



# Jubilee Church 2021

Advent Devotion  
*Gospel of John 1:1-34*

# John 1:1-2

SCRIPTURE

[A1] In the beginning was the Word  
 [B1] and the Word was with God  
 [C] the Word was God [Central Thrust]  
 [A2] He was in the beginning  
 [B2] with God

John 1:1-2 is emotion-stirring to the Jews and thought-provoking to the Gentiles.

To the Gentiles, they read that there are two Divine persons [God and the Word], yet the Church teaches that there is just One God. To the Jews, the Word is presented as second Divine Being.<sup>2</sup>

John seems to be adding another god to their faith. At this juncture a devout Jew will want to tear the scroll apart, and shout "Blasphemy!"

1 The Literary Structure of the text in the original language [Greek] alerts the readers that verses 1 & 2 must be studied as a single unit, and not to be separated.

2 John wants to proclaim Jesus as God to the world. However, his fellow men [the Jewish people] pose him a great challenge – to them, accepting Jesus as God is tantamount to idolatry.

The Jews' daily recitation of the *Shema* [Deut 6:4] in the synagogue binds them to worship Yahweh alone; and the first Commandment forbids them to acknowledge Jesus as God [Deut 5:7].

To show that the Creator-God and Jesus are ONE in essence, John presents that Jesus exists before the Cosmos materialised – *In the beginning was **the Word***.<sup>3</sup> He wants the Jewish people to re-think the Creation account that there is more than one Person in the

3 John 1:1-3 is rooted in the foundation of the Torah. There are different opinions about the Word (Aramaic, Memra) among the Jews in the first century. Some view it as a life force; and some, as a created agent. The Jerusalem Targum translates Gen. 3:8 as "they heard the voice of the Word of God walking in the Garden..."

One-God concept; that Person pre-exists before the Creation; and that Person is Divine.

Jews knew that God created the world by His word, *"By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth"* [Psalm 33:6]. That "word" was the Creator's breath. But John asserts that the Word is a distinct Person, who co-existed with God – *"the **Word** was with **God**."*

Since the Creator and the Word co-exist, how could there be One God?

In Genesis 1 the Creator is referred to as *"Elohim"*. The Hebrew word *"Elohim"* is plural in form, which denotes "gods", but to the Hebrews *"Elohim"* is One God. Genesis 1:1 reads: *"God created ...,"* not *"gods created ..."* Are the Hebrew people biased to regard *"Elohim"* as one God for themselves but reckoned the same term as "gods" for the pagans?

*Elohim* has been interpreted as "God" because all the acts produced by this Creator were described with singular verbs, e.g. *"Elohim*

*[God] creates,"* not *elohim [gods] create"*. The Creation continues with "God **says**"; "God **sees**"; "God **calls**"; and God **"blesses"**<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew grammar guides all readers to understand that *"Elohim"* is singular in Genesis 1. Thus, the Israelites had rightly understood their Creator as One God all along. However, they were not aware of another Person in the Godhead, of whom has been revealed as the "Son" [1:18].

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4 In the Hebrew words the singular and the plural numbers of the Perfective verbs [English terms "the Past Tense"] are distinguishable Thus, God created [singular] and gods created [plural] are spelled differently in Hebrew.

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*Father,*

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*Thank you for revealing Yourself through the Son. Otherwise, we could not have known you in a personable way.*

# John 1:1-2 [Part 2]

## SCRIPTURE

[A1] In beginning was the Word  
 [B1] and the Word was with God  
 [C] the Word was God [Central Thrust]  
 [A2] He was in the beginning  
 [B2] with God

Genesis 1:26 presents a puzzling linguistic problem that even Hebrew scholars cannot explain satisfactorily. In making the humankind Elohim said, “Let **Us** make man in **Our** image, after **Our** likeness...”.

There are two popular explanations: [1] The “us,” and “our” refer to “God and His host of angels”; [1 Kings 22:19-22]. **But** verse 27 says that God created man solely in His own image, and not of the angels.<sup>1</sup> [2] The pronouns are “plural of majesty” – ancient kings used “We” when speaking. **But** such form of royal plural is found only three other times in the Scripture: Genesis 3:22;

<sup>1</sup> Angels were not involved in the Creation. In the Creation accounts [Genesis 1 & 2], God is the only Actor.

11:7; and Isaiah 6:8. Shouldn’t the King of the Universe use “We” and “Us” more often, especially, when speaking to His prophets? This unresolved mystery leaves room for the later revelation of plurality of persons within the Godhead.<sup>2</sup>

John tells us “the **Word** was **with God**” twice [1:1; 1:2]. He is saying that in the beginning, there was **God** and the **Word** – Two distinct persons in the Godhead. (Moreover, Genesis 1:3 also mentions the Spirit’s involvement in the Creation, of whom John will expound in chapters 14 & 16).

**Who is this Word?** John does not intend to disclose His

<sup>2</sup> The concepts of “plurality of persons” in the Godhead and of “the plural of majesty” are actually not mutually exclusive.

identity all at once. Had he told the readers in the first chapter who the Word is, that would lead to a premature rejection of his Gospel presentation.<sup>3</sup>

John will unveil the identity of the Word progressively – He is Creator [1:5]; He is Life and Light [1:6]; and the “Word became flesh” to live among His people [1:14]. In relation to the Godhead, the Word is **the Son** who is at His Father’s side [“the Word was with God”] [1:18]. From this point onwards, John will focus on the “Son”.

John shows that Jesus brought light and life into the lives of people whom He encountered. Jesus healed a blind man after claiming “*I am the Light...*” [9:1-7]; He raised a rotting corpse after declaring, “*I am the Life...*” [11:17-44].

