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WORD : "Logos" 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church. First Sunday of Advent 2012. Dec.2

Hebrews 1:1-9

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.<sup>4</sup> So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

<sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"<sup>[a]</sup>? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"<sup>[c]</sup>?

<sup>6</sup> And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."<sup>[d]</sup> In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire."<sup>[e]</sup> But about the Son he says,

"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom."<sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing **you** with the oil of joy."<sup>[f]</sup>

John 1:1

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

**John 1:14**

**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,<sup>[g]</sup> who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

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Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the four Sundays that the church calendar devotes to us preparing ourselves for the coming of Jesus Christ to earth on Christmas. This year, as we prepare ourselves for Christmas, we will be taking the four weeks of Advent to exploring in depth some of the big concepts in the Gospel of John Chapter 1 --the passage that is set as one of the lectionary texts for Christmas worship services. John 1 is almost always read as one of the crowning passages in a service of "Lessons and Carols".

Now, the sad part about putting John Chapter 1 as a sermon text for Christmas is that frequently this very theological text doesn't get the attention that it deserves. --Christmas church services usually have to devote time to telling the story of the birth of Christ from the Gospel of Luke and there are favorite carols to sing and frequently bells to ring, and often cute kids in costume to watch as we pastors try to please everybody by putting in all of the ingredients that people are expecting into a Christmas worship service. But there is a whole lot of theology packed into those first seventeen verses of the Gospel of John. And over the course of our four weeks of Advent, I would like to explore with you four of the biggest theological concepts in John Chapter One. Those four concepts for Advent

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this year are: “Word.” “Life.” “Grace” and “Truth”. And for Christmas we will explore the concept that John 1 uses about “Light”.

But for today, we need to begin at the beginning, the very beginning. ---The very beginning of everything. We can try to imagine before there was anything. Now, we can try to imagine there being nothing, but that is really hard for us humans to do. I don't know about you, but our brains loop around and around this concept of “nothing” trying to empty themselves of all of our ideas of molecules and matter and something actually not being there. But even if you can get your brain past the idea of nothing physical being in existence, the fact is that even the idea of “**nothing**” is still **something**. The idea of “nothing” is still an **idea**, “nothing” is still a **concept**, it is a rational conscious **thought**. “Nothing” is something that theoretically can be defined and thought about. Or to put it another way, even the concept, the logical idea of “Nothing” is still “Something”. ---Nothing is something that I can stand up here and try to explain to you. And that **something**, that concept of being in existence and able to be thought about, that it is what ancient philosophers, such as Philo called, “Logos”. --A Greek term that we simply and inadequately translate into English as “Word”.

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John's first chapter is very deep in these concepts of Greek philosophy when in verse 1, John writes, "In the beginning was the Logos." John just isn't giving God a new name here, and John isn't talking about scripture. The term "Logos" had many philosophical implications in his day. What John was doing here was making a HUGE theological statement about a known Greek philosophical concept. John is saying that in the beginning before anything else, there WAS God's rationality, there was God's ability for conceptualization. In the beginning, there was something. And what this Logos was, was God, consciously thinking. God thinking ideas. --This was the Logos through which all things could be made. There was this Logos making the word "IS" mean something. It was the idea that something, even if it was just a definition of something, existed before time. Aristotle defined the Logos as perception and the ability to make something clear. So when John begins his gospel by saying, "In the beginning was the Logos" in philosophical terms, it was saying that there was something and it was able to be perceived and understood by God.

Now when you and I think about "Logos" or "Word", our brains usually jump to the spoken word and then the written word, and to modern Biblical literalists, they may take John 1 completely out of context and refer to the Bible as the "Word of God." But to the audience that the Gospel of

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John was written to, to those who were educated in the worldview of the ancient Greek philosophers, the Logos referred to here in John 1 is much more foundational than that. The logos is the awareness that there IS something. That it exists in reality and that it can be understood by and perceived by an intellect.

It is no accident that this idea that the concept of Logos is a powerful descriptor of the link between understanding and existence and it is being used here in John. John not only knew his Greek philosophy, he also knew his Old Testament theology, and this connection between word and existence is there in the Hebrew Testament in Genesis 1.

