

Second Sunday of Christmas

GETTING GOD

John 1:[1-9] 10-18

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Analysis by Chris Repp

[In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.] 10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

15(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has

made him known.

Prefatory remarks: There's "give" and "take" in this text. The "give" comes out clearly in the NRSV translation: the true light gave power to become children of God (v. 12); the law was given through Moses (v. 17). The "take" is not immediately obvious in English, but it is at the root of what the darkness does not do in v. 5. (NRSV gives us "overcome" here, where RSV [and KJV] had "comprehend.") It also lies beneath "accept" in v. 11 and "received" in v. 12, and again in v. 16. There are also two different words for seeing, one in v. 14 and the other in v. 18. Both can have the sense of "learning by seeing," or "seeing with the mind," and thus may be connected with "know" in v. 10 and "made him known" in v. 18. The latter means literally to "lead out," which is the Latin meaning of our word "educate"—hence my concluding caption below "enlightened," connecting up with the light earlier in the text. I have also connected the ideas of "taking" and "knowing" in the English "get" for the meta-pun in my analysis. The more accomplished Greek scholars among you will have to judge whether I have captured the sense of the Greek text in my musings, or whether I have taken undue liberties.

DIAGNOSIS: We Don't "Get" God

Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *In the Dark*

The preface to John's gospel evokes the first creation story in Genesis. Before God speaks light into being there is only darkness (and "the deep," or in the Vulgate, "abyss"). In John, the Word who is the life and the light has been shining in the darkness from the very beginning. Now he comes to shine in our darkness—all in our lives and our world that is other than the unadulterated, good product of God's creative work. That darkness is where we live. We are people of the darkness.

Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Not Seeing the Light*

But even though the light has now come into our world, we don't really "see" it. We people of the darkness don't comprehend the light. That is to say, we don't "get" it. Unbeknownst to us, the true light is in the world. But the darkness preoccupies us. And, given the choice between darkness and light, it seems that we prefer the darkness. Actually, it's more that a preference—it's a love. Jesus says so two chapters later in John's gospel (3:19): "And this is the judgment (krisis), that the light has come into the world, and people loved (agapao) darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil."

Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Not Seeing God*

Because we don't "see" or "get" the light, we also don't "see" or "get" God (v. 18). That's because the light—who is the life, who is the Word, who was in the beginning with God—is God. Dwelling in darkness, adulterated by sin, we find ourselves apart from God, and apart from God's good intention for the creation. Our situation is truly "abysmal."

PROGNOSIS: We "Get" God

Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Seeing God*

But God's Spirit hovers over our abyss (see Genesis 1:2), and what we don't "get," God gives us—starting with God's very self. In an act of new creation, the Word who is God becomes one of us. No one has seen God until now, but the only-begotten one now "educates" us on this point. ("Show us the Father and we will be satisfied," Philip will say later in John [14:8-9]. "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" is Jesus' response.)

Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Seeing the Light*

The ones who love the darkness are nevertheless loved by God. Where the Word is made known, the Spirit is at work, and people come to believe and trust in the Word. We are these people, who are given the gift of rebirth as children of God in Holy

Baptism. Now we “get” it because we “get” him. Now we are turned from our preoccupation with the darkness to see the light, the glory of God, glory that is grace and truth.

Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Enlightened (and Enlivened!)*

As reborn children of God, now we walk as children of the light (John 12:36), even if we still walk in the darkness of this world, even if we ourselves are not completely free of the darkness in ourselves. We walk as children of the light, because God has declared us to be such for Jesus’ sake—because the darkness that doesn’t “get” the light does not get us either. By grace we now belong to another and to one another. And in that true light is our new life.