In the early section of the Gospel, John told his readers that God had sent His Son into the world [3:16]. Towards the end, he finally reveals, “*These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God*” [20:31].

<sup>3</sup> When teaching John 1:1-2 Bible-teachers should not be too quick to reveal the identity of the Word, as this would ruin the intended mystery in John’s Gospel

The Word is the Son; and the Son is Jesus, the Christ.

#### Prayer

Father, We would not have known You if You had not sent the Son. Through Jesus we beheld your glory.

# John 1:3

## SCRIPTURE

All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. (ESV)

If verses 1 to 2 bring to mind the beginning of Genesis and God's creation, verse 3 directs us to the act of creating. This verse speaks about the relationship between the Word and the created order.

John affirmatively states that "all things were made through Him", everything was brought into being through the Word. In other words, everything exists because of the Word. Take note John did not say "everything was created by him". To be "brought into being through him" rather than "created by him" explicitly expresses that God the Father is the one who creates – He is the source of all created things. It also clearly expresses that creation is neither the sole act of the Father God nor

that of the Word. Both have a part in creation. God the Father creates, the creation is completed through the Word.

To emphasize the absolute dependence on the Word for the existence of all created beings, the second half of verse 3 repeats the statement by rephrasing it in negation. This effectively rules out any ambiguity of possible exceptions. In the entire created world, there is nothing that does not come into existence through the Word. This includes all that were present at the very beginning of creation, as well as everything we see and feel around us today.

Up to this point of the narrative, the Word appears to remain cloaked in a mysterious

veil. Yet we can be sure that this Word, who was present with the Father God before the creation, is God. We are also certain of the absolute reliance of all created beings in the world upon the Word. Vegetations and forests, oceans and galaxies, birds and beasts – each and all exist on account of the Word. Not only that, all humanity, every single person in the world including you and me, are created by the Father God through the Word. Every single one of us exists because of the Word.

This is how the Creator Father God, and the Word who is the other Person of the Godhead, are intimately connected with the entire created order – to all created beings in the world, to all humanity, to you and me.

#### Prayer

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Our Father in heaven and Creator, we give thanks to You for the world that is created through the Word. May each one of us be closely connected to you and the Word. Our existence and sustenance are wholly dependent upon You. Amen!

# John 1:4

SCRIPTURE

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.  
(ESV)

After creation, John goes on to talk about life – the most important element of creation. Life does not arise and exist by itself. Life exists in the Word, the self-existing life of God. It is on account of this that all living things on earth possess life.

This life was gifted to man at creation and became the light of man. Light may refer to the “image and likeness of God” when man was created; it may also refer to God’s self-revelation in the entire created world. In the Old Testament, God the Father is the source of life and light e.g. “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.” (Psalm 36:9). God’s life and light prevent people from slipping and falling in the dark; enable them to walk and stay on the

path of righteousness.

However, in verse 4 John says, “the Word is life, the light of mankind.” John transits from the Old Testament God’s creation account to the new concept of “the Word is the giver of man’s life and light.” With the ensuing narration in John’s gospel, the identity of the Word become progressively apparent: “Jesus is the giver of life” is the recurring message. In response to today’s devotion scripture: “Just as Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself. (5:26).

There are other scriptures: “I come, that they may have life and have it abundantly” (10:10). He died in order that man may have eternal life (3:16). He gives his body (flesh) for the

life of the world (6:51); whoever feeds on his flesh and drinks his blood has life (6:53-54). Only those who come to him have life (5:40). Two times he states that he is "the life" (11:25, 14:6). As the Lord of life, he raised Lazarus from the dead (chapter 11).

Jesus also says that he is the light of the world (8:12, 9:5, 12:46), that whoever follows him will no longer walk in the darkness but have the light of life (8:12). As the light of the world, he gave sight to the man born blind (chapter 9).

The life given by Jesus is not limited to man's living breath and existence in this world. It also pertains to man's spiritual life in eternity. Jesus is the light of life. He is the one who illuminates our inner life and enables us to live in God's new creation.

#### Prayer

Our God and Creator of life, praise and thanks be to you! Through Jesus Christ your beloved Son, your new creation is fulfilled and you have gifted us life to live in this new creation. Amen!

# John 1:5

## SCRIPTURE

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (ESV)

Based on the preceding verses, the “light” here refers to “life”, and also the light that God emanates as the creator (this was alluded to by John in the beginning of the book). Now, the light came as flesh to the world for all to see, and its presence illuminates the dark spaces. John uses “darkness” as a reference to the people and institutions that oppose Jesus (John does not draw a dichotomy between God’s kingdom and the human world)

John uses the imagery of light to describe what Jesus does in the world, and this is accompanied by allusions of people “seeing” or “being able to see” as a result. Light has a purpose of allowing sight and clarity of object within the person’s visual field. Jesus fulfils

the same effect – he allows people to have sight and clarity of God and what He does.

Looking closer at Chapter 1, Jesus, like light, allows people to see, and this is expressed in many ways in John: “the lamb of God”, “Son of God who sends the spirit”, “Messiah”, “God ascending and descending on the Son of Man”, “the saviour of the world”, “works I am doing testify that the Father has sent me”, “those who believe in me shall never die”, “those who seen the Son has seen the Father” and many more. At the cross, he allowed people to see and understand his identity and what it means to have a relationship with God: Those who believe in him are the children of God, and brothers and sisters with one

another in the house of God.

