



THE OVERTURE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR
THE ADVENT SERMON SERIES

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH – VANCOUVER, BC

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“And the **Word became flesh,**
and **dwelt among us,**
and we saw His glory,
glory as of the only begotten
from the Father,
full of grace and truth.”

- John 1:14

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THE OVERTURE

John 1:1-18

Christmas is a season which is filled with song:

- “Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing”
 (“Joy to the World,” Isaac Watts)
- “From the squalour of a borrowed stable,
By the Spirit and a virgin’s faith;
To the anguish and the shame of scandal
Came the Saviour of the human race.”
 (“From the Squalor,” Stuart Townend)
- “In a byre near Bethlehem
Passed by many a wandering stranger,
The most precious Word of Life
Was heard gurgling in a manger”
 (“In a Byre near Bethlehem,” John Bell)
- “Yet in thy dark streets shineth,
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.”
 (“O Little Town of Bethlehem,” Phillips Brooks)
- “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with us to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.”
 (“Hark! the Herald Angels Sing,” Charles Wesley)
- “So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh;
Come, peasant, king, to own Him!
The King of Kings salvation brings;
Let loving hearts enthrone Him!
Raise, raise the song on high!
The virgin sings her lullaby.”
 (“What Child is This,” William Dix)

It is not a surprise that Christmas is a time of singing, for when we truly hear the real story of Christmas . . . when we encounter the amazing truth of Immanuel (God with us!) . . . when we meet Jesus (Yahweh-to-the-rescue!) . . . our hearts burst into song!

We see this in the story of Jesus' birth, especially as recorded by the physician Luke. Songs have been a response to Christmas since the beginning!

- "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour . . ." (Mary, in Luke 1:46-55)
- "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come to His people and redeemed them . . ." (Zechariah, in Luke 1:67-79)
- "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests." (Angels, in Luke 2:14)

When the apostle John begins his telling of the good news of Jesus, like Luke or Matthew, he too starts with the Christmas story. But unlike them, he puts it in poetic form... a song. Lesslie Newbigin notes that:

"the first eighteen verses of the Gospel are usually referred to as the 'Prologue,' but it would be more accurate to describe them as an overture. Like the overture to an opera they announce in brief form the great themes which will be developed as the story unfolds." (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come*, 1)

This Advent, our sermon series is going to listen to the overture, letting it ring out. As it plays, we will notice the great themes that John develops in the rest of his Gospel. And as it echoes in our heads, my prayer is that we will again hear the great news of Christmas.

Let the overture begin!

THE OVERTURE

John 1:1-18

¹In 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 apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

⁶There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

⁹There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" ¹⁶For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

WEEK 1 - BEFORE BETHLEHEM

Darrell Johnson - Advent Series: 'The Overture'

John 1:1-18

November 30, 2014

Together, read all of John 1:1-18. Then have someone open your time together in prayer.

1. Share your immediate impressions of the text. What themes, language, verses particularly jump out at you?

2. Compare John 1:1-3 with the beginnings of the other gospels: Mark 1:1-4, Luke 1:1-17, and Matthew 1:1-19. How does John begin his book differently than the other gospel writers? What do each of the writers identify as the 'beginning' of Jesus' ministry?

How does John's 'beginning' shape our perspective of who Jesus is and what He is about?

3. Focusing on the active words in verses 1-3, what do we learn the Word was doing in the beginning?

What does this teach us about God, and the relationship between the Son and the Father?

4. In Sunday's sermon, Darrell explained how the word "with" ('the Word was *with* God', verse 1) could be better understood as "towards" – an orientation towards the Father. What does this phrase reveal to us about the relationship between the Father and the Son?

Would "towards" be the word you would use to describe your posture towards God?

In your own spiritual journey, what are ways that you have seen a shift in your own orientation, becoming increasingly *towards* God?

5. What do we learn about Jesus in verses 1-3?

6. How may this be a helpful passage to reflect on as we move into this season of Advent?

Are there ways that this passage speaks into attitudes or tendencies we have around Christmas?

7. Share with the group how God is encouraging you through this text. What is He calling you to?

Spend some time in prayer for each other.

This week, read through John 1:1-18 so that it may start to soak in to you as we enter this season of Advent.

WEEK 2 - THE COMING OF LIGHT

Darrell Johnson - Advent Series: 'The Overture'

John 1:1-18

December 7, 2014

Read through John 1:1-18 together; if possible, use a different translation than last week's. Then have someone open this time together in prayer.

