

Word of the Father, Now in Flesh Appearing

Pastor Kimberley Morrison

December 17, 2023

Christmas is a time when we celebrate the birth of humanity's messiah—Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

The nature and essence of this Messiah is what we celebrate at Christmas, not simply that he came for our salvation—but who it is that came to save us.

Only when we understand who it is that came to save us can we understand what this salvation actually means.

- What does it mean that our Savior is the Logos, the Word of the Father appearing in the flesh?
- How does salvation by this kind of a Savior affect the way we worship God and how we live from sunrise to sunset in the quotidian that seems oh so often simply mundane?

When David read John 1 for us earlier in the service, we heard Jesus referenced as “the Word.” “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” So what does this title *Word* refer to? Well the English translation *Word* comes from the Greek term *Logos*.

John is saying in the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God. John is also saying the Logos *became flesh and dwelt among us*.

Luc Ferry in his book *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living* says the following:

The term Logos, is, as far as we know, first used by Heraclitus in around 540 to 480 BC. Heraclitus was a Greek philosopher who was part of a school of thinking known as the Stoics. The Stoics had a very unique understanding about the cosmos and how we relate to it.

If we want to form a simple idea of what was meant by *kosmos*, we must imagine the whole of the universe as if it were both ordered and animate. For the Stoics, the structure of the world—the cosmic order—is not merely magnificent, it is also comparable to a living being. The material world, the entire universe, fundamentally resembles a gigantic animal, of which each element—each organ—is conceived and adapted to the harmonious functioning of the whole. Each part, each member of this immense body, is perfectly in place and functions impeccably (although disasters do occur, they do not last for long, and order is soon restored) in the most literal sense: without fault, and in harmony with the other parts. It is this order, or cosmos, this ordained structure of the universe in its entirety that the Greeks named “divine.”

It is this divinity, therefore, inextricably caught up with the natural order of things, that the Stoics invite us to contemplate, for example, by the study of sciences such as physics, astronomy or biology, which show the universe in its entirety to be “well-made”: from the regular movement of the planets down to the tiniest organisms. We can therefore say that the structure of the universe is not merely “divine” and perfect of itself, but also “rational” The Greek Philosophers named this divine and perfect ration of the universe the Logos (from which we derive “logic” and “logical”), which exactly describes this admirable order of things.”

Early Greek philosophers understood that behind the cosmos there was a divine and perfect ration or principle ordering the cosmos, giving form to the cosmos and giving meaning to the cosmos.

You could say that, for the Greeks, the Logos represented the meaning center or meaning map of the universe.

My friend Shannon wants to get a counter-top composter that is able to distill compostables down to reusable dirt for her garden. Yesterday she was trying to figure out how a particular model of a counter-top composter worked and how to use it. The instructions on how to use the composter are the logos of the composter. The Logos is a map defining reality and function for the composter.

For Greek and Roman philosophy this Logos was impersonal. The Logos was related to natural laws of how they saw the universe behaving. But, the Logos was simply abstract knowledge, disembodied or separate from the world.

The Greeks and Romans thought they could obtain happiness and joy in this life if they could somehow attune themselves to this impersonal logos. This central, organizing principle of the universe. So they studied the natural world and tried to figure out how this world behaved so that they could then understand the organizing principle or Logos.

John makes this shocking statement that would have turned the world of the Greek and Roman philosophers upside down. The Divine and perfect ration that provides for the harmonious functioning of the universe is not an abstract organizing principle—but in fact a person, a person who became human: “And the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Jesus was born into this Greco-Roman world as an ethnic Hebrew. The Hebrews worshiped the personal God—Yahweh.

What did the Hebrew tradition understand to be the source of meaning?

“And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

The Hebrews did not believe it was possible to live or thrive as a human being without becoming filled with two things—the bread that provides for physical health and the words that provide for spiritual health. Both were necessary for human flourishing. Both needed to be ingested and taken in because both were the source of life.

Human identity for the Hebrew, then, encompassed two realms.

- This material world—where bread represents all that the planet offers to support our life
- The metaphysical world—a world of meaning that transcends what our senses can receive. A world that cannot be measured and sorted through scientific method, but which comes to us through the words that proceed from the mouth of God. Answers to the most basic of questions—who are we? What are we here for? What is our final destiny? cannot be answered, by sensory engagement with the world. Science is important because it provides us with the “bread.” But faith is important because it provides us with “words from the mouth of God” Those words provide meaning for the human race.

