



Reading through the Gospels 2010

1 - Introductions by Luke and John:

01 - Apostolic Sources of the Gospel

02 - The Gospel is the Word of God made flesh

In the case of reading 02 there are some extended reading assignments on the Prologue of John's Gospel, and introducing John's use of simple words in a developed way throughout the Gospel.

David Boan

Do make certain that you read the Bible portions and really think about them yourself; then ask the Lord for understanding through His Spirit before you read anything that I have written.

On Luke and John have formal introductions to their Gospels. I have done

Only Luke and John have formal introductions to their Gospel. Mark has a one-line title and Matthew chooses to introduce his Gospel with a long genealogy of Jesus the Messiah which we treat a little later.

nt 01 – Luke 1.1-4

Apostolic Sources of the Gospel

01-1 At the time of writing people had already written about the events of the Lord's life.

01-2 He writes of the things that have taken place among "us" – the Christian community.

01-3 The previous writers had drawn their information from eye witness sources who were teachers of the gospel message.

01-4 Luke has traced these sources out from the "beginning".

Luke has decided to make for Theophilus:

01-5 Something of his own work.

01-6 The work set things out "in order".

01-7 A record that will be a reliable base of information concerning the matters about which Theophilus had already been informed.

01-1 At the time of writing people had already written about the events of the Lord's life.

Luke testifies that among the Christian community, there were circulating at the time he wrote, written accounts of the Lord's life. This testifies to a powerful need to place into the hands of the Christian converts an historical record of what had taken place among the early group of people who associated closely with Jesus.

This stress on the historical record resonates with the powerful theme of the Old Testament; that God acts in history and that what He is doing now and has done in the past constitute the record of his people's interaction with Him.

The Gospels lay down the 'base document' – the record which will become the historical revelation of what God has done in Christ. When we, as readers, experience through the Spirit of Christ what He is doing today we may both check our own experience by this base document as well as verify that we are in communion with the same early community among whom these things took place.

01-2 He writes of the things that have taken place among “us” – the Christian community.

Among the believers, among “us”, is where Luke’s readership is to be found. Indeed, he writes for Theophilus; a name that may mean any “lover of God” but with the expression “most excellent” standing before it probably means a person among the community carrying high rank among the wider citizens. He may even be Luke’s patron and may be highly literate. Luke obviously wants the material to be reliable, implying Theophilus was discriminating and would trust Luke to provide something sound for him.

Staking a claim to any educated audience, and consistent with Theophilus being addressed, this opening preface is one sentence in impeccable Greek style that any secular writer would admire. It is contrasted with the style adopted in the narrative that follows it; indicating that Luke wants the Christian community to read what he has crafted for them, whether they are educated or not.

It is not so much that Luke is writing for the “in” crowd; understanding them as sympathetic and accepting. He is not addressing a credulous audience but one who shares the same Life that was manifest then to the apostolic community. These things are happening amongst “us” today – both when Luke wrote and in our day as we read – and so the record has powerful value to assure us, to correct us, and to be our ‘base document’ as well.

01-3 The previous writers had drawn their information from eye witness sources who were teachers of the gospel message.

Luke is writing at a time in the Christian community’s life when he knew that there were already some written accounts circulating. This indicates a time when there is a need for the eyewitnesses’ material to go wider than they themselves can take it.

The Community had grown, and the instruction of the converts in each place would require accurate accounts of the words and works of Jesus the Messiah. This puts the focus on the source material and its reliability. The actual men who had lived alongside Jesus were the voices that needed to be heard in every place – it was their words that mattered because they were historically there to testify about what took place.

The eyewitnesses were also “ministers of the word” [Acts 1.17]. They were the authorised messengers who were actively teaching within the community. The original apostles carried a unique authority [see **nt47**]. Others, such

as Luke and Mark had attended to the apostolic teaching. Their records portray them as evangelists and speakers of the word of God as the message was carried wider than Jerusalem and Samaria. Luke himself is a testimony of the gospel penetrating to one of the furthest regions.

01- 4 Luke has traced these sources out from the beginning.

Luke has done some homework. He has encountered the gospel “after the coming of the Christ” as a fellow traveller of Paul, the apostle. His later, second volume of the “Acts” contains what is known as the “we” passages; where he includes himself as being present at certain stages in the journeys of Paul. He has gone back to the “beginning”, by which he means the arrival on the scene of John the Baptist. Both Luke and Mark agree in this matter of the beginning, and, if Mark is informed by Peter, he is also a person Luke uses as his source as well [Acts 12.2].

Luke starts with John the Baptist, but not in the truncated way Mark does. Luke covers the birth and childhood of both John the Baptist and Jesus from an integrated family perspective. Probably Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the source of much of Luke’s material for this section.

01-5 Luke has decided to set things out “in order”.

Does he mean by this a chronological account? If he does, by the way he generally sticks to the Markan order then he is declaring its order to be acceptable to him.

Or does he mean something, which may include chronology, but is “orderly” in the sense that Theophilus will be better instructed by Luke’s own presentation. Is his choice of the ‘beginning’ even, not only a starting point chronologically but also an apostolically valid place to start in what Theophilus needs to know? It would seem so from Acts 1.17.

nt 02 – John 1.1-1

The Gospel is the Word of God made flesh

Read also 1 John 1.1-4

02-1 A different place to think of the beginning.

02-2 Word of God

02-3 The Word of God who is God

02-4 The Word of God who is truly Man

02-5 Simple words used to develop deep ideas

02-6 John the Baptist is not Jesus

02-7 New Creation

02-8 Knowing God as Father through His Son

02-1 A different place to think of the beginning.

Luke speaks of what was handed to us “from the beginning” and then goes on directly to identify that beginning of the gospel with the births of John the Baptist and of Jesus. John, the Gospel writer, [verse 12] also wants to make clear that the birth of Jesus is central and the beginning of what God was doing in the coming of Jesus Christ. However, he wants us to consider who it is that has taken flesh. He points us to the pre-existent Word of God. This one was at the “beginning” of creation.

02-2 Word of God

The first three verses of the Gospel of John is about the Word who, as we see later, became flesh [1.14] for our sakes. These verses speak of the Word who was there both “before” and “at” the beginning. [See how this is developed at **nt44-2**]. The beginning here is taken to be from the point of view of us creatures; it is our creation. This Word is said to be “with” God and also “was” God. This Gospel, right from the start, is already asking us to think of there being at least two distinct Persons in the “Godhead”. [For more see *Assignment 1: Reading 4&5*].

Finally, John states that the Word is the Person within the Godhead through Whom everything was made; nothing came into being except through His agency. We can now state it this way. All things and every person is a creature of God’s making. They have their origin in the decision of God, the Father, to create. And second, through his bringing that to pass through the agency of a second Person, who also is God. This person is the Word of God, the subject of this Gospel.

02-3 The Word of God who is God

As the agent of God in creation, the Word is not to be thought of as a conduit or channel of the creative power of God. In him “was life” - this is how it was in the creation. Life is inherently connected with his person, not separated from Him in any way. And this is the same Person, the Word of God, with whom we are dealing with in the gospel. For the good news is about this Word taking flesh like ours and coming into the world [John 1.9].

02-4 The Word of God who is truly Man

The first letter of John, written after the death and the resurrection of Jesus - as were all the Gospels - makes clear that this real, fleshly person of Jesus could be heard, because he spoke normally. He could be seen with eyes like ours. What he said and did could be registered by us in the normal way, all was done in a substantial body that could be handled and touched [1 John 1.1]. He was truly manifest. He was not a ghost, or a spirit being. He didn't just ‘seem’ to be there; He was there.

He was alive, in the sense that we recognise that we are living. But Jesus was not simply a creature as we are God's creatures; He is the Word of God who has taken creaturely flesh. He is the Word of life, the “eternal life” who was “with the Father and was manifested to us” [1 John 1.2]. We are made flesh by Him as the Word at the creation. When He took flesh He was Uncreate, no one made Him. He did not take flesh for his own sake, but for ours. [See *Assignment 1: Reading 15 for more*].

John, the writer of the letter said that he and the other apostolic men [“we”] had a shared fellowship with the “Father and with his Son Jesus Christ”.

Already then, as we have gone this far, you are invited to think of the historical person we know as Jesus, as being a real flesh-and-blood man. At the same time, we are to understand him to be the incarnation of the very Word of God, in whom the life of God resides. Later, in our thinking about the full Gospel narrative, we shall be able to say that before he took flesh, this One had lived eternally as God and now, after he has for us died, been resurrected and ascended into heaven still lives as the God/Man. He will come again this way as well.

Our dear Father, it pleased you to create us through the agency of your Word, your Son Jesus Christ. Thank you that He laid aside the shared glory He had with you before the world was made, for our sakes. Thank you for our redemption and re-creation that has come about in and through this true Man - a salvation

from wrath and a salvation to the sharing of His life through receiving his Spirit. We marvel at your ways: greater and higher than ours – we adore You. Amen

02-5 Simple words used to develop deep ideas

John establishes his themes throughout his Gospel by using simple words such as light, life, witness, believe, receive, world, authority, born of God, glory and truth. These are flagged here for us so that we may read on. They also form a powerful summary of the Gospel in their setting here in the prologue. This vocabulary sounds simple. But as John uses each of these words in the ensuing encounters and exchanges between people and Jesus they take on an increasingly complex meaning. Each situation develops the word used. We need to read the Gospel to understand the full message that comes through using this vocabulary.

