



Discussion Notes

Arrivals: The Eternal Word • John 1:1-4
December 7, 2025 • Kirsten Anonby

Introduction

Christians have historically called the four weeks before Christmas “Advent.” Advent is a Latin word that means “coming,” or “arrival.” And that is precisely the focus of this season: to focus as Jesus followers on His arrival, His coming — both looking back at His coming over 2,000 years ago and looking forward, remembering with anticipation that Jesus has promised to come again to make all things right.

What images, memories, places or people does the word “arrivals” bring up for you?

Arrivals stir things up in us. Not every arrival is pleasant, of course. But the good ones — like the ones I just talked about — open something up in us. They remind us of what and who we love, of what we need; they remind us of the longings we have had that have been fulfilled, and they remind us of the unfulfilled longings and yearnings that we hold onto still.

At the centre of any arrival is the person who is coming. We anticipate the person’s arrival because of who they are. Who they are somehow makes a difference to us — being with them makes a difference. We want to be WITH them. We may need them, or they may need us.

As we prepare our hearts to celebrate Jesus’ coming, we’re going to take the time to look at just who it is who is coming. We’re going to see why Jesus’ biographers describe his coming as the best and most important arrival that the world has ever known — “Good news of great joy for all people” — as the angels declare in Luke 2. And to do that, we’re going to ground our time in the first four verses of the book of John, in all of their poetic beauty.

John’s Prologue: A Different Beginning

When we read this beginning, we can tell right away that John approaches the story of Jesus’ arrival differently. Luke gives us the angelic visitation to Mary and the shepherds, and all the gritty humanity of a birthing in a barn. Matthew gives us Joseph’s backstory and shows how Jesus, even as a baby, was worshipped by some in power, and was hunted down by others. The accounts are grounded in time and place — they tell us what happened when Jesus was born.

These other biographies had already been written and were being circulated among the early church by the time John sat down to write his account of Jesus' life. There was no need for John to replicate what they had already done, so he chose to introduce Jesus in a different way.

When you read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there is a gradual introduction to Jesus' full identity. The reader is in some sense on a journey with the disciples as they see Jesus teach with authority, heal the sick, cast out demons, and walk on water. The reader walks through the disciples' disillusionment at the crucifixion and their total reframing of who Jesus is after the resurrection. We watch as the disciples eventually discover that Jesus is more than a rabbi — that He is Messiah — and more than they ever dreamt the Messiah would be. They begin by calling him Rabbi, and they end by worshipping him as God.

John's prologue has none of these elements of discovery. Instead we hear who John knew Jesus to be after many years — after Jesus' death and resurrection, after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, after John has seen the spread of Jesus' Kingdom beyond the confines of Israel, into the world of the Gentiles. This is what mature John wants us to know first about Jesus.

In the Beginning

First, He begins with the phrase "in the beginning," which would have immediately drawn Jewish readers to THE beginning — the creation account in the book of Genesis.

John does not begin with Jesus' baptism, as Mark does, or with his genealogy, as Matthew does — instead he goes even further back, connecting Jesus to the very creation of the world. And the structure of this first sentence instantly equates Jesus with God. "In the beginning God created" and "In the beginning was the Word."

There is a significant difference, though, between Genesis and John. In Genesis, God needs no introduction — all we hear is "In the beginning God created..." — we move straight into the action of what God does, because God, it seems, needs no introduction. Or maybe it's more accurate to say that he is beyond introduction — that everything that follows in the Bible is a mere glimpse into who and what YHWH is.

Jesus the Word

In John, though, we are introduced to "the Word" — and the Word does need definition. Before we focus on the activity of the Word, we need to ask the question of "Being." Who is the Word, and what is his relationship with God — with YHWH?

John doesn't refer to Jesus as the Word throughout his biography, but he does so here. If you look back in Genesis 1, you'll notice that all of the creation is spoken into being. For example, *God said "let there be light."* Our Luke will go into greater detail on this next week, but for the sake of our time together today — notice that by calling Jesus the "Word," he connects Jesus with the active work of creation. God spoke all of creation into being, and Jesus is the Word.

Calling Jesus the Word also points to the way Jesus reveals God to the world. Think about what a word does — how a word functions. A word communicates meaning. For example, if I say the word, “pencil” to you, I have likely placed in your mind the image of slender cylindrical object with a graphite centre that is used to write. If I say the word, “penguin,” you’ll be thinking of a bird that lives in Antarctica and rather comically looks like a butler. It’s amazing how powerful a word can be.

The Hebrew Scriptures were full of words that described YHWH, but it turned out that we needed more than words on a page to grasp who He is. So Jesus came to be the Word — so that we wouldn’t have to wonder any more what God was like. Jesus is the Word for God, or as Jesus puts it, *“If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.”* (John 14:9) If you want to know what God is like, take a good look at Jesus.

The Central Point

John has structured these first two verses of the prologue as a chiasm — a kind of sandwich structure. Biblical writers often use these structures — and their helpful, because they indicate for us what their central point is. You’ll find the central point right in the middle, like the meat of the sandwich. If you look at our text for today you can see this “meat” in the central two lines:

And the Word was with God
And the Word was God

This is the central point John wants us to know about WHO Jesus is. Jesus, the Word, was with God. He was in relationship with God — right alongside him, we learn later on, throughout creation — but at the same time the Word WAS God himself.

