

Word and Light
[John 1:1-18](#)
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In the church, the Christmas season lasts until Epiphany on January 6 – that’s where the idea of the Twelve days of Christmas comes from, the twelve days between December 25 and January 6. But for most people, as soon as the calendar changes from one year to another, Christmas is officially over. Christmas trees that stood, festively decorated, in the middle of the living room for the past month are either disassembled and packed in their box, or else hauled to the curb, waiting for a truck to come and haul them away. Ornaments and nativity figurines are carefully wrapped in tissue paper and stuffed in a cardboard box. The supply of chocolate and gingerbread is rapidly depleting. By January, Christmas is over. And January is the worst. There is no gingerbread in January. No ornaments, no festive joy, not a single pa-rum-pa-pum-pum. January is the month when you wish it was not January. And in the cold, clear light of January, all those lovely things we said at Christmas, now we’re a little more skeptical. In December, we said again and again that God is with us, Emmanuel! In Jesus Christ God has come to be with us as a child at Bethlehem. In December, just hearing the Good News proclaimed by shepherds and angels, seeing the sweet baby in the manger, singing those rousing songs, just knowing that God is with us, in December that was enough. But in January, we want more. We want details. OK Great, God is

with us – so what? How is that supposed to actually help me? What difference is that going to make in my life here and now? What does Emmanuel actually mean?

Because most of the time we act like having God with us is a bad thing. Imagine that you are driving your car down No 2 Rd., just minding your own business, and you glance in the rear-view mirror, and you notice, driving directly behind you, a police car. What do you do? Well, first, hit the brakes, second, check how fast you were going, and third, start panicking about how long has he been back there? Did I signal when I last changed lanes? Are my brake lights working properly? My assumption when I see that the Police are with me is that I am probably doing something wrong, they are going to find out what, and punish me for it. Knowing that the Cops are with you is Bad News.

And most of the time, when we hear that God is with us, we act like it's the same kind of thing, like we just spotted the Almighty Creator of the Universe in our rear-view mirror and we start panicking – How long has he been watching us? Has he seen everything? Our first assumption is that we have probably done something wrong, and God has found out, and now God is going to punish us for it. And so we think the solution to this mess is to always drive as if the cops are right behind you, always live knowing that God is always right there with you, watching you, waiting for you to mess up. We turn God into Santa Claus or Big Brother – he sees you when you're

sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he knows if you've been bad or good, so be good – or Else.

And this is a problem. For one thing, it's a problem because even if we were able to live every moment of our lives aware of God's presence with us, I'm not convinced that it would actually have that big of an impact on our behaviour. Human beings have an amazing ability to convince ourselves that we're doing the right thing when we're actually doing the wrong thing, that God is on our side when in fact we're actively opposing his will. But even if it did work, seeing God in this way, as the Cop in our rearview mirror, it completely misses the point of why God came to us at Christmas, because it makes everything about us, it makes our behaviour - what we do - the only thing that God seems to care about. If you think the only God cares about is your actions, your behaviour, what you're saying and thinking and eating and drinking, who you're sleeping with and how, then it turns God into the Police, someone to be feared and avoided, it turns God with Us into very Bad News.

So forget completely about that Cop in the rearview mirror, because God isn't like that. That isn't what we mean when we say that God is Emmanuel, God is with us. Instead, look at what John tells us in the first eighteen verses of his Gospel, because here John shows us a new way of understanding how God is with us in Jesus Christ, understanding why God is with us in Jesus Christ, by using two images or metaphors for who Jesus is: That Jesus is the Word of God and Jesus is the Light of the World. Now,

you've probably heard one or both of these titles for Jesus before – we start every Sunday by lighting a candle to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World, and carrying in the Bible to remind us that Jesus is the Living Word of God – but it's important to think about what it means exactly for Jesus to be the Word with Us, the Light with Us, so that we can understand how having God with us is very Good News.

First of all, John says that Jesus is the Word. This Word has always existed from the very beginning, the Word is with God the Father, and yet the Word is the same as the Father, part of the same essence and substance as the Father – the Word is God. Now, calling Jesus the Word at first seems kind of strange – it's hard to wrap our mind around the idea of Jesus being the Word, and people have been arguing over exactly what John means here every since he first wrote it. The Greek word for Word is Logos, and it can mean a lot more than just Word – you could translate this as wisdom, or reason and logic, or speech, or order, or knowledge. If we think of a word as an idea that is expressed, a thought that is communicated out into the world, then you can think of God the Father being the idea, the truth, and Jesus being that truth expressed, that idea being communicated into the world – the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. But even that is kind of hard to wrap your mind around, and it still isn't clear exactly how that helps us here and now.

