Every Christmas, we have the Nativity and the reading from the Gospel of Luke that brings the weary holy family travelers to the inn, and Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man, is born in a stable and laid in a manger.   And then every Christmas, for the first Sunday ***after*** Christmas, we have this reading from the beginning of John’s Gospel as the Gosepl reading.  Talk about a  wildly different approach….

We could look at this in all different sorts of ways. We could come at this with the kind of curiousity question—-why did the writer of the Gospel of John start the account that way? In a related vein, there is the question of what are each of the Gospel writings attempting to do with their explanations of who Jesus Christ is?

There is the poetry of the words as this is thought to be taken from an early hymn. (The prevailing thought is that much of this prologue was a hymn, perhaps originally borrowed from a hymn to Wisdom, who was also present at the time of creation.)

And maybe these are questions that we could answer at least part of the way. The purposes of each of Gospel writers are decidedly different.  Each works out how to tell who Jesus is for their particular audience that they were addressing. For Mark, this begins with who John the Baptist is, as a herald for the messiah to come; for Luke, there is a literary introduction reporting on the tradition and his predecessors for the gospeller’s purposes. Matthew traces the genology of Jesus back to Abraham and therefore connects the old and new testaments with a history of salvation.

And John the Evangelist has a different group of followers.  John is probably the last written Gospel, and he was writing for what many consider a secluded group of ascetics, or people who practice severe self-discipline and avoid all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons.  It doesn’t necessarily answer *why* John takes it back to before creation, but it is a different story than the other Gospel accounts for a very different group of people.

I would recommend opening your Bible at home and reading this aloud some time this week. I know from the large part of my life, before I was ordained, that as much as anyone may read the Bible, one does not often read it aloud unless it is part of your vocation. So stand in your living room, find your bible and read this aloud. When one reads this aloud, as the priest or deacon does every first Sunday after Christmas, for all the priests that I know, all the hairs stand up on the back of your neck.

[So let’s try for a minute now, just the first paragraph. Let’s read it really slowly and pause every where we can. The words are weighty; they need time to land.

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

John makes this theological claim that the Christ was present before or at the time creation. It is easy to see the similarities with Genesis; the phrase, “In the beginning…” is not accidental.   And yet, these words are huge, and almost incomprehensible,  you really have to put meat on the bones to get at what it means. The Greek word in question is “logos;” and the translated English “word,” although poetic, may not be the best translation, but what may be better is “matter” or “being” or “logic” or “understanding”; these terms get closer to what logos means.

And thus, Christ is present at the beginning of time as that—- the logos, the reason, the logic, all beings are created, embodied and have their being, enfleshed in Christ.

And as much as we are in the season of Christmas, the terms “Son of Man” or “messiah”  actually would have no place in this hymn; these terms are temporal and this hymn is beyond time. This hymn is not about the nativity scene, but about who we claim this vulnerable baby to be. It gets at the why it matters that God sent God’s child, enfleshed as the logos to be with us.

There is also a conflation between the terms “life” and “light.” We know Jesus as the true light that darkness cannot overcome.  This light, the illuminaation, this seeing when things are dark, allows us to live more fully. This, this Jesus, allows for a flourishing life. And it is never for only our lives alone, this light and full life within us this touches all who we can encounter when we too resonate with the logos.

Remember Love is unselfish. Love is meant to be given away, unabashedly. As we hear in this season’s Eucharistic prayer, “Jesus longed to draw the whole world to himself.” For that reason, the work has never been over when Jesus died, for there is the resurrection. We too are to bring others to a flourishing life.  And I honestly believe that God doesn’t care how you do it as long as it is done lovingly…, as the words attributed to St. Francis, “preach the Gospel, when necessary use words.”

So go into the world and be the understanding of God, be the matter, the being, the logos of what it means to be life and light.  Because to borrow the words of St. Paul, the ‘spirit of God’s son is in our hearts.’

To be illuminated by Jesus Christ is to see that our own selves, in Christ, live because the true life of all things lives in us. We live but its power. It is the mystery of our own lives.  And when we resonate the logos, our own selves become Christ in the world.

**As air becomes the medium for light when the sun rises**

As air becomes the medium for light when the sun rises,

And as wax melts from the heat of fire,

So the soul drawn to that light is resplendent,

Feels self melt away,

Its will and actions no longer its own.

So clear is the imprint of God

That the soul, conquered, is conqueror;

Annihilated, it lives in triumph.

What happens to the drop of wine

That you pour into the sea?

Does it remain itself, unchanged?

It is as if it never existed.

So it is with the soul: Love drinks it in,

It is united with Truth,

Its old nature fades away,

It is no longer master of itself.

The soul wills and yet does not will:

Its will belongs to Another.

It has eyes only for this beauty;

It no longer seeks to possess, as was its wont --

It lacks the strength to possess such sweetness.

The base of this highest of peaks

Is founded on *nichil*,

Shaped nothingness, made one with the Lord.

~ [**Jacopone da Todi (Jacopone Benedetti)**](http://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/Poets/J/JacoponedaTo/index.htm)**,** trans. by Serge and Elizabeth Hughes