

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, Oh, Lord, my strength and redeemer. AMEN

“In the beginning was the Word”

John’s Gospel does not begin the way we might expect. There is no Bethlehem. No manger. No angels. No shepherds watching their flocks by night. Instead, the writer of the Gospel of John takes us all the way back—to the very beginning of everything. Before time. Before creation. Before light ever pierced the darkness.

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

John is doing something bold here. He is deliberately echoing the opening words of Genesis: *“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth...”* John wants us to understand that the story of Jesus **does not** start with Mary or Joseph. It **does not** even start with Israel. The story of Jesus **starts with God**—eternal, creative, and alive—speaking life into the world.

And that Word, John tells us, is not an idea. Not a philosophy. Not a concept.

That Word became flesh and lived among us.

God chose not to remain distant. God chose to draw close. To take on human skin. To experience hunger and joy...grief and love...dust and sweat and tears. **God entered the messiness of real life.**

And before John tells us about Jesus walking the roads of Galilee, before he tells us about miracles or signs or glory, he pauses to tell us about **a witness**... a man named John.

Brothers and Sisters, John the Baptist was more than a wild man.

When we think of John the Baptist, many of us picture a strange figure: camel-hair clothing, a leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey, shouting in the wilderness. And all of that is true—but it’s far from the whole story.

John the Baptist was not a fringe nobody. He was deeply rooted in Israel’s faith and history.

John was born into a **priestly family**. His father, **Zechariah**, served in the Temple. John grew up knowing the prayers, the Scriptures, the rituals. He knew what it meant to prepare people to meet God. But John never served as a Temple priest...instead...he went out into the wilderness.

And Brothers and Sisters...that choice matters.

The wilderness, in Scripture, is not just a lonely place—it **is a place of encounter**. Israel wandered in the wilderness. Elijah heard God in the wilderness. The wilderness is where distractions fall away and...**truth becomes unavoidable**.

John the Baptist is intentionally stepping outside the religious center to call people back to the heart of faith.

And here is something often overlooked: **John was widely respected and followed**. Crowds came out to hear him. Soldiers, tax collectors, religious leaders—people from all walks of life listened to him. Some historians believe John had disciples long before Jesus began his ministry, and even after John's death, some of his followers continued on for years.

John was not a warm-up act trying to steal the spotlight. He was a faithful servant who understood his role clearly—and humbly.

John's Gospel tells us something crucial: *"He was **not** the light, but he came to **testify** to the light."* John knew exactly who he was—and who he was not.

John had the courage of knowing his place, and that kind of clarity takes courage.

John could have claimed more for himself. People were asking if he was the Messiah. Others wondered if he was Elijah returned, or a great prophet reborn. John could have accepted the praise.

But he refused.

John understood that his purpose was not to draw attention to himself, but to point beyond himself.

"I am not the light," he says in effect.

"I am the witness."

That is no small thing.

In a world that rewards self-promotion, John shows us another way. A faithful life is not about being the center of the story. It is about pointing to the One who is.

John's humility does not make him smaller...it makes him **faithful**.

John tells us that the Word—Jesus—is life itself, and that life is the light of all people.

And then comes one of the most powerful promises in all of Scripture:

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Notice what John does **not** say. He does not say there is no darkness. He does not deny pain, fear, grief, or uncertainty. John knows darkness well—he will die in prison, executed by a ruler who feared his truth.

But John proclaims this with confidence: darkness does not win.

Not ultimately. Not eternally. The light of Christ is stronger than despair, stronger than death, stronger than anything that threatens to undo us.

John ends this passage by reminding us what the coming of Christ means for us:

“From his fullness we have all received...grace upon grace.”

Not a **little** grace.

Not **conditional** grace.

But...grace stacked upon grace!

This is where our Lutheran theology comes in..

Grace is not something we earn. It is not a reward for good behavior.

It is a **gift**—freely given by a God who loves us before we ever get it right.

The law was given through Moses, John says, but grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. Not law *instead of* grace, but grace that fulfills the promise God has always been making:

to be our God, and to claim us as God's own.

And Friends, what does this mean for us?

Like John the Baptist, we are not the light. But we are witnesses.

We witness when we forgive instead of retaliate.

We witness when we speak truth with love.

We witness when we show compassion where the world expects judgment.

We witness when we trust that God is at work—even when we cannot see it clearly.

John reminds us that faithful living is not about perfection. **It is about pointing!**

Pointing to **Christ**.

Pointing to **hope**.

Pointing to **grace**.

And, Friends, the good news is this:

the same Word that spoke creation into being,

the same light that shone in the darkness,

the same grace that sustained John the Baptist

—has come to dwell among us.

Full of grace.

Full of truth.

Full of love.

(pause)

Thanks be to God.

Amen and Amen