Jesus was persecuted by those in power, but it was not because these people could not see him, or were blind. When Jesus brought sight to the blind man's eyes, it showed clearly that Jesus had the willingness and ability to let people see him for who he was. These people who did not accept the light of Jesus did so because they were in darkness and saw Jesus as a threat to their interests. Pilate, after his trial of Jesus said "Here is the man!" John 19:5, and said to the Jews "Here is the King of the Jews" (John 19:14) Pilate did not see wrongly, but because he needed to protect his own interest as well as that of his organisation, he twisted the facts and allowed those who kept themselves in the dark to get their way, and eventually convicted Jesus.

In this case, Jesus' light was swallowed by the "darkness" of those who refused to see the light, because they had their own interests to protect. Hence John said: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not accept it (based on the CUVS translation 和合本).

# John 1:6-7

## SCRIPTURE

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. (ESV)

To understand the divine calling and origin of John the Baptist, you can refer to the story told in Luke 1. Even the name John, which means “God is gracious”, implied the act of grace of God that came along with giving a child to the elderly couple Zechariah and Elizabeth. It also points towards the grace that will come about from the child’s ministry. In the naming process, Zechariah was doing much more than just giving the child a name. The name was a command from angel Gabriel. The meaning of the name carries with it all the angelic-delivered promises of the ministry that God intended to work through John (Luke 1:13-17). John’s life will be the grace of God on his people. John will be the reappearance of Elijah to prepare the hearts of the

people for God. In this naming, Zechariah was therefore confirming the all the promises of Gabriel given in the Temple and acknowledging the birth of his son as its partial fulfillment. The onlookers in Luke 1:65 were astonished at Zechariah’s revelation of the name on the writing tablet because it was totally unexpected. They now knew that it was no mere coincidence that Elizabeth had chosen that name (earlier in Luke 1:60). It is a divinely given name, and therefore, they can expect great things to come from the child.

There is a common phrase “thank God for small miracles”. Many things appear coincidental. And many things look minor and insignificant in the grand scheme of things.

The birth of a child to an elderly couple seems like a small miracle. Yet, it is with such little steps that we are given hints of greater things to come. The trick is to recognize that the Lord's Hand (Luke 1:66) is moving these things. This will be spelt out in the ministry of John and Jesus. Let us reflect on our own lives, and recognize the small miracles that have brought us thus far. If you see that the Lord's hand is with you, what are you going to be? What you are now is God's gift to you, but what you become is your gift to God: to look beyond the current gloomy situation, and to expect great things in the future based on small miracles you see today. From the arrival of John the Baptist, we observe God's hand involved in history and we know we can all await the salvation plan to be fulfilled completely.

# John 1:7-8

## SCRIPTURE

He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. (ESV)

In simple terms, John the Baptist was the guy who gave a reference for Jesus. The Gospel will go on to make claims about Jesus. Jesus would also make claims about himself. Part of the justifications of these claims would come from John the Baptist. He would be the guy to back up the claims of Jesus. But I guess it begs the question: How can we believe John's claims? Even if he is truthful and honest, could he have been mistaken about Jesus? Can anybody truly know another person?

The story of Jesus is not ultimately a story about Jesus; it is, in fact, the story of God. From John 1:1-4, Jesus is ultimately about God's self-revelation to humanity.

So what we really need is somebody who knows God. The one who knows God will know who Jesus is, or at least who Jesus is supposed to be. Therefore the divine calling and origin of John is very important. In John 3: 27 To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. 31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. In verse 27, John revealed that his mission actually came from heaven. He was like a special agent on a special assignment for the President, or somewhat like the sole authorised dealer for the company. He was heaven-sent. Then in verse 31, we learn that the subject

of inquiry, namely Jesus, was also from heaven. This was what made John the person uniquely gifted to identify and introduce Jesus. Because Jesus was from heaven, only the one entrusted by heaven could be his witness. In the journey to know Jesus, John was the expert witness with utmost credibility because he was the one with the heavenly connection. In Matthew 21:26, even the Jewish leaders had to acknowledge that “if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” The people of God had experienced the ministry of John, and they could attest that John’s ministry was from heaven. The divine nature of his ministry had been manifested and was authenticated by the public in general. He was the messenger from heaven to herald about the coming of the promised one from heaven.

# John 1:9

SCRIPTURE     The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. (ESV)

In the gospel of John, “darkness” is treated as the opposite of light. Those who stand opposite to God or Jesus are people in darkness. If these people do not have light shone upon them, they will continue to walk in the path of certain doom. John alludes to events in which people walk in darkness, and then meet with Jesus. The circumstances in which they meet with Jesus vary, but each of these encounters have an element of “illumination”: a process of walking from darkness to light, casting away that which is bad and being redeemed, and even transiting from death to life.

Delving further, Jesus taught Nicodemus, who came to see him in the night, on how he could go to God’s kingdom;

Jesus allowed the woman of Samaria to see in daylight clearly all that she has done; In Galilee, on a night of bad conditions at sea, Jesus let his disciples see that he could walk on water and calm the seas and personally assure the disciples of their safety; Jesus saved the woman who was caught in the act of adultery from certain death (by stoning from those who accused her); Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead; In his resurrection Jesus appeared to Peter at the sea of Tiberius, and him to “take care of his sheep” three times, superseding the three times Peter betrayed Jesus in darkness.

The true light of Jesus has descended upon the earth, and shone upon its people.

Regardless of background, affiliations or status, Jesus was willing to shine His light upon all. Even those who do not get to see him would be able to gain eternal life if they believed that he was the Son of God.

#### Prayer

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God loves the whole world, and sent his son for us, so that we could escape death and gain eternal life. This line illuminates the lives of all on Earth; I pray you receive this light. Amen.

