

Light that overcomes darkness

Bible reference for sermon John 1:1–18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, from the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, and from the Spirit who gives life. Amen.

By the time we reach the second Sunday after Christmas, many of us feel as though Christmas itself is already slipping away. The decorations come down, the shops move on, and the new year presses in with its plans and anxieties. And yet the church pauses and gives us this reading—not shepherds or angels, not a manger, but a beginning far deeper than Bethlehem:

“In the beginning was the Word.”

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and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.”

John does not let us rush past Christmas too quickly. He takes us back before time itself, before nations and borders, before race, religion, and fear. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The One we meet in Jesus Christ is not an afterthought or a response to human failure. He is woven into creation itself. “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

That matters deeply in a world that feels increasingly fractured. Last month, our country was shaken by the violence at Bondi—an act that horrified us, grieving families and unsettling our sense of safety in everyday places. When violence erupts in public spaces, it leaves fear in its wake. It tempts us to become suspicious of one another. It tempts us to draw lines between “us” and “them.”

John’s Gospel refuses that temptation. If all things came into being through the Word, then every human life—without exception—bears the imprint of God’s creative love. There is no theological ground for racism, no Christian justification for antisemitism, and no gospel-shaped excuse for any kind of bigotry. To deny the dignity of another human being is to deny the Word through whom they were made.

John speaks honestly about darkness. He does not deny it or minimise it. “The light shines in the darkness,” he says, “and the darkness did not overcome it.” Notice that he does not claim the darkness disappears. The Gospel never asks us to pretend that violence, hatred, or fear are not real. But it does insist that they do not get the final word.



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Christian hope is not naïve optimism. It is resilient trust—trust that love is stronger than fear, that truth outlasts lies, and that grace is more enduring than hatred. Even a small light changes a dark room. Even fragile acts of kindness resist the pull of despair. The darkness has not overcome the light.

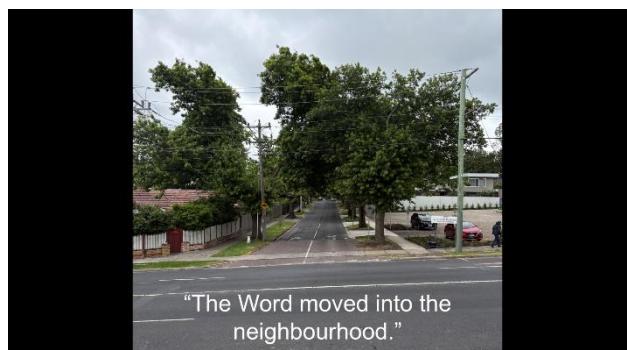
Then John introduces another figure—John the Baptist—not as the light, but as a witness to the light. That distinction matters, especially in times of grief and shock. The church’s calling is not to inflame fear, not to assign collective blame, and not to turn tragedy into suspicion of entire communities. Our calling is to point—to testify to the light that shines for all people.

In moments like these, Christians are called to resist narratives that turn grief into prejudice. We are called to reject antisemitism, racism, and scapegoating wherever they appear, whether loudly or quietly, publicly or privately. We do not respond to darkness by creating more of it.

John is also painfully honest about rejection. “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.” Even God is rejected. This tells us something important: rejection is not evidence that God is absent. Often, it is evidence that God has come very close.

Yet John does not end there. “To all who received him,” he says, “he gave power to become children of God.” This new belonging is not built on bloodlines, culture, ethnicity, or religious pedigree. It is built on grace. In Christ, belonging is not earned; it is given.

That has real consequences for the church. If our identity is grounded in grace, then fear-driven divisions have no place among us. The church must be a community where those targeted by hatred are not spoken about from a distance but stood alongside in solidarity. If the Word has welcomed us, we do not get to exclude others.



And then we come to the heart of the Gospel: “The Word became flesh and lived among us.” Or, as Eugene Peterson translates it in the Message version of the bible, “The Word moved into the neighbourhood.”

Not into a safe or controlled environment, not behind walls or at a distance, but into real, vulnerable, human life. Into bodies that can be wounded. Into public spaces that can become unsafe. Into a world capable of both extraordinary kindness and terrible harm.

God does not love humanity in theory. God loves us in flesh. Which means that every act of dehumanisation—every racist slur, every antisemitic trope, every act of violence or exclusion—stands in direct contradiction to the incarnation. You cannot worship the Word made flesh while despising flesh made by God.

John tells us that from Christ's fullness we have all received "grace upon grace." Grace does not stop at forgiveness. Grace reshapes how we live. It teaches us to resist fear, to speak clearly when bigotry surfaces, and to bear light into places overshadowed by darkness.

And finally, John reminds us that no one has ever seen God—but in Jesus Christ, God has made himself known. If we want to know what God is like in a time of fear and violence, we look to Jesus. Not to rage. Not to exclusion. But to grace and truth embodied.



As Christmas fades and a new year begins, this is what we carry with us: the Word still dwells among us. The light still shines. The darkness has not overcome it. And we are sent—not as people of fear, but as witnesses to a God who chooses presence over distance, love over hatred, and life over death.

Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>