1. Share your impressions of the passage. Did anything strike you as you read this passage during the week? What about reading it in a different translation?

2. Focus on verses 4-9. What does it mean that "in Him [the Word] was life" (vs. 4)?

3. Why may the Word be described as “light” in verses 4-9?

How does Jesus shine light? What does His light reveal?
What does it do to darkness?

How has Jesus shone His light into darkness in your own
life? What about in circumstances around you?

4. Notice the present verb tense in verse 5: “The Light *shines* in the darkness.” What does it mean to you that Jesus has not just shone in the past when He first came, and will not just shine in the future when He comes again, but is currently shining through present darkness?

5. What is John the Baptist's response to the Light in verses 6-8?

How has your response to Jesus reflected that of John's?
What opportunities may God be putting before us this season to "testify about the Light"?

6. Read 1 John 1:5-7 to close, and discuss what it means to 'walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light' (vs. 7).

As we continue through Advent in anticipation of Christmas, how is God calling you to "walk in the Light"?

Pray for each other.

Read John 1:1-18 again over the course of this week.

WEEK 3 - WELCOME HOME

Darrell Johnson - Advent Series: 'The Overture'

John 1:1-18

December 14, 2014

Together, read John 1:1-18 – ideally in a different translation than last week. Then have someone pray to open this time together.

1. Take a little time to review what you have looked at over the last two weeks in John 1:1-18. What language, ideas, or themes have stuck with you from this passage so far?

2. Focus on verses 10-13. What does it mean that Jesus came to 'His own people' (look back at verse 3)?

What is the great tragedy of verses 10-11?

3. Bearing in mind that John was written in a cultural context where there were important social expectations around hospitality, discuss what it involves to receive a guest well (v. 12).

4. Both Augustine of Hippo (4th century bishop) and Bernard of Clairvaux (12th century monk and preacher) were great Christian thinkers who described the human heart as a house which requires cleaning and repair. Share with the group ways that you needed to re-arrange (or renovate!) your own heart when you initially received Jesus.

5. Look at verses 12-13. It has been suggested that John 1:1-18 is a chiasm (a symmetrical way of structuring text which highlights the centre). If this passage is chiasmic, then verse 12 is the emphatic centre point. Why may John draw attention particularly to the claim that in receiving Jesus, we become 'children of God'?

Flip to John 20:17b. How is John's claim in John 1:12 fulfilled here? Why would it come to fruition in the context of Jesus' resurrection?

6. Continuing to focus on verses 10-13, how do we, in receiving Jesus, actually arrive 'home' ourselves?

In what ways is this the great gift of Christmas?

7. How may God be calling you to receive Him freshly this Advent season?

What areas of your heart need repair or re-arranging as you receive Jesus once again?

Spend some time in prayer for each other.

This week, continue to read through John 1:1-18.

WEEK 4 - BEHOLDING GLORY

Darrell Johnson - Advent Series: 'The Overture'

John 1:1-18

December 21, 2014

This is our last week of the Advent series, looking at the 'overture' of John 1:1-18. Read through this passage together once more, and then have someone pray to open your time together.

1. Review what you have learned and discussed over the course of this series. What will you continue to take comfort in or be challenged by from John 1:1-18?

2. Looking particularly at verse 14, why may John's description of the Word's incarnation and time on earth culminate in 'seeing His glory'?

Flip to Exodus 33:18-23. How does our passage in John 1 answer Moses' request of Exodus 33:18?

What do we learn of Jesus, looking at John's description of the Word's glory in the rest of verse 14?

3. Read verse 17. What is the relationship between the incarnation and the Old Testament law?

John twice refers to Jesus as being full of 'grace and truth' (v. 14, 17). Why do you think he repeats these particular characteristics?

4. Look at verse 16. The phrase 'grace upon grace' has an implication of relentless abundance, like waves crashing on the seashore. Share times when you were especially aware of this overflow of Christ's fullness, when you experienced grace upon grace.

5. Look at verse 18, and then flip to Paul's related reflection in 2 Corinthians 3:18. According to this passage, what happens to us when we 'behold the glory of the Lord'?

6. As we close, read Jesus' prayer the night of his death in John 17:24-26. How does it continue the claims of John 1:14-18?

Take some time to be quiet and reflect on what you have learned through John 1 and today's related passages. Then share how God is reminding or calling you to something as you approach Christmas, and pray for each other.

Thank Him for revealing His glory to us through His Son.

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