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En arché én ho Logos kai ho logos én pros ton Theon, kai Theos én ho Logos.

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

When I was in Seminary, I was proud to be known as a Greek Geek. I loved studying Greek. And I especially loved translating – I enjoyed discovering alternative meanings that brought new depth to the familiar words, and I loved finding out that some of the translations we're used to are not necessarily the most accurate. I loved Greek so much that I took an Elective entirely devoted to translating the Gospel of John. Most people thought I was crazy, but I and the other three people in the class had a ball.

By that time, I had a pretty good grasp on vocabulary and syntax so I took a stab at reading the Prologue to John's Gospel without the aid of a lexicon or cheat sheets. And lo and behold, the first line means exactly what it says. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

For some reason, out of all the things I've translated, this had the biggest impact on me. It was almost like a bright light had suddenly been shone on the text. Here I was, reading unaided, the words as they had been written down two thousand years ago. It was as if the meaning had somehow been hidden in the English words and was suddenly revealed to me in the Greek.

I take you on this trip down memory lane not to brag about my linguistic prowess, because this passage truly is about the easiest one to translate in the entire New Testament. The impact that text had on me was caused by the words themselves, not my handling of them. This passage is one of the most important in the whole Bible, but its meaning for us tends to get lost in the familiar poetry of the words.

Why do we read this passage during Christmas? There's no baby, no stable, no wise men, no shepherds, no angels, and no star. There's nothing there that overtly tells the Christmas story.

But the Christmas story is, first and foremost, about Jesus' Incarnation – about his becoming human. And in that sense, John's Prologue is very much a Christmas story. It is, in a beautiful nutshell, the entire Christ story – it takes us from the beginning of time, to Jesus' birth, which is only told obliquely here, through John's eyes, to his ministry on earth, to the crucifixion, to the resurrection, to the coming of the kingdom.

And as much as it is Christ's story, it is also our story. Humankind is woven in and out of this story like a bright red thread in a gold tapestry. We'll get to that in a minute. First we have some of the highest Christology in the New Testament in that first paragraph.

High or low Christology, for those of you who might not be familiar with the terms, means how divine or how human Jesus is portrayed. I only mention this because I didn't know what it meant when I went off to seminary, and had to have it explained to me. It's kind of a high falutin' concept, interesting mostly to systematic theologians and Biblical scholars.

But this passage, and indeed most of the Gospel of John, contains both high and low Christologies, which makes those aforementioned theologians and scholars argue like Vikings and Packers fans.

The first part is definitely high. In the beginning, before anything was yet, the Word, Jesus, was with God and the Word WAS God. Actually, the passage says God was the Word, which gives a slightly different spin on it, but both are in the nominative case, so it can go either way. Well, that's pretty clear. Jesus is God. Not only that, this passage claims that the Word – Jesus – is the agent of creation: "without him not one thing came into being."

So we're riding along on a beautiful Creation story, when, abruptly, we run into the first of those red threads – John the Baptist. Then the next two paragraphs are about Jesus' earthly ministry and his relationship with humankind – more red threads. Finally the passage heads back into the clouds with, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory."

But something has changed. We have gone on a journey with Jesus. When he heads back to his rightful place close to his Father's heart, he is not alone. He has us in tow – not as burdens or appendages or servants, but rather as his brothers and sisters, as adopted children of God.

And what's more, Jesus' appearance on earth, as one of us, has shown us the nature of God. It is through Jesus, and through his actions, that we can truly know God. Otherwise God would be beyond our understanding. Jesus truly enlightens the world.

This is where we, the red threads, come in. We're not Jesus. Most of us are probably not even John the Baptist. But we have been chosen as the adopted sons and daughters of God. And we ARE the body of Christ in the world. We have an obligation, to the best of our ability, to reflect the light of Jesus in the darkness, and, by doing so, to be sign posts pointing to the true light of Christ. Just as Jesus shows us the true nature of God, so can we, by our actions, show the world the true nature of Jesus.

I was looking on the Rosebud Mission website one time and came across this line: "Be receptive to creation, and become generous by that action." This might be taking it slightly out of the Lakota context, but somehow it seems to be a universal idea. It implies that merely being passively open to God's gift of our creation, or, if John is to be believed, Christ's gift to us, is a call to action – a call to be the best people we can possibly be. It's a call to be Christ in the world, with all that entails.

This is what the Incarnation is all about. THIS is what Christmas is all about. It's about God breaking into the world and changing it forever. The Incarnation is intensely personal. This passage begins with a high, somewhat impersonal concept of God – the Word that is God sweeping over the void and bringing life and light into existence – and ends with the Son resting close to the heart of his Father and making a place for us, his oh so fallible creation, there also.

In the beginning was the Word, and in the end was our salvation. By that salvation, through that savior, through that little baby that we didn't hear a word about today, we too have been reborn and made children of God.

2013 is almost upon us. In this New Year, let our actions - our generosity, our hospitality, our passion for justice, and our faithfulness, – always point the way to God. Let us be beacons of light in our increasingly gloomy world. And let's make it personal! Christ, the Word made flesh, came into our world at Christmas. Let us, by our love, show that he hasn't left it.