John continues in verses 1.4-18 to establish his special themes concerning this Word of God who becomes flesh for our sake. Just as in the original creation the light invaded the darkness and brought revelation of how God's way of creating would be declared [Genesis 1], so the entry of the light of the One who is the light of life brings revelation of God's way of salvation into the world [1.4-5].

The Son of God made the world [the created kosmos]; he comes into it [the kosmos as distinct from where the Son was prior to his coming] through incarnation; and yet the world [as a world of darkened, blind persons] knew Him not. Even his coming to the Jews shows them to be as blind as the world [1.9-11].

02-6 John the Baptist is not Jesus

John the Baptist is distinguished from Jesus [1.6-8]. This theme is common to all the Gospels, John the Baptist is there, but there is to be no confusion between the two men. He has a part to play but he is not the light. [See more *Assignment1:Reading 9*]. He comes for a testimony, he bears witness to Jesus. Later, we see that the testimony of the Father to the Son is declared to be greater than that of John [5.31-47].

02-7 New Creation

If the world does not give Christ a welcome, there are those who do. They "receive" Him for who he is and they are given authority "to become" children of God [1.12-13]. They begin the journey to become who they are, as they respond with faith in Christ. They are re-born or re-created into a knowledge of sonship. They are not born of the world, or through men and women. It is a spiritual birth, a second birth, [3.1-6] and is a work of God.

Later we see that they are understood to be taken out of the world [kos-

mos, that is, a group of rebellious men and women] and then they are sent back into the world as those who are not of the world [as to their genesis].

02-8 Knowing God as Father through His Son

If they have the authority to become children of God they then have an access to God as Father. So the distinctive note about God is struck. They have come to know Him as Father through the Son; the exclusive relationship which alone can bring such revelation of God. In the Father-Son relationship each receives his glory and in turn is glorified by the other [1.14].

The Son of God comes to us as one who reveals the Father and has a glory for us that is full of grace and truth. That it is a matter of grace means that it is not a matter of law. So the great contrast concerning mediation is struck, the law came “through Moses”; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Jesus will encounter the disciples of Moses [John 9] and time and again they fail to meet and comprehend Jesus.[See more Assignment 1:Reading 19].

No one has seen God at any time [for He is spirit 4.23-24] but He has become known through the Son who comes from His very bosom - a place of intimate relating - and Who alone can make Him known. Such an exclusive relationship is the basis for the unique revelation that only the Son can bring of the Father [See how Jesus speaks of it in Matthew 11.27; Luke 10.22].

Father, we call you “Father” because we primarily mean that you are the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. We praise You that You sent your Son. We thank you that You do not love us because He came to us; but the reverse, He came to us because You, and He, first loved us. As your children we thank You, in his Name. Amen.

The expression “Word” never appears as a title again in this Gospel. But before we leave the prologue we need to see what a serious and powerful way John has set us up to consider Jesus Christ. It is that as He appears and we listen to his words and we see his works we have been given to see Him in His pre-existent life by the Prologue. John then, has given us a secret about Jesus Christ before we see Him presented – and yet John’s presentation presumes this pre-existing Word of God. Yield to John’s presentation here, see Jesus Christ that we and consider.

Assignment 1: The Prologue of John's Gospel

In this assignment we are simply reading and thinking about what we read in the Bible and then reading the prepared note to aid our meditation on the text.

You could do this in one sitting; you could take a week and read two or three sections a day. The most important thing is not to rush and do read the Bible passages.

Often we have a powerful desire within us to get through things quickly; perhaps to discover gems or deep thoughts, as if we were collectors of precious things. This is not the case here

Here are some "slow" readings. Slow in the sense of they require us to read some parts of the Old Testament as a preparation for our thinking - as do many of the sections of John's Gospel - and then we need to ponder a little as we read what John has written.

Do make certain that you read the portions I have directed you to the Bible before you read anything I have written. In fact, do not hurry to what I have written: Rather, speak with God about him showing you what he wants for you see, for revelation is His prerogative. Notice that I have asked you to read the Prologue a few times.

Later in our readings we look at the whole of the Gospel in overview. But this early section, often called the Prologue of the Gospel, stands alone. It differs from the narrative itself. It introduces us to the Word of God who takes flesh for our salvation.

What is remarkable is that the Gospel from then on does not mention the Word of God as a title of Jesus, but speaks to us of the Son of God who is the revelation of the Father.

Reading 1 - News is always a revelation when it comes: good news is revelation from God

Read carefully John 1.1-18

Throughout his book, John is going to make us aware of good news – that is why his book is called a Gospel. The news concerns a Person whose "glory" has been seen by the writer as well as others. John writes because he knows that whoever has seen it has come to share the life which God has. The good news then, is news that, when we hear it - or read of it - will draw us by revelation of someone's glory to make a response to them. This response will be controlled by what we have come to know.

You can never know a person unless they choose to reveal themselves to you. Can it be true of a Person who has always existed, even before we were created, Who was involved in that creation and who is God? Can we come to know that Person? We can, but only if His Word will come to us. And that is what John will tell us has happened [John 1.14,18]. This Word, who is in unique relationship to the Father is the One through whom the Father may be known personally.

So, amongst other things, the Word is the Revealer of God the Father. For the Word to do this He shall have to come into the world which we know. He has done it by becoming flesh like us [John 1.14]. As He becomes flesh, we shall come to know who He is in Himself as well as in His relation to the Father. It is by this unique relationship to the Father that the Word reveals Him.

Reading 2 - To see the glory of a Person you must look at Another

Read slowly through John 1.18; 4.19-23, 41-47.

Think of yourself visiting a local school. As you enter the classroom, your eye takes in many things. As the teacher speaks there is a hungry attentiveness of the students as they listen. Working time reveals the quiet and intense order of the class as the set work is hovered over by each student. A student rises to walk to the front to consult the teacher. You notice the reception there, the meeting of the eyes, the quietness of the voice, the sureness of the direction; these would not be missed by any watching eye. The students look up as the teacher rises; the faces are expectant; there is an obedient attitude within the students. All through this interchange of relationship what you are seeing conveyed is the glory of the teacher!

Glory is relational; we can never seek our own glory through what we initiate ourselves [John 4.43-4]. Our glory is in the hands of others; just as it is also true that their glory will be seen in how we relate to them. It is seen in the court rising to meet the presiding judge. It is the eye of the child seeking in a sea of assembled parents the one face, which as an eyebrow is raised, the child is seen to obey and yield. It is the husband's glory found by observing the way that his wife relates to him; just as hers is seen in his care of her and her share in his public responsibilities.

"We have beheld his glory, glory of an only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth." The glory of Jesus Christ is going to be the glory of a Son, who by his obedience and amazingly consistent living for his Father, draws from the Father the shared honour which his Father has. It is through this relationship between the Father and the Son that we shall see each is glorified by the other.

The Gospel is going to be a revelation which comes to us by the presentation to us of a relationship. It is a holy relationship; exclusive, permanent and showing total preoccupation between the Father and the Son.

The Son will only do what He sees the Father doing [John 4.19-23], since He is

yielded to Him. By the same token, the Father delights to reveal what He is doing with the Son, living openly in relation before Him. They are found to be doing similar things because they are in holy relationship together and have a shared life.

Their shared holiness of relation will mean that no one can come to know the Father except through the Son; and correspondingly, no one can know the Son except the Father reveal Him to them [See **nt80**]. They each can show us themselves, only as they live to show the glory of the other. Their love toward each other is selfless - for that is their Nature.

Reading 3 - The Word of God “was”.

Read John 1.1-18 and then slowly, and particularly, 1.1-2

According to John the news from God begins with the Word of God who exists in relation to God way back [John 1.1-2]; He is also at the creation of the world as well [John 1.3-4]. This Word is a divine Person who is both the Creator of all there is and the Revealer of God. Is He God Himself?

In his opening clauses John states some matters concerning the Word; each of which conveys a picture.

First, it is not said that the Word Himself was “made” or “came” but that in the beginning the Word simply “was”. So we are led not to think of the “beginning” as the creation of the world; we are drawn further back than that. That the Word “was” refers not to the act of creation but to what is true in God before anything was made.

Second, the Word is explicitly said to be God. We should not miss the directness of this third clause.

Third, the Word, while being God is not God by Himself, for He is said to be “with God”. The way John says it in Greek could mean “to be in the presence” of God [the expression is used with that meaning in Mark 6.3]; or to “be in fellowship” with God [as is the usage in 1 John 1.2-3]. Later statements in John’s Gospel will convey the idea that Jesus, as the incarnation of the Word, is in union with God.

This means that God was in the beginning but that He was not alone, the Word was with Him. We now have to consider that there are two divine Persons alongside each other and equal to one another. So the Word has the same status as God and we will not be surprised when John tells us that those who come to believe in the Word confess Him as the Son of God [John 17.5] and even address Jesus directly as Thomas did, “my Lord and my God” [John 20.28].

Why has John started here; and why has he drawn us with his opening statements to consider the union of God and the Word in fellowship before our time-frame was begun? It is because John is going to point us to Jesus, so as to look closely at Him to apprehend Who he is. Only by considering his pre-existence can we know why He is the revelation of God the Father as the Son of God.

Reading 4 - Jesus Christ, the historical Person

Read John 1.1-18 and particularly 1.14.

If the Word of God “was” in the beginning before the creation, and equal to God and yet said to be “with God” then we can say that the Word does not belong to the creaturely world by nature. And yet, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”!