So to understand Jesus as the Word with us, picture this. You wake up tomorrow morning, and you find you are no longer here in Richmond, or

even here in Canada. You are in a foreign country, in a faraway city where everyone speaks a language that is completely unfamiliar to you, everyone around you is impossible to understand. You have no money, no passport, and all your attempts to communicate with the people you meet just end in failure. Imagine how you would feel in that situation. Pretty helpless, and pretty hopeless – you are trapped in a world that you do not understand, that seems hostile and strange to you. And then just when you are about to give up in despair, someone approaches you and speaks to you in your own language, in words that you understand – speaks words of gentleness and comfort and love, He guides you through that city, translates that world and the people in it into your own language and translates your speech so that you can understand and be understood. In that moment, that stranger is being Logos – he is the Word, bringing meaning and order where there was only chaos, saving you from your confusion and despair by making the world make sense to you – without him, you would be totally lost. That is what Jesus, the Word of God, does for us – he translates the language of heaven, the love and power and forgiveness of Almighty God into a language we can understand, and as we follow him, as we grow closer to him, we can learn to speak that language, we can start to live in that new and different world. Without that guide, without God with Us, the Word with us, we would be totally lost. The gift of Emmanuel, God with Us, is that we have a way of understanding who God is here and now, we can meet with the truth that brought the universe into being because it has been spoken in the form of

the baby in Bethlehem. Because the Word is with us, has come to us in Jesus Christ, we can meet God.

And the same idea stands behind the picture of Jesus as the light of the world. Again, try and picture the darkest place you have ever been – in a cave deep underground, or in a thick forest on a moonless night, the kind of darkness that is so strong and impenetrable that you can barely see your hand in front of your face. You know there is a path somewhere that will take you back home to safety and light and warmth, but you can't see enough to find that path, to follow that path. Every step you take just seems to lead you further into the darkness, away from safety, away from home. And then, when you have given up hope of every finding your way, you see bobbing towards you through the darkness a bright, brilliant light, a light so bright that it dazzles your eyes, it shines so brilliantly on everything that once seemed so mysterious and strange and now you can see them as they truly are, and you can see your rescuer for who he is, as he leads you with his light back to the path, back home. That is what Jesus, the Light of the World, does for us – the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. CS Lewis said "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." When we see Jesus, when we seek to know him and build that relationship with him, not only do we see and understand who he is and who God is, but we begin to see what the world really is, who we really are, because his light illuminates everything around us. Without that light,

without Emmanuel, God with Us, Light with Us, we would be totally lost, and yet in Jesus Christ God's light shines here and now, so that we can see our world clearly, so that we can see ourselves clearly.

The gift that we have been given at Christmas is that God is with us, God has come to us, and he doesn't come to us to give us rules to live by, to scare us into obedience. He came to save us from the darkness of this world, to walk with us through the confusion and brokenness of our lives so that we can see the world the way God sees it. We are called today, here and now, to live in the Light of Jesus Christ, to speak words of love and power with him, to spend our lives here in his presence so that we can spend eternity in his presence. When we worship, when we pray, when we read God's word, when we serve the people around us and share what we have with those in need, in all those things we have God's promise that we will meet with Jesus Christ, we will experience his love, speak his Word, live in his light, and the more we do that, day by day we grow stronger, we grow more and more like him. In Jesus Christ God has come to us, God is with us, so that we can learn how to be with God. Because of Jesus Christ, we will never be alone, because the Word is with us, the Light is with us, Emmanuel, God is with us, and that is Good News.

And now as God's people, we are called to go and shine that light in the midst of the darkness – to speak God's word of encouragement and comfort and love to a broken, troubled world. The church's job isn't to be the police in the world's rearview mirror, lecturing everyone about how they should

behave. We are called to represent Jesus Christ – to be a familiar voice of comfort and love to those who are lost and afraid, to be a shining light guiding weary travellers home through the dark. We who have seen God's light and heard God's word, we now have the opportunity to shine that light and speak that word to everyone we meet, so they can see what we've seen, they can meet Emmanuel in us. We are called to be Christmas people in a January world – to keep the light of God's love burning even when things are cold and dark, to tell God's story and sing the song of Christ's love, even when there doesn't seem to be much to celebrate. Here, today, may the light of Christ shine in us, may the word of God be spoken through us, so when the world sees and hears us, they will see and hear Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the Light of the World. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen!