



WEEK 5: AWE AND WONDER: JOHN 1:1-34

I'm starting our final week with a rather strange scripture, strange because it relates to the arrest and trial of Jesus and not as it might seem, the birth of Jesus...but wait and see!! Jesus had been arrested; only two of the disciples followed him into the high priest's courtyard: "*Simon Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door outside . Then the other disciple who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in" John 18:15,16. The "other disciple" is most likely none other than John! And so at long last, we come to the Nativity, but the crucial question is this: who exactly is this baby Jesus? Here for us is a decisive moment: is it going to be*

an “ooh” moment or an “awe” moment? If we think of Jesus as any other baby, then like Peter we remain “stood at the door outside”; we never enter in to understand; we never bow low like the Magi to worship; and we will certainly never pick up our cross and follow him. However, as we read John, we are led in awe and wonder to worship; we are led to understand the significance of this birth: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* John 3:16. Christmas carries with it this simple choice: remain on the cold, dark and wintry outside or enter in to accept the light and warmth of God’s love gift (Jesus), the real meaning of Christmas. If you have read C.S Lewis’s “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” then you might remember the long eternal winter thawing with the coming of Aslan.

The Bible comes out fighting from the very first verse: *“In the beginning God...”* and so does John in verse one: *“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Only God has no beginning and, as John makes clear, neither does the Word. In one sense, the baby Jesus has no beginning: He was there at the Creation: *“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”* v3

What a light comes to shine in our darkness (v5)! It's good to celebrate Christmas near the Winter Solstice, the shortest day, December 21st. In the midst of so much present day scepticism of the real meaning of Christmas, it is good to note that *"the light shines in the darkness and darkness can never extinguish it."*(v5). Not even Santa's little helpers can hide the true meaning (and wonder!) of Christmas!

In Greek the underlined word (καταλαμβάνω) has three meanings. 1) to extinguish, overcome, i.e. *"the darkness does not gain control over it"*; 2) to perceive or understand, i.e. *"the darkness is unreceptive and does not understand it"*; 3) to quench or extinguish i.e. *"the darkness will never be able to eliminate it"*. That was as true in Bethlehem then, as it is in the 21st century now. Indeed in the darkness and the fiery heat of Chairman Mao's red revolution (the time of the "little red book") the church failed to die, as was expected, but grew massively, not in formal buildings but underground.

So, who is this Jesus? John the Baptist, who was six months older than Jesus, testified: *"This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before I did."* Notice also that he pointed Jesus out to the people. Christmas is an ideal time for us to do the same. We are told that religious Christmas cards are falling out of fashion, but we are a people who have a real

faith to share, and who cares if we are unfashionable? Christmas carols (originally a way of teaching and proclaiming the good news in a day and age when most people were illiterate) are still appreciated today, so why aren't we out there today doing just that? Christmas is also a family time, and so vulnerable or lonely people often get forgotten. We can point out "someone who is far greater than I am" just like John the Baptist, with caring church projects like Open Doors at St. Johns URC in Warrington for the homeless or at Christ Church URC in Haydock, open on the days after Christmas, providing warmth and company and some good old fashioned films!!

Jesus the Lamb of God (John 1:29-34) John the Baptist was a cousin of Jesus and yet, until Jesus came to be baptised, John, who was preparing the way (Malachi 4:5,6), didn't know who the Messiah was although he was "baptising with water in order to point him out to Israel" (v.5) Note that John was looking for something very specific and, by definition, out of the ordinary. When John saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on Jesus and resting on him, he knew this was it! But why did Jesus need the Holy Spirit descending on Him when He is the Son of God? Jesus, fully man and fully God, emptied himself of his Glory while on earth (John 17:5); for example, although he lived a sinless life, he could sin and God cannot sin. Also as human beings we need the empowering of the

Holy Spirit to do the works of God and so did Jesus. He performed no miracles until after he was baptised in the Holy Spirit (and mark this: he leads us by his example, for we too need the empowering of the Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit comes within to sanctify and upon to empower. I find it immensely encouraging that leads you and me by example (and just as Jesus could have sinned but didn't, so we too can not sin: note can not sin, not cannot sin).

You might also notice another case of the anonymous John: it is quite likely that in John 1:37 that John was the other follower of John the Baptist, where only Andrew was mentioned by name. Hence, vv.29-34 are eye witness testimony from the author of the Gospel.

So who is this Jesus? Certainly not a mere man. He is God (note: not a god as Jehovah Witnesses claim; that would be theios, which means divine in that sense, but John uses the word theos, which can only mean God). *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."* John 1:1. He also is the Lamb of God, prophesied in Genesis 22:14, the sinless one who came to die on the cross to pay the price of all our sin. When we come to Christ in repentance, he makes us sons and daughters of God and removes satan's authority over us (the seed of a woman crushing satan's head Genesis 3:15).

Let us now as His people, come to the baby Jesus and like the Wise Men give our best gifts (obedience and service) and bow down to worship in awe and wonder at God's amazing grace.