In the first creation account, God speaks the world into existence. God thinks and says, "Let there be light" and **wham!** there IS light. The Logos and the concept and the existence of the thing is inevitably linked to the thing it refers to. And here in our John 1 passage today, John is saying that same thing about Logos.

The Logos, --the concept that there is something real that can be thought-- was WITH God. The logos was separate from God in that God could think about Logos, that God could think about this ability to reason

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and think and discern. It is kind of like when we think about our own ability to understand and think about a concept.

When I was a sophomore at Calvin College, I very vividly remember being intrigued by my required introduction to Philosophy course. I had never encountered Philosophy before. I had been raised to be a concrete and not a very introspective thinker. I sat through some of my first classes that fall semester and I was pretty amazed that there was entire field of study that examined **what** you thought and **how** you thought about ideas and concepts. For our first book, we were assigned to begin reading Rene Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy*. At first when I got the little book out of the stack of books I had bought from the bookstore, I thought that this Philosophy assignment wasn't going to take very long. The 56 page book was deceptively thin, even if the font wasn't very big and for our first assignment we were just supposed to read a portion of it. I took it the little book downstairs from my dorm room, (#350 Heyns) into our communal basement quiet study room, and I was lucky to score one of the comfy arm chairs, and this particular chair happened to have a great view of a couple of good looking guys, --just in case I wanted a study distraction.

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It turned out I didn't. As I sat there reading, underlining and writing notes in the margins, I found myself for the first time thinking and questioning my thoughts and questioning my own existence. I had to read through the paragraphs multiple times, but I understood the arguments that Descartes was making. --What if I actually didn't exist? What if I was being deceived and my whole life was really a dream? What if all of the things that I was thinking were not real? -- It was in my asking these questions that Descartes argues that humans have all of the evidence that we need to make the rational leap into proving our own existence. "I think, therefore I am" Or in other words, "I question my existence, therefore I exist."

In the same way that I could think about my own thinking and my own existence, God can also self reflect on God's ability to reason and to conceptualize. God can analyze and think about God's own Logos, and thus the Logos is "with" God.

But at the same time that God could think about God's own Logos, God understood that this Logos was also God, the ability to think and to form and to reason and to make logical sense was also a part of God and God's being. A God who is not rational, who does not exhibit the essence of reason and logic is not a God that is functional, let alone one that is

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worthy of worship and praise. The Logos of God, the reason, the ability to think and to conceptualize IS God, just as our own ability to think and to analyze, reason and understand is a part of our own intellectual make up as human beings made in God's image.

Later on in chapter 1 of John, we hear more about the Word of God. In verse 14, the Logos of God, this ability of God to reason and understand did something that no Greek philosopher would ever expect it to do. Instead of the Logos staying as simply an abstract entity in the spiritual realm, John 1:14 states that this Logos of God became human and lived among us. This physical connection between the God of the universe that created thought and reason and lowly humanity who lived at the mercy of God was an idea that was unprecedented. What John is saying here is something new and something very amazing.

It is the reason, the comprehension of God, that connective understanding that came down to earth to become God with us, knowing us, teaching us and living out love among us. The logos of God, the part of God that could connect and understand humanity is the part that stood with us and died for us out of love. The Logos of God, with God and one with God also came down to connect with and to be with us.

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So in conclusion, in our scripture passage today we have the very philosophical and very complicated concept of the Logos. This “Word” of God was understood in the Greek philosophical terms of the day as the ability to reason, to understand and to comprehend. While it could encompass the spoken and the written word, it was more a more fundamental concept that had to do with the ability to reason and understand and to recognize the existence of something. This ability of God to understand, comprehend, and to connect with, according to John 1 became human in order to live with humanity. Because God so loved the world, God came to this world to live with us, to understand us, to comprehend and to connect with us. This indeed is some good news for Advent. Amen.

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<http://www.bible-researcher.com/logos.html>

λόγος in John 1:1 are from Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Scribners, 1887), pp. 25-33.

Rene Descartes Meditations on First Philosophy

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logos>