John’s book is a presentation of an historical Person. Yet not such that his physical birth marks the beginning of the Person. Rather, we are led to consider that the pre-existent Word of God took flesh in that man. So, in the Person of Jesus we are not encountering something which has its origin in this world or in our time; but Someone Who is without beginning and Who always was. John would have us know before we read of the historic, space-time, actions of Jesus that His origin is not of this world, even if his taking flesh most certainly is, and that for our sakes.

This means that as we consider Jesus’ works and words - whatever He does or says - we must think back further into that union of fellowship with the Father and the Son. It is through Jesus that we have a connected bridge into the heart of God as it is, and always was, directed towards us with love and care.

It means that if we are to know God and think of Him, we must do so as He is revealed to us through the Word of God made flesh, Jesus Christ. To think and speak of God is to think and speak of His revelation in that Man. Jesus is the Revealer of God Himself; He is not someone that the Word of God simply used as a channel. He is the very Word of God. It is because of Who He is that He can be the revelation He is; only God can reveal God. We cannot come to know the Father except through the Son of God Who is the Word of God and the Son of man [John 1.51]. It is through this wonderful God-Man that the revelation of God is found. If we could come into union with that Man we shall be able to share in the life of God. Whatever we have of God’s life does not come to us from anything external to Christ. All of it comes to us in and through that Man!

Recognise that it is in the man and not apart from Him that all the access we have to God has been brought to us. Resolve not to deal with God in any way which is apart from, or external to, Jesus Christ.

Reading 5 - He Who first makes alive is also the One Who remakes us as well.

Peruse carefully John 1.1-12 and especially 1.2-4.

The One Who is the Revealer of God to us is also the One through Whom we have come into being in the first place. Our creation and redemption issue from the one source.

It was the Word and none other who was with God in the beginning [John 1.2]. As the creation came into being we learn here that the Word was there. John asserts positively that everything that was made came by the Word, and then negatively, that there is nothing which was made without Him. And yet, as we have seen the Word is in fellowship with God; He is the agent of Another. The creative activity of the Word is the activity of God done through Him.

As we have considered, the Word is not some intermediary, acting as a channel or conduit. Rather, what John writes is that “in Him was life” [John 1.4]. The Word has the power to create life, it is He Himself who makes alive. [Here are some texts in John’s Gospel to look up and consider 4.10; 6.13,35,48, 51,63,68; 7.38; 8.12; 10.28; 11.25; 14.6]. Not only does He create life, He continues it, sustaining the whole universe [Hebrews 1.4].

Our writer John, wants us to understand that when the Word through Whom the creation took place is the same Word who has taken flesh. He is the one Who can work a “new creation” [John 3.3-8; 2 Corinthians 5.17]. The new creation is redemption which is a restoration [Acts 3.19-24] of what was lost; it comes from the one who is the life and the light of men.

The gospel is about the saving act for mankind of the Son of God who is the Word of God. However, this redemption presupposes the original creative act of the Word making us in the first place.

Reading 6 - He Who “re-makes” us, does so by revelation.

Read John 1.18 and Genesis chapters 2 and 3

We have seen that the Word is the Revealer of God, declaring Him and making Him known [1.18]. How does the revelation of the Father to us “remake” us? How does it change us so as to rescue us from death and take us into life?

To understand this we need to appreciate what took place in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve, once made, found themselves knowing in their experience that God was their Creator and their Provider. They would know this through their senses, as they ate the fruit of the trees, looked upon the loveliness of the Garden, to say nothing of the satisfaction in naming the animals and the working of the soil in the garden. All things were there for them and God had worked six days to provide it.

Then God took them to a centrally placed tree which looked like the rest of the trees. He gave them a word about this tree; it was a tree whose fruit they were not to eat. He

warned them that if they did so they would surely die. In this way a situation, an occasion, was presented to the man and the woman – it was an opportunity to obey God's word. In fact, the obedience or disobedience was the main matter here. Which is another way of saying that what was on offer here was a way of relating to God, not simply as the One Who Creates and Provides, the other trees provided that. What was offered here was to know God not so as to receive something sensual in the mouth and to eat, but to know Him as a Father by simply obeying. Simple obedience would, by refraining from eating, be an experience of God as a son relates to a Father – this occasion was an offer of sonship.

As surely as the act of obediently eating any tree of the garden conveyed to them a knowledge of God as Creator and Provider; so the act of obedience here, to not eat, would have caused them to know God as their Father. All of God's words to us, if acted upon, bring us a knowledge of Himself in our experience. To disobey here was to die. They did disobey and they did die – not so as they dropped dead physically, but they did not enter into sonship, knowing God as Father. And with them, all of mankind has failed to know God in this way. Our own disobedience is our experience of a failure to know God this way.

Now, what if there can be a Son of God, Who is the very Word of God, Who is of the very nature of God Himself who comes, by taking flesh Himself, to open up for us a way?

As a true Man, when He acts it can be said that He obeys for us. In this representative way, He takes us into the obedient, honouring life which He has with the Father as a true Son. Unlike the first Adam, He is an obedient Second Adam. In this way human beings would be “re-made” or restored. They would become a new creation [2 Corinthians 5.17].

And the way God took to do this is through revelation - for He shows us the Father and then taking us into the life that He lives with Father so that we could share it and participate in it in and through Him.

Reading 7 - Into our darkness enters the light of the knowledge of God as Father.

Read slowly, yet again, through John 1.1-18 and especially verse 4-5.

Then look up and dwell on John 3.19-21 and 1 John 1.7

That the Word has come to convey life to us through His revelation of the Father was our theme in the last reading. And we are drawn further into this connection between “life” and “revelation” by the statement of John 1.4, that, “in Him was life; and the life was the light of men.”

We have thought about the failure of us all to know God as Father. A failure seen both in Adam originally, and also in our own life of rebellion as well. The rebellion of the hostile world to be mankind is expressed by darkness.

Our writer [John 1.5] is telling us that the Word Who made everything is life, and that this life comes to a world in the Incarnation of the Word [John 1.12] and in such a way

as light shines into the present darkness. But the picture is not of a room which is dark, and then has the lamp is turned on. The picture is of men and women who, in their very beings, are dark inside. They need to be enlightened; but not only in the sense we usually mean that expression, of needing to see something; but also of needing their inward darkness changed by the coming of the light there. The text tells us that the “life” was the “light” of men. Later, we shall see that we can think of the light coming into the “world” [John 1.9] and yet not being known by the “world” [John 1.10].

This coming of the light is going to face us with the darkness, both within our own persons and also at large in the religious and secular affairs of the world; both will get a mention in this Gospel. John 3.19-21 will show that the coming of the coming of the Word of God in the Person of Jesus Christ will start to manifest a divide amongst men and women of the world.

This is a good place, right at the start of the Gospel, to acknowledge to yourself and to God your own personal darkness. It is also true that we need to recognise the darkness of the world around us. This will mean that we are beginning to agree with the Word of God about our own state. It is a form of the darkness itself that our mind is already set so as to think of God as a rebel thinks; likening God to a Moral Governor who is out to punish us. Knowing God like that is a sure manifestation of the darkness. For it is the knowledge of God which may only be known by and through disobedience. In that sense it is an accurate reflection of our state. We need the light, Who is a Person, to come into such darkness of conscience and save us from always knowing God this way. This is to fear His wrath, to be frightened of what He can do to us.

This Gospel is going to reveal to us that God is our Father, Who has always loved us, and always desired us to walk in the light as He is in the light. As the Father, He desires His children to live with Him and to share His life. As One Who was always forgiving [Daniel 9.9], He has sent His Son to deal with the wrath we fear – and draw us to trust Him and love Him in return. Notice that this “light” will teach us that God does not love us because Christ died for us – it is the reverse, that Christ died for us because God has always loved us and sent Him to be the light of the world.

Reading 8 - The darkness did not overcome the light

Read John 1.1-18, especially 5b.

Also John 12.31,35-36,44-47; 13.26-27; 14.30; 1 John 2.8 and Revelation 5.

John portrays the light, in coming as the Word of God made flesh, as having had a very powerful affect upon the darkness.

First, concerning the darkness within men and women, the light will draw them to become sons of light as they believe on Jesus. For to trust in Jesus is not to remain in darkness. Not only shall they know where they are going, ceasing to flounder around in the darkness ; they shall also have a joy in their obedience, for that is the sign of knowing God as Father. Joy is the experience that comes when we know the pleasure our life has brought to someone we respect. It is the knowing that one has been obedient as a child.

Second, the darkness of the religious, man-centred preoccupation with God is portrayed in this Gospel as being pushed back by the light. John's Gospel shows the opposition to Jesus and we must not be surprised where it comes from.

Third, the light also exposes the darkness of the controlling and occupying powers within Israel as the time the Word of God came. They too, find that they encounter light and truth - they are judged by it even as they attempt to judge the Word of God themselves.

Fourth, there is not so much in this Gospel as there is in Matthew, Mark and Luke, concerning the demonic world that afflict men and women. Rather there is the encounter with the devil as the ruler and prince of this world. Indeed, it is the darkness of the world which is the sign of his rule over it.

It is God's judgment of the ruler of this world, and the fact that he is thrown down which is expressed as one side of the meaning of the death of Jesus.

The death of Jesus brings the Lord the government of the world; the future of the world's times result from the fact that Jesus has purchased people for God. This purchase restores to God what is His own, what was lost to Him and captured by an enemy. On this enemy He has expressed his judgment through the death of His Son.