# John 1:10

SCRIPTURE      He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. (ESV)

Everything sounded great and went according to God's plan until this point in the text where John elaborates on 'the world' (v.10) in which the Word had come into (v.9). At the stroke of a pen, the celebration of God's power and goodness (vv 1-9) gave way to human indifference and their unwelcoming response.

"He was in the world" (10a), says John. The expression indicates that He did not just pass by but tarried in the world. In other words, the world was given time to know him, but it let pass the opportunity to do so, just as the Pharisees who condemned Jesus for healing the man who was born blind (John 9)". This was something not meant to be since "the world was made through

him" (10b). Taking this clause together with the final one (in the same verse), it becomes clear that John is not simply repeating verse 3 where he declares that all things in the universe was made through him. The focus herein is the human world, for it is humans who can be said to "not know him" (10c).

We are not told the reasons for the world not knowing Him. John only highlights for us (by stacking together 3 clauses) that it was something truly not meant to be: since he took time to be known (10a) by the ones whose owes their very existence to Him (10b)! All that we are told is that the world has refused to see God's self-expression in the world in Him and rejects having right

relations with Him.

We see from the above that the world back then did not know Him because it did not take note of who God had claimed himself to be. Similar danger lurks in every era, before and after Jesus' first coming. The first century Jews sought a messiah who would free them from the Romans; ours is a time where many a church seeks to become larger and more attractive. Both hopes can be justified, but they should not be preoccupations causing us to miss out on God's presence (eg. His answers to prayers) and purpose (eg. Christian involvement in social justice, peace making and ecology).

The world did not know Him also for the reason that they do not know themselves, humans made through Him to love and worship Him. What then might be Christians' responses; since believers are people who can no longer claim that we 'do not know Him'?

# John 1:11

## SCRIPTURE

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. (ESV)

The prologue reaches the low point with the rejection of the Word by “his own”.

“His own” appears twice in this short verse with similar wordings but in different forms in the original Greek text; the first likely referring to his home, while the second to his people. The repetition serves to underscore the pain from something not meant to be, that it was his own of all people who “did not receive him”; people whom had experienced His deliverance time and again, and had received special revelations “at many times and in many ways” (Heb 1:1).

The words herein rendered as ‘receive’ herein is used in 14:3 and translated as ‘take’, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and

will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” In other words, it was such a kind of reception that his people should have given him, not rejection. The peoples’ rejection amounts to a crisis, for ‘receiving’ is the key to salvation (1:12). The effect of the rejection is visible from the gospel going instead to the Gentiles (see Rom 11:11).

However, when we look slightly beyond the verse, we see that the section as a whole (vv.9-13) closes with a positive note. What this means is that the inappropriate responses made by most of the ethnic Israel did not derail God from loving and saving his own (and the world).

In teaching Christian devotion and spirituality, the

church down history had asserted that his world is not our home, and that we should set our minds on things that are above<sup>1</sup> (Col 3:2). But we see in the Gospel of John (and the other gospels) that God indeed so loved and cherished the world that gave to it his only son. Hence, should we see the world, the needs and affairs therein as of secondary importance, the undying love of God as a response to the rejection point us to a different direction. In short, we are called to love the world the way God loves it.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul in the latter half of Colossian 3 focuses on practical earthly relationships. Hence, Col 3:2 should not be misunderstood to downplay earthly needs and affairs. Rather, Christians are to treat them in a godly manner.

# John 1:12

## SCRIPTURE

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (ESV)

Three times in this verse mentioned "he", "him", "his", and this person is to be related to the Word, Life, True Light that appeared in verses 1-5, 9-11. He came into the world, and even though the world was made through him, and the world was his own place, but the world did not know who he is, and did not receive him.

In the teaching of Jesus, he often mentioned that he came in the name of his Father, but men did not receive him (John 5:43). Those who receive him receives who sent him (John 13:20). If anyone received a child in the name of Jesus, he received Jesus, and received the one who sent him (Mark 9:37). When Jesus sent his disciples on preaching trips, he said those who receive them,

they shall stay on with that family or city until they depart. But whoever that doesn't receive them, "And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town." (Matthew 10:14). We can hence derive that to receive a person, implies acceptance, show hospitality and obedient.

The best example can be found in the Samaritans. They heard the testimony of the Samaritan woman and received Jesus, and they believed in the word of Jesus. And after hearing the word of Jesus, they are sure that he is the saviour of the world. (John 4:39-42)

During the night visit of Nicodemus, Jesus revealed to him about born again, those

who believe can have eternal life (John 3:15). They are not be condemned, and they believe in the name of the only son of God (John 3:18).

Gospel of John was written so that "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."  
(John 20:31)

The Acts of Apostles testified that in the name of Jesus, the apostles went forth to heal people, and in the name of Jesus, those who believe received Holy Spirit. "His" name is what all the brand new work of God depend on and get a kick start!

### Prayer

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Heavenly Father, let me receive Jesus the true light, and may he shine into my life!

Pray that Heavenly Father enable me to receive the weakest one as if receiving Jesus, and let me live the new life in Christ.

# John 1:13

SCRIPTURE ...who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (ESV)

The people of Israel are descendants of Abraham. The covenant making at Mount Sinai confirmed the relationship with God, from then on God is their father, and their king. However they often disobeyed Him. Even though Israel knew that one day the Messiah, the Redeemer shall come, however when the time came, the people of God did not receive him. Instead another group of people who received him, and believed in his name, received the right to become the children of God. John said these people who became people of God were not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John deliberately contrast those born of the will of man with those of God. The prior refers to physical union, and

the identity comes from the set of parents, and hence they are born of the will of man.