Remember this is mature John, who had spent his whole life reflecting on and preaching about Jesus. These are the words of a man who has learned to live with mystery. Because this, in as simple language as possible, states the incredible reality of the incarnation, and of the trinity. Jesus is with God, but at the same time IS God.

We will probably never be able to grasp what a radical departure it was for a Jew to write this. “Hear, O Israel:” says Deuteronomy 6:4, the central declaration of the Jewish faith: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” All of the people who surrounded the Jewish people worshipped many gods — the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Babylonians and the Canaanites. Gods were everywhere in the ancient world, and so were their idols. The Jews were unique because they worshipped only One God — who had no physical idol, or representation. In fact, it was so odd to other cultures that they worshipped only one god that they were called often called atheists by the people around them. Central to their identity was the reality that their God was One, and they worshipped Him only.

The central thing that John wants us to know about Jesus is that He is God. He was with God in the beginning — in the beginning WAS the Word. And this Word is not only with God — He is God.

Many of us have heard this so many times that it's hard to fully grasp how revolutionary this is. But for me, it begins to hit home when I remember this:

John Knows Jesus

John is describing his friend. He fully knows Jesus as a person. His language is big and cosmic and abstract, but he is describing a particular person that he knows — that he loves. Jesus gave John and his brother James the nickname, "Sons of Thunder," because they were fiery, passionate, and somewhat misguided at times. John was with Jesus when he raised people from the dead, and he sat next to Jesus when all the disciples shared their final meal together. Imagine all of the memories, great and small, public and personal, that John had with Jesus. And then think of the ongoing experience of walking in the Spirit after the resurrection. Jesus is not an abstract idea to John — he is his friend.

You can see him grappling with this in the beginning of one of his letters — which has a very similar feel to the beginning of his Gospel:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.
(1 John 1:1–2)

When we hold these two images of Jesus in tension — Jesus the friend and Jesus the Word — we begin to grasp why this arrival is such good news. Jesus came to be both. He came to be intimate with humanity, to enter the muck and mire of what it means to be human. He came to be born in a stable and to experience our joy and our pain, our laughter and our loss, with us. But He did that AS God. With his birth as a helpless baby, Jesus, who had always been fully God — also became fully human. And He is still fully human. This is the radical intersection of the God's holiness and greatness with our mundane everyday.

So what is the good news that becomes clear when we hold Jesus the friend and Jesus the Word together?

God can be Encountered and Known

First, it means that even though God is always too great for us to understand, He is not too great for us to encounter, and He is not too great for us to know. God is holy — He is mighty beyond our imagining.

There is a moment in the book of Exodus where Moses asks YHWH to show him his glory. The Lord tells Moses, *"There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.*

Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”
(Exodus 33:22-23)

Moses was so close to God that he was called God’s friend, but there is something that Moses was not able to see that was revealed through Jesus. We have seen the face of the One who made the world — the power of all powers — and it is the face of Jesus.

I want you to know that our God has drawn close to each one of us through Jesus — fully knowing how messy and broken and unworthy we are. He has offered us the hand of friendship — of reconciliation. The good news of Jesus’ arrival is that He can be encountered, and he can be known.

God does not use Power like the Leaders of our World

Second, holding both the greatness of Jesus and the intimate presence of Jesus shows us that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords — the God of the universe — does not use power like the broken and corrupt leaders of our world. Our God is good — so good that he chose to empty himself of his power to become a vulnerable, human infant, hunted by evil kings, cared for by imperfect people, misunderstood for his whole life by people — even those who knew Him best. In a world where people in power like Pharaoh and Caesar claimed to be gods, God himself came into the world with nothing — and as nothing — willfully choosing to be born in a backwater town in an animal feeding trough, to insignificant parents. All throughout his life he lived as a servant — owning almost nothing, and giving everything to his followers and those he encountered.

The more we see Jesus’ greatness, the more fully we appreciate what his life tells us about his goodness, his trustworthiness. What we learn about God through Jesus is that He will never crush the lowly in the pursuit of power. *“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out”* the prophet Isaiah 42:3 says.

We may live in this world under corrupt and broken leaders — in our governments and our businesses. We may live among corrupt people, who exploit the weak and turn a blind eye to human suffering. We may discover selfishness, apathy and cruelty, and pride within ourselves when we have the courage to honestly look.

But the manner of Jesus’ coming shows us that the One who is truly in charge is nothing like our corrupt leaders — or like those dark parts in each of us. Our God, our King, is worthy of our trust — gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. He is worthy of our worship, and of our hearts. And His Kingdom will ultimately win — when the Word became flesh a hostile takeover of the world of evil was begun — and we are a part of that story.

Discussion Questions:

- Our theme for this advent season is “Arrivals.” What has been one memorable arrival in your life, and why does it is important to you?
- Read John 1:1–4. What do you notice about these four verses? What questions do you have about these verses?
- What do these four verses tell us about who Jesus is? How is this a departure from what the Jews believed about God?
- It’s difficult at times to keep both Jesus’ greatness and his intimate closeness in our minds at the same time — to see him both as God and as friend. What is that like for you?
- What does Jesus’ coming reveal to us about God’s relationship with power? It may be appropriate to read Philippians 2 as you reflect on this question.
- What longings does Jesus’ arrival — His coming — stir up in you this year? What do you need from Him as you prepare your heart for Christmas?