Revelation 5 has Jesus, because He was slain, opening up the hitherto sealed future of the world in its encounter with the reigning Christ and His church .

Reading 9 - A God-sent witness that we might believe.

Peruse carefully John 1.6-8,22-35; 3.22-26; 5.30-40 and Mark 1.1-8.

All the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have a clear record of John the Baptist; the last of the prophets before the coming of the kingdom of God.

Our writer John, has been careful to include something about John the Baptist in the prologue to his Gospel. In doing so, it appears that he interrupts his flow concerning the light. But not really. For, although he will speak of John the Baptist again in the Gospel, he wants us to be quite sure there is no confusion, before we go on to complete the reading of the prologue, that John the Baptist is not the Christ. John, our writer, develops two themes.

His first theme is that John the Baptist is a man sent from God. His work dovetails in a special way with that of the Word of God Who comes into the world.

His second theme is that John the Baptist came for a specific purpose, which is to bear witness to the light. This is not because Christ is in need of any witness of man [John 5.33-34] but because we are. For John the Baptist comes for our sake, "that all might believe through him" [John 1.7]. He is a gracious provision of God for our consideration.

This establishes a clear relationship in this Gospel between what God does as a "witness" to Christ and the "faith" which people come to exercise in relation to Jesus Christ. The witness of John the Baptist is of one who was sent by God as a prophet, to be the voice of God to us about Jesus. Whenever we have the voice of God it is a witness of God

to His Son for our sakes. Further, it will lead us to believe, to trust and welcome Jesus Christ as the Word of God incarnate.

So we must not think that John comes to tell us his testimony as we might think of a testimony today. So often, our testimony is seen as recounting our experience of Jesus Christ; that is not what John is doing. He is bearing witness to us as from God as an authorised, commissioned witness who speaks for God Himself [John 1.29-34].

The theme of our reading puts before us is the need to decide about this man John. Indeed, Jesus, when challenged by the religious leaders as to why he cleansed the Temple asked them in return whether they thought John was from heaven or not. Jesus went on to make it clear that because they were unclear about that matter then it followed that they were unable to know Him for Who He is. As we read this prologue we are confronted with whether we will receive John the Baptist as the prophet of the Lord speaking with His authority. It is important to decide about this for it will lead to receiving God's voice about Jesus. John, the writer, will present that voice from John the Baptist in the second half of the first chapter of this Gospel.

This was certainly how Jesus received John the Baptist. When He came to John He recognised his cousin's voice but He also heard His Father's word through that voice. He heard him as a prophet of the Lord. In obedience to that voice He entered the waters of baptism and so began His serious, overtly public, encounter of standing with sinners - a mission which led to death on their behalf.

Reading 10 - If there is a calling of God as a witness, then eternal things are in view.

Read carefully John 1.7,19-24; 2.24-25;3.22-33; 5.31-38

We are told early in this Gospel [John 1.7] that John the Baptist came so that people may come to believe on the Word through his testimony.

To the opponents of Jesus, John also bears witness, although in a negative way. To them he first says, of himself, that he is not the Christ. Second, he instructs them as to how they should think of himself – as a voice crying in the wilderness that there may be, in God's people Israel, an open road of access prepared for God.

John the Baptist simply pointed his own disciples towards Jesus [John 1.29-37]. First, as God's own Lamb who is appointed to bear away, not only Israel's sin, but also the sins of the world. Second, as the One Who will baptise [immerse] in the Holy Spirit; and third, John the Baptist flatly states that Jesus is the Son of God.

Later, we learn of from Jesus Himself, that he does not need the witness of man con-

cerning Himself: He does not, we might say, come forward to receive their witness on his behalf [John 2.24-25].

Also later, when Jesus is found baptising, John the Baptist is questioned concerning this [John 3.22-33]. After reminding them of what he had said of himself, John the Baptist makes it clear that he had been sent ahead of the Christ [John 3.28] and now, like a best man at the wedding of his friend, he rejoices to be serving Him as He is the centre of things.

At this record of John the Baptist, our writer John, introduces the idea that Jesus is bearing witness as One Who comes from heaven to the earth. Just as John the Baptist was an authorised witness concerning Jesus, so Jesus is an authentic and authorised witness from heaven. Jesus is authentic because He has come from heaven, and He is authorised because the Father has sent Him. Anyone who receives Jesus witness about the heavenly matters, not the least of which is what Jesus says of God, the Father, really testifies themselves that God is true [John 3.31-33].

Finally, for our purposes here, Jesus Himself recognises the Old Testament truth that there is need for two witnesses to establish the truth of a matter – one cannot bear witness about himself [John 5.31]. Making clear that John the Baptist's witness is authorised, but nevertheless the witness of men, Jesus speaks of a witness which he has which is greater than John the Baptist. This witness is the works that the Father has given Him to do. It is these which bear witness that it was the Father Who sent Him [John 5.34-38].

The works¹ of Jesus are vital to each of us who read of Him and know what He has done; and is still doing. In the court of our own mind's assessment they are powerful witnesses called forward and presented by the Gospel. They testify to us, the readers who believe, that Jesus was sent from God on our behalf.

For each of us then, we must look at what Jesus does, not so much to see if it is miraculous or wonderful [which it often is] but whether it is the sort of thing which God Himself does. If it is, then we are required to think about our receiving of Jesus as a reception we should give to One Who is of the very nature of God.

¹Later, [14.9-11] we shall see that the works of the Son are really the works of the Father, done through the Son. And done through the Son because the Father indwells the Son. This working of the Father through the Son is a matter which results from their union. In this way we have seen that John, the writer, has presented us with the idea of "witness" so as to lead us to the connected concept of "works" in such a way as to integrate this witness by works as something which reveals the union ["we are one"] between the Father and the Son.

Reading 11 - The true light comes to the created, darkened and rebellious world.

Look at John 1.1-18, [especially verse 9-10], 3.16-21

This prologue of our writer is about the eternal Word of God making an entry into the world by incarnation, the taking of flesh. In the prologue, John the Baptist is seen as actively anticipating such an arrival. This makes the prologue not simply a statement about the pre-existing Word of God, Who is the light. But the inclusion of John the Baptist means that we are dealing with the Word of God meshing with real space and time history. And it is this mention of John the Baptist which, in the prologue, locates the entry of the light into the world [John1.9].

When it is said that the true light “enlightens every man was coming into the world” we must not think only of the salvation and help which the light brings to some men and women who receive it. For we learn later [John 3.16-21], that the entry of light also brings about a judgment – there is a double division established by the reception of the light. There are those who come to the light and those who do not. It may enlighten “every man” in the sense of bringing a judgment and calling for decision.

The coming into the world has been anticipated by our writer with the earlier saying of John1.5 that the light “shines in the darkness”. This prepares us for a darkness concerning the world. So we are not surprised to find three meanings in the one verse of the world “world”.

He was “in the world”. This speaks of the Word of God as being able to be found where we are. He is now locatable, He is the Word of God come to the earth. So in the sense of the word “world” we are to understand the created world of men and women as opposed to heaven [John 3.31], from where the Word of God comes. This is the sense of the “world” as something below, in contrast to something “above”.

The world “was made through Him”. This speaks of the created place which owes its origin to the Word of God. It is then the world of the creature to which the Word of God comes. All the more stunning then is John 1.14, when we see that the Word of God becomes flesh.

The world “did not know Him”. Here is the darkened, unseeing, blind world which is visited by the Word of God. Set in its wicked ways it does not recognise Him for Who He is. This is the world in its rebellious, alienation from God. This world is the place of men and women who do not know God.

John has used a simple word “world; but used it in such a way to convey three word pictures. We shall see that John has three more pictures to make before we are through with the idea of “world” as he uses it. This will make us careful to ponder John’s use of simple vocabulary. For we shall not be surprised of the powerful pictures he can evoke through a simple word being used in a number of ways; and in such a way that, as a writer, he develops and complicates that usage.

Reading 12 - The One “coming” from God to us.

John has presented to us the Word of God as One Who is said to be “coming” [John 1.9] into the world. What is this coming? As we shall see, the nature of a “coming” depends on three things; Who comes, who we are in our relation to them and also our condition which is the reason for the coming.

The action is not that he is fetched by someone sent from the world to go and get Him. Rather, the initiative is in the One coming. This speaks to us of the royalty and greatness of the One coming. It also speaks of the grace and love of such a One Who deigns to visit the rebellious territory of this world.

First the greatness. Should a king be summoned to visit? Hardly, you would say. Great personages are not within our beck and call. It would be dishonouring to them, to say the very least. Just as we may not, and could not, ascend into heaven to summon or even invite: so the Word of God must come to us under His own initiative and power. It must be a coming to us because it cannot be by our going to Him. His “coming” declares us to be his subjects and He our King.

Second, the gracious love. Can a great King be moved by the abject need and inability of his creatures as a father pities his children? Could this motivate Him to send his Word to visit them in their darkness? A darkness in which they cannot see where they are going so as to know themselves or the truth of their Creator and Redeemer?

This “coming” then, is a work of God, issuing from his own heart and as a manifestation of his love for the world [John 3.16]. It will be the sending of the Son by the Father to save those who are in darkness. Although, it is not that our condition elicits from Him love. God is not motivated by our need. Rather He is motivated by His own great love for us as our Father. Our pitiable need is the occasion of His action- but it is not the motivation for it.