John said those born of God are different, they belong to those who receive him, believe in his name, and receive the right to become children of God. This status does not come from blood ties, but from the right given by God. Whoever is willing to receive the Word, in believing in his name, shall become the children of God.

There are several instances in Gospel of John that contrast the will of man with the will of God. Jesus has mentioned several times that he seek not his own will, but to do the will of the one who sent him (John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38-40, 7:17, 9:31, 16:21). Jesus has stated that he as the son, is close to the

Father, and he and Father are one. Apart from the Father, the son can do nothing, and seeing him is seeing the Father. And in John 1:18 clearly stated no one has ever seen God; the only son who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Jesus said he is the door, those who enter by him will be saved and will find pasture (John 10:9). Jesus said to Peter, on this rock (Peter) he will build his church, and the gates of hell (door) shall not prevail against it. If gate and door have similar meaning (ref to Matthew 16:18), by the gate of Jesus, God gives the right, then those who believe will have the right to become children of God. And so they become children of God not by the will of man, but by the will of God!

### Prayer

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Thanks be to the Father that Jesus is given to us, and now through his name I can become children of God, and receive this honour.

Pray that I can always treasure this identity, and walk a life worthy of the grace bestowed on me. And let my life be an open book to express what our Heavenly Father is like.

# John 1:14

## SCRIPTURE

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (ESV)

In Exodus 33: 18 Then Moses said (to God), "Now show me your glory." In contrast to the revelation through Jesus, the first revelation of God's glory began with a special request from Moses. "Show me your glory." Moses want the full revelation of God, in all his glory. Why? Maybe it had to do with the golden calf incident that happened right before this special request. The worship of the golden calves idols made God furious. In God's anger, he said he would destroy everyone and just start all over again and make a nation out of Moses. But Moses pleaded and God relented. In God's anger, he said he will no longer travel with the people, and just let an angel take his place to lead the people to the Promised Land.

But Moses pleaded again and God relented. Eventually, God promised that his Presence will be with the people as they journey on. And this is the precise moment Moses requested for more, to finally see God in full. "Show me your glory." Why? In that vulnerable moment of truth, perhaps he needed that assurance of seeing for himself who God is. Because who God is, so will his actions be.

When the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, it enabled us to see the glory of the Father. We witnessed in a physical manner the heavenly Father who is full of grace and truth. Many have asked the same question: Where is God? In a world of sin and suffering, we want to

feel grace. In a world with liars and fake news, we want to feel the truth. Where is God in our world? If you have ever yearned to see God just like Moses, then this is the answer from John: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God fully revealed. Where is God? God is revealed in Jesus Christ. Over time, we might have taken the coming of Christ, this full revelation of God for granted. Christmas is not about Christmas trees or Santa Claus or even about holidays and presents. Christmas is about God fully revealed. Christmas is about God witnessed in all his grace and truth, in all his glory. May the Christmas this year be a reminder to us of God's promise to be with us through the thick and thins of life.

# John 1:14-15

## SCRIPTURE

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”) (ESV)

In Exodus 33: <sup>19</sup> And the Lord said (to Moses), “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. Then in Exodus 34: <sup>6</sup> And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

The Bible does not record what exactly did Moses see when the glory of God passed

him by. But the Bible recorded who God is: grace and truth. That is the assurance and the glory that Moses was asking for. Because who God is, so will his actions be. From that moment of revelation, Moses knew that God will journey on with his people, no matter how stiff-necked the people may be. And with God’s goodness, compassion and grace, he need not be afraid. This was revealed also to us in God’s name. We are protected from whatever would overwhelm us as human beings.

John the Baptist also experienced a divine “passing by” (surpassing), from Jesus the full revelation of God. He said

in John 3: <sup>29</sup> The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. <sup>30</sup> He must become greater; I must become less.

John's disciples came reporting to John when they heard that Jesus and his disciples were also baptizing and apparently attracting more people. They presumed John would be jealous of Jesus' popularity, especially since John started the "business" earlier. John explained to them that the bride, which is Israel the people of God, belongs to the bridegroom, who is Jesus the King. His role was like the best man, who was supposed to prepare the bride for the groom, not to snatch the bride away. Hearing the news from the disciples about Jesus' popularity only made him joyful because that means that his job had been done, and done well. Just like how Moses witnessed the true identity of God as God passed by him, in the same way, John witnessed to the true identity of Jesus as

Jesus surpassed him.

# John 1:16

SCRIPTURE For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (ESV)

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. How shall we understand what constitutes the fullness of Jesus?

Shall we not be astonished by the very first miracle recorded in the gospel of John (2:1-11)? The wedding at Cana in which Jesus was in attendance, was faced with the predicament of having run out of wine. Yet with Jesus' help, six stone water jars of potable water were instead turned into fine wine, which was around 800 bottles of full-bodied fine wine in terms of volume! The acts of Jesus were numerous beyond count in the mind of the author of Gospel of John, and this event of turning a disaster into a miracle, was as magnificent as a display of

fireworks, inspiring and stirring man, unable to be suppressed for a prolonged period of time. Shall we not also recollect and reminisce the acts of God in our lives, and recognize the fullness of our lives ever since we know Jesus?

Apart from above incident, on the journey through Samaria (Chapter 4), we noted the heated conversation Jesus had with the woman beside the well, is not in the least inferior to the meeting Jesus had with honourable Nicodemus (Chapter 3).

