And God’s existence is forever and changeless and it lives at the heart of life itself.

- 2) Right away John reveals to his readers the most important truth of all within Christianity, which is that Jesus Christ is Divine and is One with God the Father—they are the same God-Being, in fact. John tells us that God is both transcendent (or far above our ability to comprehend) and at the same time the Lord God is also manifesting or revealing Himself in the relational-tangible Person of Jesus Christ.
- 3) John composed his Gospel brilliantly, speaking directly to the two primary audiences of people he was focused on in his century when he wrote this Gospel, and they were first century Jews and Greek people back then.

How did John accomplish so much in just a few verses of Scripture? He began by using the same phraseology as we find in *Genesis 1*, which reads, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth.” John grabs our attention right away by anchoring us in the most powerful and transformational truth of all time, which is that God is for real and that God has existed since before the created universe was made by God. But, in addition to this grandest truth of all, John reaches into the hearts of both the Jewish and Greek realms of thought telling us that “the Word” of God has always existed as well. In New Church theology we would say that the very Essence of God is Infinite-Divine Love itself...pure, holy, unconditionally loving and good...and out of God’s Love-Being shines forth God’s Infinite-Eternal Truth and Wisdom...which in Greek terminology was known as the “Logos” of the Lord.

“Logos” was the word the Greeks used to refer to the living Mind, Reasoning and creative life-force of God that literally ***SPEAKS*** things into existence. In Greek terminology then we can read these opening verses as such: “In the beginning was the Logos (the wisdom, truth or thinking) powers of God, which John refers to as “the Word” of God. So again, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*” John begins right away sharing with his readers that the all-powerful, creative life-force (whom the Jews knew as Yahweh), is not only pure Divine will and purpose, but wedded to God’s Being are His thoughts, His reasoning...yes, His Words! And the life-giving thoughts, the Divine Light we can say, ***is Jesus Christ***. John’s opening verses are helping us to understand that essentially this Divine-Human manifesting force and Light-filled presence of God (which ultimately came into being in Jesus) existed as long as God has existed, because they are One and the same. Using New Church language I would put it this way: God is infinite-Divine Love-and-Wisdom itself—in actuality, love is only *LOVE* when it flows forth as loving-truth or loving-wisdom, which moves always into doing what is good, what is useful in life.

Our theology states, most emphatically, that in reality love and wisdom are only real when they flow into useful ends or purposes. So again, John the Gospel writer tapped into both realms Jewish and Greek arenas of thought brilliantly using ideas familiar to both audiences. John was saying, in effect, that the living Word of God has always been, and that the Word of God is equivalent to Jesus Christ---in other words,

rather than struggling to understand God's own Divine thoughts by ourselves, all we need to do is listen to and encounter the God-Man in Jesus of Nazareth, who embodied the very mind and reasoning and words of God in human form.

From a purely Jewish or Hebrew theological perspective John was drawing from four interconnected strands of thought: First, that any word ever spoken is much more than the mere sounds of whatever language is being spoken. Words themselves have an independent existence and they actually move forth into life and create! As Professor John Paterson has put it: "The spoken word to the Hebrew was fearfully alive.... It was a unit of energy charged with power. It flies like a bullet to its billet." For that very reason the Hebrew was sparing with his or her words. Hebrew speech has fewer than 10,000 words, while Greek speech has 200,000 words. For Jewish thinkers words are a form of life in themselves, which can walk up and down in the hearts and minds of their listeners.

History, of course, has many examples of this kind of speech. One of the most vivid examples for me came out of the mind and wordsmithing of Sir Winston Churchill during Britain's toughest days and months when Hitler's Nazi Germany and her Luftwaffe air force attacked and bombed the English shores and cities without mercy. Churchill wisely used the deep spiritual power of words daily by way of radio back then. For example when he said one day after London was burning to the ground, **"We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender!"** With the power of living words Churchill brought unbending inner steel inside the souls of the beaten down British people, and they never fell to evil of the Third Reich!

And then we have the example of when John Knox preached in the days of the Reformation in Scotland, it was said that the voice of that one man put more courage into the hearts of his hearers than ten thousand trumpets braying in their ears! His words literally did things to people—they inspired angelic courage and they knew they could win.

John the Apostle understood this godly power within words when he wrote, **"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."** Of that general idea of the power of words, the Old Testament is full examples. For instance, once Isaac had been deceived into blessing Jacob instead of Esau, nothing could be done to take that word of blessing back again (Gen. 27:1-46). The words of Isaac's blessing had already gone forth from his lips and had begun to act and shape life, and nothing could stop it. Also, we have the much more powerful example in the Hebrew Scriptures when we see the word of God in action in the Creation story. At every stage of it we read: **"And God said..."** and it was so (Gen. 1:3,6,11). In other words, my friends, the Word of God is a creative and creating power!

And for me, personally, I hear this awareness of words having life-enhancing force within them when I read *Isaiah 55:11* that has God saying to the Israelites, **"So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty,**

but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

It is with such life-impacting and life-giving force that John wrote: **"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."** (John 1:4-5) For me, personally, I love opening my Bible to these powerful words when I find myself in the throws of some kind of spiritual battle inside, and then I let the deep, unbeatable truth of God's Word stamp out the dark forces attacking my mind, as I reach out to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, letting Him fight for me. This choice, you see, allows the unbeatable might of God's truth trample out the foes within me, because I know it and I feel it with every fiber of my being, that in Jesus my Lord (my God made visible in Divine-Human form) all of the good forces of His Divine life are now my rear guard! And His life-force is my Light! His Divine Light shines into every kind of darkness in this world, or in the darkness of hellish impulses we all inherit from ancient times, and those dark forces are thwarted **EVERY TIME!** There is no contest. It's as if a young man Muhammad Ali were to be fighting Joe Frazier after Frazier had swallowed a handful of sleeping pills! Victory for Ali would be a foregone conclusion.

And so, my friends, every time God's power is reached for by any one of us, it wins easily...because the forces of the hells are unable to fathom it, nor can they in the least way overpower God's will of unstoppable Love flowing through Truth. This is what happens when we reach out with love and faith for our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever our personal struggle or weakness may be, opening ourselves up to the unquenchable Light and Love of God in Christ gives us the "spiritual umph!" we need to overcome. We may need to do a lot of self-examination and soul-searching to discover the roots of our particular issue or weakness, and face that truth head-on.....but when we partner up with our Lord in Human form, John's Gospel is here to remind us that God's Light shines into every form of darkness there is, and it shows us the truth at hand....and it wins!

This is the guiding and empowering Divine Life, wisdom and energy living in the heart of God's Word, in our Bibles. Our New Church theology says this so well: "Read the Word and believe in the Lord, and you will see the truths that are to be part of your faith and your life."

Amen.

**Let us pray....**