He “came”. John tells us in the prologue that his coming has happened: it is written from the historical perspective that is past. Further, he will say that it was a coming to his “own”. This may mean in the sense of the coming of Israel’s Messiah to his own people. And that would be a true thing to say. But more likely here in the prologue it means his “own” as those who he owns because He has created them [John 1.3]. He came then, to his own possession, His own domain, his world². Our Creator is also our Redeemer – more on this later.

It was a visitation to Israel of course - but it is a coming into the world for John. John writes after the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. He is expressing something which is capable of being understood in Old Testament pictures of Israel’s historical dealing with God, and he uses them freely. But now the gospel extends, even as Israel’s original mission included, to the world.

² As we shall see, consistent with this thought, Jesus speaks of Satan as the prince [ruler] of “this world” [John 12.31] in such a way that He acknowledges a rule because he is a usurper, but he does not have any ownership rights. Satan is not the creator of the world, he is a creature himself – a matter of which the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness reminds Satan.

Reading 13 - Receiving the Person!

John 1.1-18, especially verse 11. Also 17.3; 20.30-31

He came to his own [things] property, a world which was made by Him and his own people [Israel or the world] did not receive Him.

What does it mean to receive a person? As a great personage visits your town there is often a “reception” held; it may be a ball. Or perhaps a dinner, as for wedding guests. In this sense receptions are large affairs held to honour the presence of someone; they take their meaning and sense of occasion from the arrival [presencing] of the important one. This much we learn from the more formal, public setting.

It is also true that if you receive someone personally, face to face, then you must be careful to address them and treat them as they are content to be known. That is, you really respond to the revelation which they make about themselves; either directly in their address of you, or indirectly through others who precede them, bearing witness of them in advance. It is no good having a view of a person which is very far away from what they say and declare about themselves. Indeed, if you treat people as you prefer to think about them, and not as they reveal themselves to be, then you offend them, making them in your own image as to how you like to think of them.

To receive Jesus is to welcome Him for Who he really is. And this is the important centre of the gospel, as it is of all four Gospels, – Who is Jesus? His works and words will be constantly brought before us and the question in view is always directed towards us having revelation of Him; so as to know Him for Who He is. John wants us to come to see that Jesus is the Son of God.

To receive Jesus is to come to believe in Him, which is to believe in His name. It is to put our faith and trust in Him as a trustworthy Person Who is sent to us to reveal the Father through his way of relating to the Father as a Son [3.18, 20.31]. The expression “to believe in His name” simply brings out more strongly the recognition of what is signified by His Person. To receive Jesus is, in the Gospel, to come to understand what believing is. Study carefully 5.43-44]

To receive Jesus can only be done, as with anyone you meet, by responding to the revelation which He makes of Himself, or Another, the Father in this case, makes concerning Him.³

This Gospel, as we read it, will ask of you to come to a conviction about Jesus and the Father. Through revelation comes awareness which leads to convictions and then to trust – which is to receive Him.⁴

³ See, for example, the way the voice of the Father is spoken at the Temptation and Transfiguration concerning Jesus. But see also the way the Father honours the Son by giving Him the works of the Father to do – just so that people will honour the Son as they honour the Father [John 5.20-23]

⁴ Notice that modern understandings of “to receive Jesus” has the idea of welcoming Him into your life. And this is an appropriate thing to do - and it is done by yielding to His will as a true Lord and Master. But prior to that movement is revelation, awareness and deep conviction about Who He is. And such yielding to Him is a result of such revelation, not the cause. We are not acceptable to God because we yield to him; it is the other

way about. We yield to Him, because we have first learned that we are acceptable to Him solely through Jesus the Son of God and our only Mediator.

We are not to welcome Him for what He does for us so much as Who He is for us – and then we can with integrity welcome His works He does for us – trusting them to accomplish what they do, and so build our life on reliance of Jesus and his work.

Reading 14 - Authority to become...!

Read yet again 1. 1-18, and especially verses 12-13

Receiving Jesus for Who He is, as the Word of God become flesh, the Son of God brought a change into the lives of the receivers. It conveyed to them an authority.

As with many relationships in life, we usually find ourselves in relation to people because someone, who was already in relation to them, met us. Then, through that meeting we were introduced to the other person and so found ourselves within a new orbit of relations. This is how many friendships begin.

So with the Father and the Son. The Father has sent the Son into the world from their own intimacy. From their holy, exclusive relation which They have always and ever enjoyed.

Salvation, in this Gospel of John, is coming about by participating in the shared life of the Father and the Son. There are those who receive Jesus for Who He is – as Son of God. And this is only possible if the Father reveals it to them. Then He gives them an authority to “become children of God” which means that they will enter into a relation with God as their Father.

“Authority to become” is an expression which could lead us immediately to think of the picture of adoption. But the image quickly moves not to any legal transaction, but rather to another picture of regeneration, to language of birth and being “born of God”. [Significantly, this theme will be dealt with more fully when we come to the John 3.1-21 in the discussion with Nicodemus about the necessity of being “born again” or “born from above” – both render the Greek clearly.]

At this point in the prologue, John is making it clear for us that there is a revelation about who Jesus is. And that salvation in receiving Jesus which comes to mean also believing in Jesus. That is, trusting Him and His work for us is the action of “receiving” Him. This leads to coming into relation with the Father by the authority of the Son. The relation is that of children to a Father.

John reserves the title Son of God for Jesus; and as we receive Jesus we are called children of God. However, from the point of view of the Word of God we notice that in John 12.36 children of God are also called sons of light.

This birth has no origin in man; it does not come about because of natural birth being sired; or of mingling of parental blood lines; or of sexual desire. The work is wholly God’s operation, in strong contrast to all of human begetting.

Reading 15 - And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us

*Read carefully through John 1.1-18 [especially 14]
Leviticus 16, Exodus 33.7-11; 40.34-38 Ephesians 2.11-22; 1 John 1.1-4*

Now an amazing thing has taken place concerning the eternal Word of God Who was in the beginning with God and Who created all that there is. The Word became flesh. In doing this the Word entered a new condition becoming something which He was not before. In so doing He participated in human weakness. He did not just seem to be a man; He became true flesh. He did not come into man, but came as Man.

It is said that He “pitched his tent [tabernacled] among us”. The picture is taken from the Old Testament where God, Who had been meeting with Moses on Mt Sinai announced to Israel that He had saved them for the express purpose that He might live among them. God gave to Moses the plan of a house, a tabernacle, which is a moveable tent, which He would have them build so that He could be among them. It had furniture and servants [the Levites] and it came to be the constant manifestation that God was among them.

But at that time it had to be marked off as a holy place amidst an unholy people. It stated to Israel that God was their God and that He was present among them; but also, at the same time made it clear that intimacy with them was impossible. It was a shared existence but hardly a shared life with them - he was present, but not directly knowable; in the sense of accessible. The holiness made it necessary that to draw near was an act that required much cleansing [performed as rituals God prescribed for them]. And all this was a scary thing – a matter to be handled with great precision lest God break out among them.

Indeed, as the High Priest went into the Holy of holies [the innermost section of the tabernacle] on the Day of Atonement [Leviticus 16] he had bells attached to his garment hem to indicate, by their constant tinkling that he was still alive. Also, a leg rope was attached to him so that if he was struck dead in coming close to the mercy seat where God met them, he could be hauled out without anyone else entering.

John is telling us something revolutionary in Jewish terms and something unheard of in world terms. For here is an intimacy of the Word Who is God, and has come from God Who is made available to the world through the Person of Christ - the Word made flesh. God has come to us [Immanuel meaning God is with us Matthew 1.23 and Isaiah 7.14].

The picture is that this God-Man, Jesus, is the moveable presence of God Who may be dealt with, met, looked upon, handled, known and in such a way as in His death breaks down a dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles. He dwelt among us – that is, mankind in general, not just simply among Israel.

Reading 16 - We have beheld his glory...

Read John 1.1-18 [especially verse 14]; 10.43, 8.40

The “we” who beheld the glory of Jesus Christ are those who receive Jesus, believing in Who He is. This “we” prompts us to see that there is an offence of the gospel which is found in the Incarnation of the Word of God.

It is true that the Revealer of God can be taken by anyone evaluating Him when He came [and later by reading of Him as we do], as nothing but a mere man. It was possible for those most aware of Him in their daily round of life to know his father and mother [ie Joseph and Mary] and so, through familiarity, to take offence at His claim to be the Revealer sent from God [John 10.33]. There are persons who could not tolerate a man who told them the truth [John 8.40].

Fallen human nature being what it is, we need to be careful not to make a mistake here. Most men and women would prefer the Revealer of God, if He is to be found in human form, to be a shining, mysterious and fascinating person – obviously great in their eyes. They want therefore that his humanity would be no more than a disguise and so it must really be transparent to their gaze. Men and women want to look away from the humanity of such a person, expecting it to be no more than a visualisation or a form.

So we are brought up sharply here and all the way through the Gospel. For the glory is not to be seen alongside the flesh. Nor is it to be seen through the flesh, as it were through a window. Rather it is seen in the flesh. With Jesus Christ we may concentrate upon the flesh without falling victim to appearances. The revelation is to be seen in the hiddenness - but the Gospel will point us where to look. It will have to do with a relation - it will point us to a Father revealed by an only Son.

Notice also that the “we” are speaking of the glory of the man Christ Jesus. The title “Word” does not play any more part in this Gospel. This is because the Word is now present as Incarnate Person; indeed, He is only present in this way at all!

Reading 17 - ...His glory...glory as of an only Son...full of grace and truth.