The word of Jesus illuminates and reveals truth, allowing man to grasp issues which were previously incomprehensible, from Chapter 3 through 4, grace upon grace. When the time

comes, man will be born anew (3:3). But this could not be attained with our works, but with the grace bestowed by God. And this grace would be of benefit to all mankind, and regardless of gender, moral or ethical standards, all will have the opportunity to get to know Christ (4:25-26). Through the testimony of the Samaritan woman following her encounter with Jesus (4:39), it is evident to us that even for someone who was deemed unacceptable by others, could see her life set free, and be integrated into communities because of having encountered Jesus. The truth which Jesus made known to the Samaritan woman (4:21-24), would be more than adequate for her to relish and enliven her for her lifetime. From henceforth, there is no longer any need to dispute as to whether one should worship in Jerusalem or Samaria, but rather know for certain that God has accepted man, and to worship the one true God in Spirit and in truth.

The season of Advent allows one to moderate his/her pace, and may we open the gospel of John, and witness the “grace

upon grace” meeting between God and man brought about by Jesus. In what aspects are you stirred?

#### Prayer

Lord, we will never be able to cease experiencing Your fullness. May You provide me with the key, and allow us to witness that in the events which had transpired the extent of Your generosity in Your interactions with man in numerous occasions, so that we will submit!

# John 1:17

SCRIPTURE For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (ESV)

Some had considered that since Gospel of John said so, it shall mean the law came through Moses, while Jesus is of a superior order who brought grace and truth. However by searching through the events recorded in the gospel, one can witness how the Word of Jesus is consistent with the law, and yet akin to the fullness of a feast, enriched with the revelation of grace and truth.

Jesus visited the Bethesda pool (Chapter 5), which had a gathering of people who were sick and crippled and as such were unable to worship at Temple or synagogue. They were powerless to remedy their predicament. Jesus proactively reached out to a man who had been infirmed for 38 years,

and said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." This is grace, because Jesus came forth to heal and deliver him, and to transform a life what appeared to be futile and meaningless.

The man obeyed, was instantaneously made whole, and took up his bed. However, as that day was a Sabbath, those around him said his taking up the bed was against the law – this law, "Remember the Sabbath Day," was the fourth of the ten commandments accorded to Moses. But how does one go about "remembering the Sabbath day"? Jesus' prophetic service, healed and made that man whole on Sabbath, to be no longer tormented by ailments, so that he could

give praise to God on that day. To be healed, to be liberated from 38 years of poverty and destitution, is this not the manner in which God gifts life to mankind (5:24-26)?

There was a woman who had been caught committing adultery, was made to stand before Jesus(Chapter 8). Both the seventh commandment "You shall not commit adultery", the tenth commandment "You shall not covet your neighbour's wife," were not heeded in this passage. The scribes and Pharisees said the law of Moses commanded that women in such circumstances be stoned to death, and awaited Jesus' response. Jesus made no reply, bent down and wrote on the ground with His finger, but His spoken words eventually led to the drifting and scattering of the crowd. Thereafter, He said to the woman, "Has no one condemned you?", "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." These words reaffirmed the truth in the gospel of John 3:17-19 – the Son of God was sent, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be

saved and receive the bread of life. From that woman's perspective, this was the manifestation of grace, she was the one to be stoned, yet Jesus who was not related to her, took the pressure in her stead, and subsequently set her free. Reflection: From hereon, if we were to come across those who seem to only have themselves to blame upon themselves through their actions, will we be able to call to mind, that these people can in fact have their lives transformed solely because of Jesus?

#### Prayer

Lord, You brought us the feast of grace, leading to us to be astonished indescribably upon witnessing it. We do not know how to seek You, yet You searched for and sought us. Thank You for electing us.

# John 1:18

## SCRIPTURE

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (ESV)

How did Jesus make God known? One way is through the divine work of bringing life to the people. Jesus said in John 5: <sup>21</sup>For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. What Jesus meant was that what he did was the work of the Father. And the work that he did could not be done without the Father. Specifically, this work refers to life-giving and judging. Only God can do the work of life-giving in Creation and judging in the Last Days. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Because he is the Word, he is the living water and the daily bread we need for life. Because he is the Word, his works are the creative and redemptive works of God.

In the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11, we often think that the moral of the story is that Jesus was able to raise Lazarus from the dead. But the real mission of Jesus in this story was to confirm his death on the cross. At the end of chapter 11, because of the miracle, the Jewish authorities called a meeting and we are told “so from that day on they plotted to take his life.” Jesus knew of the outcome from the very beginning (John 11:4) and the events at the end proved to be so. We witness how Jesus walked courageously towards his death. Mary and Martha believed in the resurrection on the last day. But like the others, they felt helpless in the face of death. They regretted that Jesus had not been around, or Lazarus would still had been

alive. But Jesus did not look at death in the same way.

This is the true meaning of the saying "I am the resurrection and the life." It is more than just a saying that Jesus gives life after death. It means that Jesus embodies what it means to truly live beyond the reality of death, to display the essence of life itself. Jesus was not helpless before the fate of death. On the contrary, Jesus confronted and defeated death. The belief in the resurrection is not just hope for the future, it is for us to live our lives courageously now. We know death, but we also know that we have the victory in Jesus.

# John 1:18

## SCRIPTURE

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (ESV)

How did Jesus make God known? One way is through the divine work of bringing light to the people. There is a story of the healing of a man blind from birth in John 9. We find embedded in this story the startling proclamation by Jesus, "I am the light of the world". To acknowledge Jesus as the light of the world is to experience divine transformation in circumstances and in understanding: a transformation of darkness to light. The blind man experienced it, and hence he proclaimed "I was blind but now I see". Jesus is the light, giving not just visual sight, but also insight into the meaning of life. John Newton experienced it, and he wrote in the hymn *Amazing Grace*, "was blind but now I see". Jesus as the light

of the world was proclaimed most powerfully when the blacks identified their liberation from slavery and racism as *Amazing Grace*. The hymn became the emblem of the African American spiritual, thus its influence spanned from its early days in motivating William Wilberforce to fight against slavery in the British Empire, to becoming a source of strength for the later civil rights activists. Clearly its message about redemption from the depths of human suffering is one that resonates with many who have come to know and love this song. This story of Jesus making the blind man see is the sign that points towards Jesus as the light of the world. This light is life itself; it is also divine forgiveness, salvation and liberation.

