

11 December 2011

Reading: John 1: 1-11

Background to the reading

John's description of John the Baptist is far more cryptic than those in the other Gospels. John doesn't mention the context of his ministry, his dress or diet. John tells us that he is not the prophet of Jewish expectation, nor is he the Messiah. So who is this cryptic figure? John's answer is that John the Baptist is a man sent from God, a witness to the coming light. A recent scholar says: "He is the lamp and not the light. Once he has borne his witness, he sends his followers to Jesus."

But let us examine our text. The Greek text says: In the beginning – referring to the same wording in Genesis where creation started, there was the Logos – or as it is translated the Word and the Logos was with God and the logos was God. Logos can be translated as Word, reason or wisdom. In this case John is referring to Jesus because He is the embodiment of all God's revelation in the Scriptures and thus declares that only those who accept Jesus honor the law fully. Jewish people considered Wisdom/Word divine yet distinct from God the Father, so it was the closest available term John had to describe Jesus.

John refers to the Old Testament and Jewish picture of God creating through his preexistent wisdom or word. According to standard Jewish doctrine in his day, this wisdom existed before the rest of creation but was itself created. By declaring that the Word “was” in the beginning and especially by calling the Word “God”, John goes beyond the common Jewish conception to imply that Jesus is not created.

Developing Old Testament ideas, Jewish teachers emphasized that God had created all things through his Wisdom/Word/Law and sustained them because the righteous practiced the law.

The Old Testament promised of long life in the land if Israel obeyed God. Jewish teachers emphasized that the reward for obeying God’s word was eternal life. John declares that this life had always been available through God’s word, which is the same word that he identifies with Jesus. Jewish teachers called many things “light” like the righteous, the patriarchs, Israel, God), but this term was most commonly applied to God’s law.

That darkness did not “apprehend” the light may have a figurative meaning. The darkness could not understand the light and hence failed to admit to receive the light. In the biblical world the forces of

light and darkness were engaged in mortal combat, but light was predestined to triumph.

John was sent as a God to serve as a witness to the light. The term “Witness” was a legal concept in the Greco-Roman world and in Jewish circles. In those days only two witnesses could either established your innocence or your guilt! In his case he is the true witness to the Light.

Neither Greek philosophers nor Jewish teachers could conceive of the Word becoming flesh. Since the time of Plato, Greek philosophers had emphasized that the ideal was what was invisible and eternal. Most Jews emphasized that a human being could not become a god but they never considered that God might become human.

“In the Father’s bosom” means that Jesus was in the position of greatest possible intimacy.

John’s Gospel wanted to say to his readers that Jesus is God. He was not created but was with God since the beginning. He is infinite and eternal. John the Baptist was sent to be a witness of Jesus’ coming to the world. So John is represented as a model of Christian discipleship, a paradigm of what all Christians are called to do: to be

a witness, to testify to the light, 'so that all might believe through him'.

JP 5 All over the world

Sermon

The text verse for the sermon:

¹⁴The Word became flesh and as it literally say in the Greek text "pitch his tent" σκηνώω among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten or unique relation, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

I found the text especially verse 14 fascinating. It really says so much about the identity and purpose of the coming of Jesus to the world. A tent describes the duration – it is never intended to be a permanent dwelling - meaning that Jesus would not stay indefinitely on earth. He came to stay for a little while to be a light in the darkness. But through faith it is possible that He is visible through the witness and testimony of believers. But in order for this to happen, His presence and love must be in the hearts and minds of believers, in everything they do. He must be a reality, a "pitched tent" in everything they say and do. The believers must be true witnesses of His glory and His unique relationship to God the Father.

^dOr *the Only Begotten*

Does Jesus have a place in our hearts, in our lives? Are we a witness of His glory in everything we say, do and think? There is a saying: your home is where your heart is!

Jesus must be living within us through faith. Our hearts must be the place where His tent is pitched. Our hearts must reflect his home!

Some people would now immediately say or think that O no – my heart is not good enough. It is so full of angst, fear, anxiety, bitterness, sadness, disappointment, and sometimes troubled with the onslaughts of life!

I guess we need to think again who the God is who came to stay with us through Jesus Christ. He never had a home. He never had the luxury of staying in palaces. He was born in a stable. God does nae care about the state/seize/grandeur of our homes/hearts. He wants to see a place where He is welcome, and where the stranger and the orphans and the widows feel loved and welcome. God does nae care about a nice orderly “show house”. No He wants to stay within people who are true witnesses to His light - People who have experienced life in all its fullness – in joy and through sadness. But in saying this, He knows we are not perfect and will never be perfect. He does nae care if we are perfect. A home is not where people put on a show of perfection. A home is not where all the colours match

and where the carpets have no stains. A home is where love reigns. And when there are disagreements everyone in that house knows – all problems can be solved and dealt with in love.

We do not have to think of ourselves as unworthy to have a place for God in our hearts and lives. He came to be a light in our darkest moments, to help us when all other help fails.

As we prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of our redeemer let us get our homes/ hearts in order and focus on the things that really matters – namely our love, our faith, our hope and our joy.

Our hearts do have to be a show of pretence and holiness. We can just be ordinary people with trails and tribulations bearing witness to the Only Saviour of humanity!

Amen