Read 1 John 1.1-18 again. 2.11; 5.19-25; 16.4-5,28; 19.35; 20.24-29;

Romans 1.4

When we think of His glory we are presented here with the glory of the One who became flesh - the Word of God- and we are speaking of Jesus Christ as the one with glory to be seen and can be born witness to by the Church [“we”].

This glory, which will be presented to us all the way through the Gospel will be predominantly seen in the signs which He performed [John 2.11]. These signs are confined mainly to chapters 2-12. The disciples of Jesus find that these signs are occasions for faith, they provoke the disciples to trust Jesus to be Who He is. Those who are found rejecting Jesus find that they have to reject Him in the face of these signs, much as the unbelieving

in Israel needed to see signs under Moses.

The glory is presented to us pre-eminently in the Cross [death] of Jesus Christ [John 19.35]. It is here that we see the Son of God going to death, expressing His love for the Father by carrying out his obedience to Him.

The glory is also seen in the Resurrection [John 20.24-29]. This is so because, while He was suffering, being shamed and crucified as a wrong doer [which He was not] He is seen as humiliated. In the Resurrection, the Father vindicates Him as being right and also declaring Him to be His Son [Romans 1.4]. Our Gospel of John, sees the resurrection as a time when Jesus will raise the dead and judge the world [John 5.19-25].

In all these ways, what is made clear to us is the relation between the Father and the Son.⁵ It is by watching the Son's way of relating to the Father that the Father is seen and honoured before us. And of course, conversely, the Son's glory will be seen as the father glorifies Him as he goes to the Father by way of the Cross and Resurrection [John 16.4-5,28].

So the prologue speaks here of the glory of an only Son – which of course tells us of a relation – the relation of an only beloved child who shares His Father's glory with no one else.

“Grace”, a constant New Testament term, occurs only here in the prologue to the Gospel whereas “truth” is a key term in John's Gospel. It is a word in which Greek ideas of reality and revealing things as they are while at the same time the Hebrew understanding of truth speaks of the stability of person, dependability and trustworthiness.

The glory of the only Son is full of these things to see - can you see them now, will you see them as we go along to look through this Gospel? Ask God for this – to see it is the intention of John writing.

⁵ *You may remember that we traced the importance of glory very early on in Reading 2. Where we saw that to see the glory of a person you must look to another as they relate to them.*

Reading 18 - Priority of Jesus over John the Baptist...fullness...grace upon grace.

Read John 1.1-18 [especially 14-16]. Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.7.

Our writer John, now inserts another unit into the prologue concerning John the Baptist. A statement which will be known already to those the record of the other Gospel writers.

The other Gospels, particularly Matthew 3.11 and Mark 1.7, speak of John the Baptist, making it very clear that, in respect of their birth and the start of their ministries, Jesus follows after John the Baptist in time. Jesus is born six months after his cousin [the Greek word may mean near relative, such as a cousin] and He begins his public ministry after being baptised in the River Jordan by John.

And yet, the same John the Baptist speaks of something else about Jesus which must

have been a puzzle to his hearers at the time. For just as folks could see that Jesus “comes after” John the Baptist in historical sequence of time; so they must have wondered at the other statement that Jesus was “before” John the Baptist. Perhaps many simply took it to mean that they were two statements; one which referred to Jesus as having a priority in status to John whilst John came first onto the stage of history.

John’s Gospel makes 1.15 a parenthesis between 1.14 and 1.16. If we are discussing the Incarnation of the pre-existent Word of God then this is presented to us as the meaning of the witness of John the Baptist. But we are left in no doubt about the pre-existence of the Word of God, because John our writer has established this in the early part of His prologue.

In the light of John the Baptist’s witness this is what is meant when he says that Jesus was “before” Him. The Christian church, the “we” who have seen the glory, have also born witness to this truth. Indeed, the “we” is made even clearer in 1.16; it is all of us who have received fresh grace replacing grace⁶ which has already been received. That is to say, an inexhaustible supply of grace which sustains our life. Revelation as salvation is a free gift. What Jesus brings us in His own words is “life”; what we, as recipients, call it is “grace”.

⁶ *The picture is of a waterfall, as the water flows over it followed by more. this is what John has in mind when he speaks of grace upon grace.*

Reading 19 - ...through Moses...through Jesus Christ

Read John 1.1-18 [especially verse 17], 3.18; 5.24; 6.52-59; 7.37-39, 14.16-24, 16.13-15; 2 Corinthians 3, Hebrews 1.1-4,;3.5-6.

What is brought forward now is a contrast of mediation. Just as Paul contrasts the ministries of Moses and Christ [2 Corinthians 3] we are to compare things old with things new under three headings here:

- [a] a law compared and contrasted with grace and truth
- [b] two mediators; two contrasted persons
- [c] something “given” against someone who “came”

The Old Covenant was mediated through Moses but it was brought to its fulfilment by the second Exodus which occurs under Jesus, the Messiah, the Word of God incarnate, Who ushers in the kingdom of God as a new order. It is not to be understood as a simple replacement of the old; but as a fulfilment of the old in such a way that once we have known the goal of the old as achieved, we would never return to the old at all. The Old Covenant has become unnecessary in the light of the New.

This is fundamentally a movement from living under law to living under grace. It is to be moved from death to life [5.24], to a place of no condemnation [3.18], to a place of feeding on the [living by] the bread of life [6.52-59] and to have received the Spirit of

Christ [John 7.37-39, 14.16-24, 16.13-15]. All this, as we saw in John 1.14 – is nothing less than sharing [participating] in the life of the glorified Christ.

Moses and Christ are to be contrasted, just as they are in Hebrews 3.5-6; in the household of God, one is a servant, the other a son. In Hebrews this is the difference between a man used in the household and a Son who shares the honour of the head of the household. Here, in John's Gospel it is similar. It is the use of the word "given" which tells us that Moses is a servant of God through whom God gave the Law. Here he is a used man - God's tool; and it is really God who gives in using the man.

But the grace and truth which come through Jesus Christ "came"; as in the coming of the Person of the Word of God to be incarnate. So with the coming of the Person there comes "grace" and "truth". This tells us not that God uses a channel but that the Person themselves is the mediation of the given grace and truth. the grace and truth is to us the giving of the Person of Jesus Christ, It is only through the sharing of His life you could be said to have "received of his fullness"; it is to receive by participating in His life.

Reading 20 - Moses, the servant in the house, cannot compare to the intimacy of the Son. It is on just this basis that their mediation of God's word is to be contrasted.

Read John 1.18, Exodus 33.18-23, John 4.9; 14.9

Moses stays in our thoughts when we recall his request to see God's glory. His request, leastways in the form of direct seeing, was denied [Exodus 33.18-20] but what he was granted to see was the "back" side of God [Exodus 33.21-23] - out of that encounter came the Law. The Law that leaves us with denial that God is accessible to man and that He cannot be grasped by the senses. Indeed, what was granted to Moses was a revelation of the moral character of God which it is said that he proclaimed by the word of Moses [Exodus 33.19].

The "only begotten of God" is One Who shares the very nature and essence of God. Because of this He is the authentic exposition of God to man. Here is one who if we know Him then we will also know the Father [John 14.9]. This is so because He is the one who is truly intimate and close - in the very "bosom of the Father". He was that as the pre-existent Word and He is that now as the resurrected, glorified Son who has ascended to the intimate lace He had with the Father before he "came".

"That One has made Him known". This making known of the One by the coming of the Other is how we find this Gospel speaks revelation and "seeing". We have said that it has to do with a relation. In the words and works of Jesus we are constantly finding that He does and says what He does because it is consistent to what His father says and does. As a loving, subordinate Son in His obedience to the father then we start to get a picture of the father through the exposition of His will, all through watching the obedience of the Son.

As we noticed before, the expression "Word" never appears as a title again in this Gospel. But before we leave the prologue we need to see what a serious and powerful

way John has set us up to consider Jesus Christ. It is that as He appears and we listen to his words and we see his works we have been given to see Him in His pre-existent life by the Prologue. John then, has given us a secret about Jesus Christ before we see Him presented – and yet John’s presentation presumes this pre-existing Word of God. Yield to John’s presentation here, see Jesus Christ that we and consider.

Assignment 2: John's word usage

In this assignment we need to do a word-study. It is not simply looking up a word which is recurring. It is more concerned with the setting of that simple word. For, it is in different contexts that the meaning of the word begins to change.

In this assignment it is really vital to make sure that you look up each reference, then see what the word we are studying is meaning in that setting; and then note any advance or change in the way it is used. Through this method we get at some deep things John wants to convey.

1 - Do we read a book or an author? It's both isn't it!

Whenever we read anything we have to ask the question whether we would say that we are reading an author or whether we are reading a book? It may sound an absurd place to start, yet, it is true that both of these questions may be asked and both of them can receive an answer.

For when we read we can be reading the book itself, in the sense of performing skills of reading print and understanding the grammatical rules of writing and the syntax of how things go together in a sentence and how sentences form to make a paragraph etc.

When we read an author our emphasis is on the understanding of the ideas. To read a book then involves us in the skills both of reading and interpretation. To read an author really involves us in a personal relation and our focus is on the person who has written what we are reading. It goes without saying that, of course, we do both of these things at once.

When we read the Bible then, and as we think of the Person Who has written the material, we could think either about the faithful writer of the material, or we could concentrate on the Lord Himself, the primary Source to Whom the writer was submitted when he wrote. So, when we set out to understand the author - we could describe that as an exercise in understanding the human writer as to his style and technique, in the sense of being different from another writer. Or, we may speak of the understanding of the mind of God.