We all need to truly meet Jesus and be confronted by this moment of undeniable truth. Truth is God's reality made clear to us. In our own reality, we are obsessed with our strengths, our limitations, and our problems and successes. But when faced with the truth, we see how God sees us, and we see how God sees the world and we see the world with God inside. These moments of spiritual change, these conversions, they are moments of undeniable truth. Perhaps you can reach such a moment as well: who you truly are before God. Jesus enlightens us to who God is, and if you were once blind, now you shall see. We all yearn for the moments of spiritual change, the conversions that re-orientate and transform our lives. For that to happen, you must truly meet Jesus once again because grace and truth come through Jesus.

# John 1:19-23

## SCRIPTURE

<sup>19</sup> And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” <sup>20</sup> He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” <sup>22</sup> So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” <sup>23</sup> He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (ESV)

**John 1:19-23 Who am I? Who am I not?**

John was asked, who are you? John denied being Christ, Elijah, and the Prophet.

Reference to the Prophet was the earliest. Moses foretold the coming of this person: “The LORD will raise up for you a prophet like me” (Deut 18:15). Moses was the great deliverer who led Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Moses received the Ten Words from God and gave Israel a set of instructions to live by so that they would be

a holy people set apart for God. Moses served as the intermediary between God to His people. Near his departure, Moses assured them God had prepared a leader to fulfil this mission. Up till the time of Judaism, Jews eagerly awaited the coming of this prophet-liberator.

Elijah was the prophet God sent to denounce Israel’s wicked kings. He battled false prophets to bring people back to worship the true God. Elijah’s words were authenticated by

mighty wondrous acts of God. Later prophets foretold that one like Elijah would return to bring God's judgment and deliverance: "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the great and dreadful day of the LORD comes" (Mal 4:5).

Messiah was the Hebrew word meaning "the anointed one". This title is reserved for unique individuals like kings, high priests and prophets anointed by God to fulfil His purpose. Christ was the Greek translation for Messiah. In Judaism tradition, God's anointed one would come to save Israel and restore their nation to its former glorious kingdom.

Who was John? He was not the Christ the long-awaited saviour. He was not Elijah reincarnated. In John's own words, quoting Isaiah: "I am the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord" (Isa 40:3).

John was called to be the forerunner and witness of Christ the saviour. At birth, his father prophesized regarding him, "You will be called a

prophet of the Most High; you will go before the Lord to prepare his way" (Luke 1:76). John knew he had been given the awesome privilege of introducing Christ and getting the people ready for the good news of God's Kingdom. His lived his life fulfilling this.

What is your role in God's Kingdom?

#### Note

Even though Jesus later affirmed John the Baptist's role as Elijah (Matthew 17:11-13), John's denial here could be due to his disagreement with the Jewish leaders' understanding of Elijah.

# John 1:24-28

## SCRIPTURE

<sup>24</sup>(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) <sup>25</sup>They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” <sup>26</sup>John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, <sup>27</sup>even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” <sup>28</sup>These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (ESV)

## John 1:24-28 Being a Forerunner for Jesus

### What are you doing? Why?

John’s actions were tied to his understanding of who he is and what God has called him to do. John was baptizing the Jews at Jordan river.

In ancient Israel, washing and bathing in water was a common purification ritual (Lev 14:8). Centuries before John, devout ascetic Jews started practicing baptism as an act of cleansing to symbolize the washing away of one’s sin for God’s acceptance. John adapted these various customs

of ritual bathing to prepare the people for the coming of Christ.

“I baptize with water,” said John. The focus of his baptism was repentance. John urged his followers to renounce their wicked ways, seek God’s forgiveness and open their hearts to Christ who shall restore Israel. He refused to baptize those who were not truly repentant in their hearts, like the Pharisees and Sadducees. The legalists religious teachers questioned to John’s authority to baptize. Was he implying that the Jews like themselves were not

righteous before God?

John pointed them to the one with absolute authority.

“After me comes one who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3:11).

It is this anointed one who shall powerfully and radically transform lives.

John’s ministry was unique.

While his role was like the prophets before him – calling Israel to repent – he was the last prophet before the arrival of the long-awaited saviour.

Unlike past prophets, John would encounter Christ the Messiah during his lifetime and be His witness. “Repent! The Kingdom of heaven is near!”

This was John’s urgent message and ministry to his people.

John reckoned himself the lowliest slave of this coming Christ, “the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” Yet John’s ministry was affirmed by his master the Messiah. Jesus said, “I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28).

John had the privilege to be

Christ’s forerunner. Today, we are more privileged because the Kingdom has come and we encounter the living Christ.

What are we doing to prepare people to be receptive to the Gospel and to introduce the Saviour to them?