In other words we cannot use just our sight, taste, smell, touch, and hearing to investigate this world and then process that information through our brains to discover meaning. Scientific investigation is amazing and we should rely on it to answer questions related to technological advancements, taking better care of human health, the flourishing of the planet, human leisure, production of safe and sustainable energy, and hundreds of thousands of other significant aspects of being human on this planet. But scientism will not get us to ultimate meaning.

This is why in the last few decades our education systems and centers of Western thought which relied solely on understanding the world through scientific method and reasoning have failed. You cannot reason your way to God. God must be revealed to you.

Science cannot provide ultimate meaning; science can only describe what is. Science, by the very nature of its methodology, cannot describe or define that which is transcendent—that which is beyond you in space or before you in time.

We live in a society where scientific naturalism is the primary belief system. Scientific naturalism is the conjunction of naturalism—the claim that nature is all that there is and, hence, that there is no supernatural order above nature—with the claim that all objects, processes, truths, and facts about nature fall within the scope of the scientific method.

This means that there is a ceiling put on the experience of the human race and that only immediate meanings related to our existence on this planet are discoverable. There has been a widespread acceptance of this absence of discovering pre-existing meaning. In other words, meaning is not already present in the universe. There is no transcendent understanding of what it means to be a flourishing human person, we live without the map of meaning for human existence, the ethical center that explains how we should live. Such a map explains where we come from, how we live this life and where we will go after we die. Our society has embraced the notion of the self-creating individual who fashions a self for himself or herself. We have also embraced the notion that social consensus determines that which is true and that which is right. Our moral compass and ethical center is derived from seeking solidarity with others. For most people in America—meaning is made not received.

If the physical world can only hint at meaning, but never deliver it—then scientism cannot answer questions of meaning.

If there is no Divine, no Creator who can reveal meaning—then it is only the words I share with others on this planet, or the words I share in dialogue with myself that can create meaning. So, the words between us and the words I tell myself are all that can offer meaning.

This loss of meaning, loss of a center for the self and for society, loss of sense-making has led to a cultural crisis of incredible magnitude. The culture wars despite all of their symptoms and all of their nuanced, profound and fragmented effects can be reduced to a single diagnosis—we do not have a shared understanding of meaning upon which we can build a society together.

We live in a world who has ceased dreaming of anything beyond the horizon of this planet. That is why the journey must become all-encompassing because the end to every life journey on this planet is death.

As Christians who share much of our ancient tradition with the Hebrew people, we believe that God speaks, we believe that humankind cannot live on the bread of science alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. We just spent 12 weeks reflecting on recorded, historical moments when the Divine ripped apart the veil that hides the transcendent from the earthed, the immortal from the mortal, the real from the shadow, the actual from the mere image and made himself known to men and women on this planet

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.”

God repeatedly came with the words of life. The words that would not only give us eternal life—but also the words that would explain life, would explain meaning would provide understanding on how we could align with God and live a flourishing life, not an easy life but a life that made sense of our design—eternal souls housed in earthed tents.

We rejected those words of life. *“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”*

Rather than wanting words of life—we made bread. When the bread we made did not provide lasting meaning and did not satisfy we made more and more bread, we thought that in the making of bread we would find ultimate, transcendent meaning that would provide a horizon beyond the human mundane plane—we focused on production we scientifically investigated and the resources of the planet to our will and our vision. We produced so much bread that we had a surfeit -but this required exploitation of the planet and workers on the planet. For all our making of bread we found no ultimate meaning.

We then surmised that perhaps what was lacking was different kinds of bread, different flavors, different texture—we wanted to focus on choices and options—100 things on a menu, millions of menus and sophistication of our menu options. We focused on luxury items, the novel, and sometimes the bizarre because with a surplus of bread that holds no meaning. We became bored, the world seemed sterile and production-oriented so we wanted something to entertain us and distract us. Creatures made for another world have hearts that ache when the windows of that world are forever nailed shut.

In our culture, high anxiety is normative for millions, suicides escalate, wars increase, violence soars and depression sets in. Why? Without ultimate meaning our horizon is limited to what can be seen and heard and felt and touched and smelled and on a dying planet in a body that is decaying more each day and in relationships that must be constantly negotiated to keep them from falling apart—the social ills of our day make complete and perfect sense.

We have no joy because joy is dependent on meaning! We have no joy—because joy is dependent upon a stable identity. We have no joy because joy is dependent upon relations that are safe.

At Christmas we celebrate the undoing of despair!

In a world hungry for ultimate meaning God sent his Son. Jesus is the Logos. The meaning of the universe is not some impersonal idea. The meaning of the universe is not something that humans can co-create through mutual dialogue and reflection. The meaning of the universe is a person and his name is Jesus!

The Logos became flesh and lived among us.

God knew that if the human race was to be restored to the Divine, if the human race was ever going to understand the meaning of the universe, then the Logos would need to become sensory data.

John describes how he engaged with the Logos:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.”

Wow! The meaning map of the universe became enfleshed as a human person. That which makes sense of all of reality comes to us in a child.

“In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and by whom also he made the universe. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”

When Jesus of Nazareth came to this world, born as a human, and taking on the nature of a human person he was tempted by Satan. Satan had tempted our first parents—Adam and Eve and he had succeeded.

Satan wanted Jesus to believe that all that mattered was the bread—that which the material world could provide for him.

Satan wanted Jesus to despise the words of God and go after the bread. *“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”* Satan knew this was not God’s plan and not God’s timing. A time would come when Jesus would multiply the loaves, but this was not it!

For Jesus to command the stones to become loaves of bread he would need to decide that he would not align his life with the words from the mouth of God. Jesus replied, “humankind shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Jesus refused to make the bread of this world his ultimate meaning.

Jesus of Nazareth ministered in the region of Galilee and Judea for around three and a half years. During that time the Logos, the ultimate meaning of the universe, the navigational tool that could make sense of all of reality was a person walking around on planet earth—his name was Jesus.

God had told the ancient Israelites, humankind shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Bread—that tangible thing that can be touched and tasted, smelled, and seen is necessary to human flourishing—but it is not enough.

Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God—the meaning of the cosmos, the reality to which we must align is also necessary if we are to flourish as human persons.

So, what does God do in all of his Love? He takes that which is immortal that which is Spirit, that which is the Logos and makes it tangible. Jesus the Logos who is the center of meaning for the whole cosmos becomes bread that can be touched and seen and heard. The Divine comes to us in a way that we can understand with our senses.

“Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” John 6:32-33

Jesus the babe in the Manger is the meaning of the universe—he is the Logos and he is the bread that comes down from heaven.

In what way did Jesus give us a meaning map of our reality.

1. The virtuous life of Jesus, the deeds of Jesus and the words of Jesus show us what it means to be a flourishing human.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:29,30.

To be a flourishing human is to be productive, to labor, to make bread—but that productivity, that laboring on this planet can create burdens—emotional, physical, relational, psychological, burdens.

To be a flourishing human is to come to Jesus and receive rest as we carry burdens—good burdens, good labors that represent the will of God for our lives.

To be a flourishing human is to learn from the one who is meek and lowly in heart. Meekness is surrendering our lives under the mighty hand of God and entrusting ourselves to him. To be lowly is to not think too highly of ourselves.

2. The virtuous life of Jesus, the deeds of Jesus and the words of Jesus shows us who God is.

“If you have seen me you have seen the Father” John 14

“God is love” 1 John 4

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” 1 John 4:9

“In this is the love of God demonstrated, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Rom 5:8

The Logos, the organizing principle of this cosmos is Love.

3. The virtuous life of Jesus, the deeds of Jesus and the words of Jesus show us how flourishing humans relate to God and others

The greatest commandment for every human being is this: *“you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”* The second greatest commandment is this: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.* Mark 12:30-31

Humankind cannot live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. When we rejected and turned away from the words of God that bring life, God sent us the bread of life. But for the bread of life to give us life it would first need to be broken:

- *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”* John 6:48-51
- *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.* John 6:53-57

In this season as you look upon the manger and worship the infant Logos imagine what it was like for this child to have within him the life of the world.

As you look upon the toddler—who was worshiped by travelers from the East, imagine what it was like for this child to be the infant bread of life that would someday be broken for the restoration of the entire created order.

O Come Let us Adore Him—Christ the Logos, the Bread from heaven.