In the sense of understanding the human writer whom God used, we may study his work, yet we are really only to say of him that we understand his ideas - for he is dead. However, when we come to think of how God, Who is alive, communicates to us today, we have a living relationship with Him now. So, we can say both things - the human author may be studied, if that is your focus - and God may be met, if that is your desire, through the Scriptures. This distinction is important to understand, for you will read

scholars who will speak about the Johannine language as being different from the Petrine - which is another way of saying that John says things differently, say as to language and style, to the way that Peter says them. As a point of comparative study such a statement may be made - and yet we would say that such an enterprise of comparing the human author's differences, whilst it is a very important exercise, yet it is a tool only on the way to finding out what it is that the living God is communicating to us today.

It is also true, that when we say we are reading an Author, what we mean is that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are understanding the mind of God. This is really an exercise in relating to God. So in this case, the important matters in our Bible reading are the submission to the will of God in advance, for this is necessary to knowing the truth [John 7.17]. We shall need to be open to the Holy Spirit to teach us. In this way we are dealing with our relation to God as the pre-requisite for understanding His mind.

However, if we are concentrating upon the idea of reading a book, then we shall have to consider another area of study. We will have to occupy ourselves with certain technical skills.

These will have to do with research into the manuscripts which we have before us, their trustworthiness and the history of the transmission of the material. Where did they come from, how many are there, what is the state of them, how do they differ from one another, if they do, which shall we trust as the best manuscripts? Do we have a translation of the original language in our hands, if so, who made it, why did he make it, did he make it for a particular audience or people? What sort of editing process has he done on the text? If he has broken it up into paragraphs why did he? How did he decide where to put the paragraphs - does this mean that he is telling us how he understands the break up of the text according to the argument which he perceives? If it does, is he a trustworthy explainer of the text? The questions here are numerous.

We shall also have to read all the writings of the author that we reading, to see all the examples of his style and use of words. This is very important with the Gospel of John - as we shall see.

2 - How our author uses simple words and then conveys deep meaning as the Gospel proceeds.

See, yet again, John 1.1-18

It won't have escaped us, having read the prologue through many times now so as to ponder it, that this introduction to the Gospel is really about the subject of the Gospel, the incarnate Word of God. But it is also an introduction as to how to read the book about that subject. For one does not only read an author, one also reads a book. The first deals with the mind that we are communicating with as we read. The second is concerned about the structure of the book itself and, in particular, with the words, the vocabulary of the book.

John, our writer, has written into the prologue some flags to attract our attention. Up to this point in our first Assignment, have concentrated on the Subject, rightly. But now it is time to look at the flags - for they will stand us in good stead to read the book's

deeper themes.

John has given us, in the prologue the words which he will repeatedly use. They are the words such as **life, light, darkness, witness [testimony], believe, world, receive, know, authority, glory, truth**. We shall find that, if we looked up every occurrence in the Gospel of each of these words, in the order of their appearance, the development of a theme would become obvious.

Each occurrence begins to develop a deeper understanding of, not only the way the word is used, but a large idea also emerges. In this way, we could say that John's Gospel chooses really simple words; but we would also have to say that the use of those words, in their various settings, conveys a very powerful and deep meaning. A meaning which goes far beyond the simple meaning of the word as we use it everyday.

It also makes us think of another matter. John has no difficulty in quoting the words of Jesus and then slipping straight into stating something himself, as a writer, which uses the flagged words to develop the deep things the Christian church has to say about Jesus. In this way John interprets Jesus to us. He is not just recording something which happens [and, as we shall see, he assumes some knowledge of the gospel story to be already in the minds of his readers] he is also telling us what it means. The other Gospel writers do this as well – but John uses these flagged words as a device. They represent his own editorial explanations of what is recorded for us - they are John's statements of their meaning.

Read carefully through the prologue again and notice the connections between the flagged words I have listed. Write down what you have noticed about how those flagged words interact even in the prologue.

3 - The “world” into which came the “light”.

Let's test what we are noticing in the flagged words of the prologue.
[a] We shall use the word “world”. Although, as we shall see, “world” will also connect into other of the flagged words we have noticed in the prologue.

[b] Take your time in this. It may take several days of readings. Look up for yourself and read carefully through the following texts and make some notes. [c] What you are looking for is to state, in the various contexts where “world” is found, what does it signify? Here are your sections. Work through each setting before you read what I have written. You must see this work out for yourself.

John 1.9-10; 1.29; 3.16-19; 4.42; 6.14,33,51; 7.4,7; 8.12, 23-26; 9.5,39; 10.36; 11.9,27; 12.19,25,31,46; 13.1; 14.17,19,22,27,30-31; 15.18-19; 16.8,11,20-21,28,33.

[Now if it is puzzling, read your first context, and then see what I have written, and then go back and work the rest for yourself.]

John 1.9

1. The idea of the true light which has an effect on every man [universal in scope] comes into the world. The world here must mean a sphere, a place “into” which the light enters. There is an implication that to come into the world means that the light comes

from somewhere which is not the world. This other place is expressed elsewhere in this Gospel by the contrast “above” and “below”.

John 1.10

1. The first usage here “in the world” sees the world as a sphere which has been entered by the light. The light was outside the world [verse 9], and is now “in” the world.

2. The second usage tells us the world = the creation which was made “through” [by the agency of] the light.

3. The third usage speaks of the world as an entity [something] which does not recognise the light. An ignorant world, and yet an ignorance which is made clear only as the light comes to it. So we are beginning to see a movement to the world as = people.

John 1.29

Here, in John Baptist’s words, Jesus is seen as dealing with [= taking away, in the sense of “bearing”] the sin of the world. The world then must be understood as an entity which requires its sin dealt with by the Lamb. The world then is sinful and needing a cleansing in the sight of God.

[Does the Lamb here remind us of the OT scapegoat which would fit the “sin-bearing” idea: or, do we have the Passover Lamb in mind here as the wrath bearer? Or does “Lamb of God” simply tell us that this One is God’s own provision, unlike the other two, which God made provision for them to be used in this way, yet men brought them themselves. At this stage we simply ask the question.]

John 3.16-19

We learn that the world is loved by God in the dual sense of the people of the world and the creation, both of which God made [through the agency of the Word 1.2]

We see that the world may be “judged” [verse 17] so therefore must be accountable, which suggests men and women.

The world is understood as able to be “saved” by the Son. Saved from the wrath of God [verse 14, using the image of the serpent on the pole] and from perishing [verse 16], so it is under God’s wrath.

John 4.42

In the Samaritan woman’s words “Saviour of the world” has the same idea as 3.16 with the added idea that, in the mouth of a Samaritan, it includes the Gentile world.

John 6.14

Similar usage to 1.9 where “into the world” is used of a Prophet coming from somewhere. In this sense because prophets come from God, then into the world comes to mean here, “from God into the world” which = from heaven [see 3.31, where it is opposed to earth] into the world. This gives us the picture of heaven [above] and the world [below].

“from heaven to the earth” parallels “from God to the world”

John 6.33

This text now develops and bears out the comment on 6.14. That is, something [Bread, with the OT understanding of manna] comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. World here means those who can potentially receive God's life. Here the context demands 'people' who can receive, it doesn't extend to the creation.

John 6.51

Develops the movement above. World here is that for which Christ [the living Bread] dies. This means that He dies for the world. The dying is the giving of His flesh [ie an historical actual death-exchange]

John 7.4

The parallel is "not in secret" = "publicly" = "to the world". So here in the sense of world = everyone who is watching. Jesus' brothers here have yet to understand that it is by revelation that any person [eg Nicodemus John 3] knows Him. For the "world" knew Him not [1.10]

John 7.7

The world here means a collected group of people with evil deeds who "hate" Jesus because He shows their deeds for what they are.

John 8.12

Jesus is the light of the world. World here as we saw in John 3.19-21, it is the people of the world who find they are separated into two camps as the light shines. So here, "he who follows Me" = "the one who comes to me" [chapter 3] who receives the light. This one is said here to now be living as having the light of life.

John 8.23

Here, as similar to 1.9, and 6.14 above, the world is that which is below, in contrast to that above.

John 8.26

World here means those who hear the openly spoken words of Jesus which the Father gave Him to say.

John 9.5

"In the world" as we saw in 1.10 above

John 9.32 The RSV translates "world". The ASV "from the beginning of time" which is more faithful to the Greek text. The word "world" doesn't occur here.

John 9.39

Here "come into the world" means as it does in 3.17,19 above. The entry into the world from above brings judgement and so division.

John 10.36

Here “into the world” same as above. With the added idea of being sent by the Father, which we saw in 3.16-19.

John 11.9

“this world” here as the world into which the Father sent Him to be it's light. Which if a man “sees” he walks surely, without the confusion and stumbling of the rest.

John 11.27

“Into the world” as for of 3.17-19,10.36,11.9

John 12.19

“the world has gone after Him” - from the point of view of the Pharisees = everyone. [Notice here that the usages of John are not conveyed in the Pharisees mouths, they simply always speak in the fleshy, blinded sense of the world, for Jesus hasn't been revealed to them for Who He is.]

John 12.25

“in this world” means “here and now, this age” as opposed to what will last forever, the age to come.

John 12.31

Here “this world” has judgement upon it and its ruler is cast out. ie in Biblical language, has a judgment executed upon him. So, “this world” = the present evil age, or wicked people.