# John 1:29-31

## SCRIPTURE

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."(ESV)

John the Baptist used the unique phrase "Lamb of God" to introduce Jesus and testified for him. This phrase only appeared in The Gospel of John 1:29 and 1:36. As there is the long historical background of the Old Testament as well as rich theology meaning of the term "Lamb" that runs through the Old and New Testament, many theologians are keen on the discussion of what the phrase "Lamb of God" means and the message that John the Baptist or the author of the Gospel of John wants to bring across. These are some of the possibilities listed; 1. The lamb

that is offered daily on the altar (Exodus 29:38-46) 2. The lamb is the suffering servant because in Aramaic, the two words "servant" and "lamb" sound the same; or the lamb that was led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53) 3. The lamb that triumphs at the end of time (Revelation 7:17, 17:14) 4. The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12, 1 Corinthians 5:7) 5. A combination of the above instead of just a single meaning.

According to the Theology of the Gospel of John, Jesus is seen as the Passover offering (John 19:14-36). Together with the Gospel of John's author's understanding of the meaning

behind the Messiah's sacrifice, it seems like the most probable interpretation is the Passover Lamb. Although the Passover Lamb does not have the meaning of atonement, but the use of the lamb as an offering represent redemption, pardon and the Messiah's salvation. It also explains the meaning of the proclamation "takes away the sin of the world". Jesus' sacrifice and death takes away our sins so that with His Grace, we can be reconciled with God.

During this year's Advent, let us all continue to think of how this proclaimed "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" has influenced and helped us in our faith. Regardless of which interpretation you accept or agree with, Jesus Christ has become the mediator between man and God, and all who believe in Him will be reconciled with God. We are thankful for that.

#### Prayer

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Thank you God our Father for the incarnation of Jesus Christ, for Him becoming the "Lamb of God" and the mediator. With His sacrifice and death, those who believe in Him are reconciled with God. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

# John 1:32-34

## SCRIPTURE

And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (ESV)

John the Baptist continues to testify for Jesus. He used a metaphor to describe what happened when Jesus was baptized. He saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him. The other Gospels have similar records (Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22). Here, by stating that the Holy Spirit remain on Jesus and Jesus also baptize with the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist acknowledged that Jesus is Messiah and divine promise has begun to actualise. During Old Testament period God has promised that the Messiah will come, and the

Holy Spirit shall rest upon the coming Davidic King (Isaiah 11). Through this Messiah, He gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him and receive Him (John 3:5-8, 7:38-39, 14:16-17, 15:26-27)

Next, John the Baptist further testified that based on what he has seen, Jesus is proven to be the "Son of God". This is the Christology that Gospel of John has in mind, as the Gospel is written so that man may believe that Jesus is Christ (Messiah), the Son of God (John 20:31). Jesus also claimed to be the Son of God (John 10:36, 19:7), and often

expressed the relationship between Father and Son to be one and only (John 1:14, 18; 3:16-18; 17:1-3). Various versions of the Bible has translated "Son of God" as "God's Chosen One" or "God's Chosen Son", meaning Jesus is the Son chosen by God. He is also the Lamb of God, the Messiah who takes away the sin of the world. This Son of God brings salvation (John 3:16), gives man a new life and the hope to rise from their graves in the future (John 5:21, 28-29), sets man free (John 8:36), gives judgment at the end (John 5:22), etc.

When one believes in and receives Jesus Christ, and accepts the Holy Spirit He has given, the Holy Spirit will remain on him while he leads a life of conviction that pleases God. The Son of God brings salvation and the grace of benedictory, giving man hope and faith to face and overcome various challenges in life. May we bear a heart of gratitude, joy and hope this Advent!

#### Prayer

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Thank you, Father for having the Holy Spirit among us and the strength we receive from the Holy Spirit. Thank you for the blessings and grace the Son of God brought to enable us to lead a fruitful life. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.



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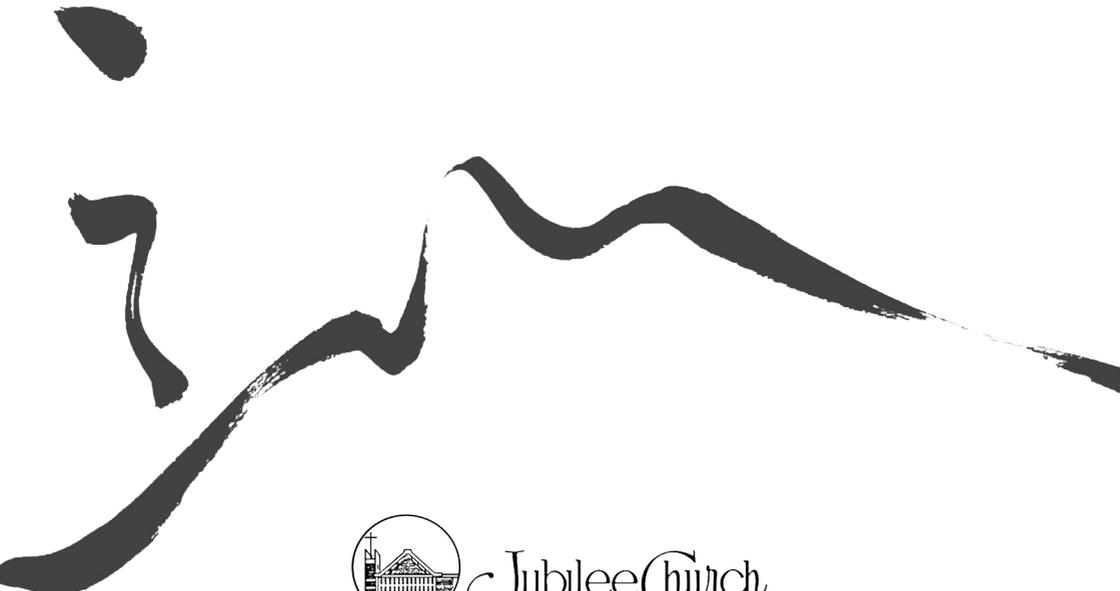
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