



He has made Him known John 1:15-18

2009 was 40th anniversary of first moon landing. How did we know what the Moon was like beforehand? Lunar Orbiters. Surveyors. But didn't actually know exactly what it was like until Armstrong and Aldrin landed and could only do what actual people do – and that's walk there, take photos, take samples and fix up advanced scientific equipment. They were there. They knew what it was like to walk in one sixth gravity, they saw first hand what it looked like and in the last 40 years many of them have made a living out of telling others what it was like. I can remember the excitement there was when someone from Cardiff University brought their moon rock samples to my school for pupils to look at – and the disappointment when we found that all they had were less than a small spoonful of grey powder in a sealed test tube! But it had come because someone had been there.

How do we know what God is like? Because He has revealed Himself to men over the centuries (c.f. The idea that we don't find Him – the one way mirror).

- prophets
- scripture
- theophanies

All these gave us an idea of what God was like, but to the surprise and shock of people at the dawn of *anno domini* they found that God was nothing like what they expected Him to be when He actually became a human being, not just taking on the appearance of a body, but actually becoming flesh and blood. They didn't think God could do that. They also had a limited concept of the Fatherhood of God. They understood the prophetic picture of God as Israel's Father as we saw from our study of Hosea 11, but there was no understanding of being the family of God – being adopted as God's sons. Yet Jesus persistently called God, "My Father". They knew what that meant to them. John 10:27 *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."* 31 *Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, 32 but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" 33 "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."*

John has already presented us with the whole idea of the Logos – the Word - the One who was pre-existent, the Creator of the World, the one who is the source of life and the One who enlightens men's lives. All those were known features of God and John says *"and God was the Word!"* And the Word became flesh. How could a God be in the heavens, and be a man at the same time with all the limitations of a human being? For that matter, how could He also at the same time as being in heaven and being a man also pervade the whole of creation and be personal to millions of people?

And we have presented to us the whole idea of God as Trinity – the God who is in heaven, the God who is a man and the God who is a Spirit – all one and the same, yet a God who has different personalities as Father, Son and Spirit respectively. How did people start thinking like that? Because God Himself revealed it to us. John the apostle presents us with how that happened here in the first chapter.

He extensively uses the testimony of John the Baptist, because it was John who first understood a little of

what was happening *"This is the one I was talking about when I said, "He comes after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born."* I suspect the words in verses 16 and 17 were put there by the apostle John to explain to us what the implications of what the Baptist said was. I'll come back to those in a minute.

John's Gospel is Trinitarian. That isn't just because John recalls the words of Jesus in what He said about the Father and the Spirit which are clear and unequivocal, He also presents the Trinitarian nature of God this way. Look down chapter 1 to verse: *29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.' 34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."*

There we have it, the Baptist's witness of the Son's baptism, being audibly affirmed by the Father and visually affirmed by the Spirit descending as a dove. Some say there is no clear affirmation of Trinity in scripture – but there it is in John 1. If you read one of my favourite passages, Ephesians 1, you immediately see the Trinity in that passage as Paul celebrates that we are God's people, called by the Father, redeemed by the Son and sealed by the Spirit.

As I've said, it all started with the advent of the Logos, the eternal Son who became flesh and as Jesus, lived among us and finally the Apostle himself became a witness of who Jesus was and is. Actually, the words of verses 16 and 17 seem to be the Apostle's and not the Baptists – and most translators express them that way. What the Baptist started and the Apostle finishes here is that Jesus points us to something new : *16 Out of the fullness of his grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another. 17 God gave the Law through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

Here are a few key truths about the One who's advent we celebrate. There are three things I'd like to point out from these verses. I'll deal with them in reverse order as it were.

He has revealed the Father – *18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.* It is in the New Testament that we understand that God is a Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit. God's revelation to us took an amazing step forward when the Father spoke to us through His Son. And the Son then revealed the Father to us. There are some great words of Jesus in John's Gospel about the Father. "He who has seen me has seen the Father"

He has brought us grace and truth. *17 God gave the Law through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* Now if you have heard enough of my sermons by now, you should know that I reckon that God is completely consistent and the Word of God reflects that consistency of nature. God by His nature is gracious. He's truth. So therefore the Law of Moses is truth – it has to be because it is God's word. It's scripture. Similarly, if you look through the OT we persistently see God exercising grace. Look back at Hosea and you'll find a catalogue of grace even though the actual word is not mentioned much. So how could grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. The key word is the way in which John uses the word Jesus Christ and not any other form. Jesus Christ – Yeshua the Messiah God the Saviour, Messiah. It's true what I said about the Law and OT, there was grace and truth there but it was foreshadowing, but it was only made perfect, and only became an eternal reality when Jesus came and became the Saviour. The Message I think gets the essence of it: *"We got the basics from Moses, and then this exuberant giving and receiving – this endless knowing and understanding – this all came through Jesus the Messiah."*

He has blessed us all *16 Out of the fullness of his grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another.* – John the Baptist pointed out how great Jesus was because He pre-existed – He was there and in this chapter we already know that John the Apostle has unpacked it to show how the Logos pre-existed, He's Creator, He's God, He's life and light and he became flesh.

We see here how He blesses us (ideas of blessings canvassed from congregation). C.f. Again that there is

the idea here that He blesses us from His grace, not because we bless Him or are able to earn His favour. Grace shows God's love in action – because He shows us unmerited favour. That's the difference between the Law and Jesus – Jesus is the Logos, the physical embodiment of what God has said in His written word. God didn't send a note saying I love you – He made it complete by showing it in Christ who has died for our redemption.

There is another important aspect to the way that the Son blesses us. The TEV and NIV translate this verse 16 in much the same way but the more literal translations like the AV and the NRSV put it this way: *16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* Actually the AV and NRSV are more literally correct whilst the other translators are trying to unpack it a bit. The word for grace, charis is also the root for gift: of the fullness of God's grace we get gifts; blessings which explains the structure of the sentence in the NIV or TEV.

I must say that I prefer the more literal translation of the AV and NRSV *16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* What it expresses to me is that there was the old way, the law of Moses but this was not the whole story, and God has brought us the complete way in Christ. That's what the word fullness means – pleroma the full thing, completeness. Before, our understanding of grace was incomplete but in Christ everything has been made complete and God blesses us in Christ. Grace has been added upon grace. God through his grace revealed Himself to the OT saints and then that grace is added to by the way He has produced the more perfect way as it were in Christ, which was only foreshadowed in the OT. For another slant on this, the writer to the Hebrews expresses it this way:

Hebr 1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. 3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

What can we take away from our study this evening? We started this week with the truth revealed in our title for last week "*the Word became flesh and made His dwelling with us*". As a result the Son took on our nature and our life which allowed Him to do all those things we just read about from Hebrews 1. However, what John's Gospel indicates to us this week is that in the Word taking on our experience of life, He was able to reveal to us the nature of God more fully:

- ➔ the Fatherhood of God – the consequence of that being that in Christ, the Father becomes our Father.
- ➔ An adequate knowledge of the truth of God to understand His grace as the basis on which He has brought us salvation
- ➔ the blessings that the Son brings us by sharing our humanity, most notably our salvation.