John 12.46-47

Into the world as in 3.17-19,10.36,11.9,11.27.

John 13.1

To “depart out of this world to the Father” = to go home to Father where I came from, with the mission accomplished, which the Father sent Him to do. So, “this world” means this ‘hostile environment where I have temporarily come for a task’.

John 14.17

“the world cannot receive...the Spirit of truth”. World, here meaning the hostile, rebellious, blind and judged people, who, in their refusal to receive Jesus, now cannot receive the Spirit.

John 14.19

“the world will see me no more...but you “ . Here the world = those who are not disciples.

John 14.22

Judas doesn't understand Jesus' usage of the word. That is, like the Pharisees in 12.19.

John 14.27

The peace of Jesus to the disciples is "not as the world gives..." So, here, the world = again the people who are not disciples. Because it is the peace of the world as contrasted to the peace of the disciples [which comes from Jesus]. So, where there is a contrast between them and the world, the word is used here that way. We now see that the world means here the whole of mankind minus the disciples.

John 14.30,31

In 14.30 world as in the sense of 12.31 and 14.17 above.

In 14.31 "world may know that I love the Father" this is the reason why Jesus rises and goes on to death. Does this mean that the world, even as hostile to Him, will understand that He loved the Father. And thus He would be vindicated.???

John 15.18,19

"world hates you" Here world = hostile environment as in 13.1 yet there is more here as the next verse develops.

Verse 19 indicates that the world hates because Jesus has chosen the disciples out of the world [the whole of people] and then those who are left = the world that hates the disciples.

John 16.8

"world" in the sense of 'the people who haven't yet heard', the future peoples who will hear the Holy Spirit's message as preached through the disciples. It doesn't mean here that the whole world will make the appropriate response to the message. Simply it means that of the world which hears, some will come to make the response because of the Spirit's work. What is being explained here is the work of the Spirit, not the response of the people [the world].

John 16.11,

"ruler of this world" = this age

John 16.20

Again, the key is to see that the "world" here, is contrasted and opposed to "you". So, the "world" here is the hostile people who are not receiving Jesus and who are happy at the death of Jesus. By contrast, the disciples are sorrowful.

John 16.21

"child is born... into the world" = 'come into existence, here and now, on earth'.

John 16.28

.."into the world" ...leaving the world". World in the sense of the place to which Jesus came from heaven and now leaves. As in 1.9-10, 6.14.

John 16.33

..."in the world you have tribulation... I have overcome the world"

In the first sense as the hostile environment, and in the second a judged world – a world which has been pronounced upon through Jesus' death and action.

Throughout this example we see a movement of the word "world".

1. It is the place which is below, into which enters the Word of God from above. So it conveys a heaven/earth comparison. In terms of the incarnation, the eternal Word enters space and time - created entities - by the incarnation.

2. It is also the created world, the product of the creative power of the Word of God, through Whom the world was brought into existence. In that sense it is the property of the Word – it is his own.

3. It is developed to mean the hostile, alien environment. It is rebellious to God and so the "world" is the people of the world who find themselves invaded by the light which brings a judgment and divide to the world of rebellious men and women.

4. The "world" is that out of which God takes some and causes them to be born of God. In this sense they are not "of the world" but are "of God". That is the world, which marks most, does not stamp these, delineate them or define them – God does.

5. Once these "begotten of God" are taken out from the world, then the "world" now comes to mean not the whole of mankind; but the whole of mankind minus the children of God.

6. Finally, the children of God are put back into the world now that they are not "of the world". The hatred of the world for Jesus now becomes that which hates his children. Here is the "world" defined in its relation to the children of God.

Thought: You would have to be careful then, in quoting a text from John's Gospel to apply it carefully and set its meaning in its context.

4 - In him was life, and the life was the light of men

*Read carefully through this collection of texts 1.4,9; 3.19-21; 5.35-36; 9.4-5;
12.35,44-46; Numbers 21.1-9.*

Again, don't read what I have written until you have at least read all the texts listed. In the opening text we have a connection flagged between light and the life in relation to men and women. The life is the light. So it must be true that men and women are in need of light, That is they are in the darkness – they may also be dark themselves.

John 1.4

In Him was life and the life was the light of men. In a Person was life, and this life is

the light for men. This raises the question of life in relation to light. This light is something which shines in the darkness. That is, it breaks in on that which is already there. The darkness into which it breaks, does not 'overcome' [comprehend] it - either in the sense of encapsulate or understand it.

1.9 John Baptist is not the light.

The true light

[1] comes into the world. In John this has to mean the incarnation.

[2] enlightens every man. What will this mean? - we shall have to read on and see what the light does to people to understand the development. Suspend judgment here for the moment. Yet, whatever it means it is cosmic in scope.

3.19-21 The scene of 3.14ff, has, for its message a basis in Numbers 21.1-9. Here, as the wrath of God comes into the camp of the Hebrews, Moses pleads for the people and the Lord allows them to set up a brass serpent to which they can look if bitten. Then, as they trust the word of God for their salvation from His wrath, then they have it.

This picture is the basis for first understanding that the immediate purpose of the Father in sending Jesus was to save the world. But, having stated that, verse 19 introduces the idea that light has come "into the world". This means different things for different groups.

[1] for those who practise evil. Men choose darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil. That is, their choices are a reflection of their deeds - they have a pre-commitment already in play. Men do not come to it because it involves an exposure of the source of their deeds. The light brings division, this division is seen on respect of the movement of people. Which in turn reflects their actions. Throughout we are led to consider that the light shows the source of their actions.

[2] for those who practice the truth. They come to the light to show that their deeds have been worked in God. That is, the source of their deeds becomes clear. They are the work of the Father, as Jesus' works are. God's light brings a recognition of His action everywhere. So the light actually brings division among men and women because it shows the source of works as seen in the world of men and women. Are they God's works or are they men's?

Notice the pattern here in the style of John.

Everyone who does evil {A} hates the light and does not come to the {B}
light lest his deeds should be exposed {C}

But he who practices the truth {A} comes to the light {B}
that his deeds may be manifested {C} as having been wrought in God

Here we see a way to think about the text so as to see the equivalents and contrasts which John uses to convey his message. So for example

A: he who does evil is contrasted with practicing the truth. Not, as we might have expected "does good". It is the practised truth which is the opposite of evil. In this way, usage of another important word flagged in the prologue, the word "truth" is explained.

B: coming to the light is explained as something which is affected by the motive.

One does not want his deeds exposed, the other does so that God may get glory. See the statement of the Lord in regard to the blind man in 9.3.. "that the works of God might be manifest in him."

C: Exposure of evil is contrasted with manifestation of God's works. The light does both, it exposes evil for what it is, it also shows you what God is doing so that He may receive glory. This is the double work of the "light" in this Gospel.

5.35-36 Jesus witness to the truth is greater than John's

9.4-5 and the following verses. Understanding how Jesus is the light of the world requires considering light [pictured as daytime] and darkness [as night time] as to what they mean for working God's works.

The daytime is the time for the working of the works which the Father gave Jesus to do. Once again it is the source of His works is what is in question. Compare this with Jesus' constant understanding and teaching that the works which He did were not his works but the works of the One Who sent Him.

There is a time is coming when He cannot do those works. It will have to do with the time when Satan is allowed to have a time. ["and it was night" of 13.40].

The remainder of chapter 9 illustrates the works of Jesus and the strength of the 9.39-41 reply to them.

Here at the end of the chapter 9 there is a statement of judgement which is issued over the Pharisees in the light of their presumed understanding.

[12.35,44-46

In verse 35- "the light" is here the person of Jesus. They are to walk [live in such a way] while they 'have' Him.

A. If they live this way the darkness will not overtake them.

B. The one walking in the darkness is typified by the fact that he doesn't know where [in the sense of goal or immediate movement?] he is going. The darkness has a confusing effect which effects the life of a man.

C. The thing to do "while they have the light" is to believe in the light [= trust Jesus]. The reason for doing this trusting, is that they may become "sons of light". Now we have a movement which speaks of their status in relation to the Light.

Here we see the inter-relation between light, darkness, believe, sons of God.[born of God]

In verse 46 - Now the statement is made clear.

"I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in me may not remain in darkness."

Here is the direct correlation between "believe" and "light" - both associated with the Person of Jesus. Further, not to remain in darkness, implies that the persons of the world are in the darkness. And we have learned from verse 35 that the darkness is typified by not knowing where one is going, and also is a position of being overtaken by another power.

All this is an example of how the flagged words are interweaved in such a way as they

take us into the thought form of John the writer. We need to be prepared for this – it will help us understand why John's use of words make us grasp a way of looking at the world and the spiritual realities around us. They give us a "world view".

5 - A way of fruitfully going on meditating on the text.

This technique of looking at the contextual use that John makes of a simple word would now prepare us for the understanding of each text he writes. For some of these, it is really necessary to see them in their setting, for it is only there that their meaning is transparent.

Here is a lot of work: have a go!

[1] Look through the "flagged" words and study out each one. See if you can see the meanings of the words alter in each setting.

[2] Then, re-read the prologue. Do you see it differently, is it a summary of the main themes of the Gospel of John? If it is can you express it in your own language.

[3] Not only then, does the prologue prepare us to read the book, it also summarises the main statement of the eternal Word who took flesh for our sake and for our salvation. This eternal Word, upon taking flesh brings us to the historical person of Jesus Christ.