



CLARE PRIORY CHRISTMAS 2016

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# THE PROLOGUE

# WELCOME

- ▶ Introduction to John
- ▶ The history of the Prologue
- ▶ John the Baptist
- ▶ Background in Wisdom and Philosophy
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# WELCOME

- ▶ Structure of the Prologue
- ▶ Roots in Jewish Wisdom
- ▶ Narrative sequence
- ▶ Contemporary reflection
- ▶ Prayer

# STRUCTURE

A (vv. 1-5): The relation of the Logos/Word to God, to creation, to humans

B (vv. 6-8): The witness of John the Baptist

C (vv. 9-11) The coming of the Light/Logos and his/its rejection

D (vv. 12-13): The benefits of belief in the Logos/Word

C' (v. 14) The coming of the Logos and his reception

B' (v. 15): The witness of John the Baptist

A' (vv. 16-18): The relation of the Logos/Word to humans, to recreation, to God

# STRUCTURE

A

vv. 1-5

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. **2** The Word was with God in the beginning. **3** All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. **4** In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. **5** And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.

A<sup>1</sup>

vv. 16-18

**John 1:16** For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another. **17** For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known.

# STRUCTURE

B

vv. 6-8

B<sup>1</sup>

v. 15

**John 1:6** A man came, sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that everyone might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

**John 1:15** John testified about him and shouted out, "This one was the one about whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than I am, because he existed before me.'"

# STRUCTURE

C

vv. 9-11

C<sup>1</sup>

v. 14

**John 1:9** The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world was created by him, but the world did not recognise him. **11** He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him.

**John 1:14** Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory—the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father.

# STRUCTURE

D

vv. 12-13

**John 1:12** But to all who have received him—those who believe in his name—he has given the right to become God's children **13** —children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God.

# ROOTS IN JEWISH WISDOM

(1) Pre-existence is common to both the Johannine Logos and Jewish Wisdom (John 1:1: "In beginning was the Word" // Proverbs 8:22; "The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old"; Sirach 1:4: "Wisdom was created before all things"; 24:9: "From eternity, in the beginning, he created me").

(2) Both are said to be "with God" (John 1:1: "and the Word was with God" // Proverbs 8:30: "then I was beside him, like a master workman"; Wisdom of Solomon 9:4: "the wisdom that sits by thy throne").

(3) Both are said to be divine (John 1:1: "and the Word was God" // Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26: "For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; ... she is a reflection of eternal light, ... and an image of his goodness").

# ROOTS IN JEWISH WISDOM

(4) Both are described as the instrument of creation (John 1:3: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" // Prov 8:30: "I was beside him like a master workman"; 3:19: "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth"; Wisdom of Solomon 7:22: "wisdom, the fashioner of all things"; 9:1-2: "who hast made all things by thy word, and by thy wisdom hast formed man").

(5) Both are called the source of life (John 1:4: "In him was life" // Prov 8:35: "he who finds me finds life"; Baruch 4:1b: "All who hold her fast will live") and light (John 1:4: "and the life was the light of men" // Wisdom of Solomon 7:26: "she is a reflection of eternal light"; Sirach 24:27: "It makes instruction shine forth like light"; Baruch 4:2: "walk toward the shining of her light").

### ROOTS IN JEWISH WISDOM

(6) Neither can be overcome by darkness/evil (John 1:5: "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it" //

Wisdom of Solomon

7:29-30: "Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against

wisdom evil does not prevail"). The parallels settle the translation problem of 1:5. In this context *katelaben* means "overcome," not "comprehend."

# ROOTS IN JEWISH WISDOM

(7) Both continually come into the world (John 1:9: "The true light which enlightens every person was continually coming [present tense, periphrastic participle] into the world" // Wisdom of Solomon 6:13, 16: "She hastens to make herself known ... she goes about seeking those worthy of her"; 7:27: "in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God"; Sirach 24:6-7: "in the whole earth, and in every people and nation, I have gotten a possession. Among all these I sought a resting place; I sought in

whose territory I might lodge"; 1 Enoch 42:1: "Then Wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people") and are in the world (John 1:10: "He was in the world" // Wisdom of Solomon 8:1: "She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other"). The parallels, together with the present tense (continually coming) in 1:9, point to a general revelation to all people. This idea would be compatible with other early Christians from Paul (Rom 1:19-20) to Justin (1 Apology 5).

# ROOTS IN JEWISH WISDOM

(8) Both are rejected by humans generally (John 1:10b: "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not"; 1:11b: "and his own people received him not" // 1 Enoch 42:2: "but she found no dwelling place. So Wisdom returned to her place and she settled permanently among the angels"; Baruch 3:20-21: "they have not understood her paths, nor laid hold of her. Their children have strayed far from her way").

(9) Both create a relation with God among those who are receptive (John 1:12-13: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" // Wisdom of Solomon 7:27: "she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets, for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom"; "because of her I shall have immortality"), saving humans (Wisdom of Solomon 9:18: "and were saved by wisdom").

# ROOTS IN JEWISH WISDOM

(10) Both appeared on earth and lived among humans, tabernacled among them (John 1:14a: "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" // Baruch 3:37: "she appeared upon earth and lived among humans"; Sirach 24:8, 11-12: "Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob'... in the beloved city he gave me a resting place. So I took root in an honored people").

(11) Both possess glory as monogenes/unique (John 1:14, 18: "we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only son [monogenes] from the Father ... the only [monogenes] Son/God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" // Wisdom of Solomon 7:22, 25: "Wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me. For in her there is a spirit that is ... unique [monogenes] ... . For she is ... a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty").

### ROOTS IN JEWISH WISDOM

(12) Both know God and make him known (John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son/God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" // Wisdom of Solomon 8:4: "For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God"; 9:9-10: "With thee is wisdom, who

knows thy works and was present when thou didst make the world, and who understands what is pleasing in thy sight and what is right according to thy commandments. Send her forth ... that she may be with me ... and that I may learn what is pleasing to thee").

### ROOTS IN JEWISH WISDOM

- ▶ In antiquity, the same reality could be given different names.
- ▶ In ancient Judaism, Wisdom and the Word of God are sometimes used interchangeably for the same reality.
- ▶ Logos is masculine and it fits with Jesus as a male.
- ▶ Logos was shorthand for the Gospel in early Christianity.
- ▶ Logos aligns the Jesus event with creation.
- ▶ Logos brings Jesus closer to the prophet.

# NARRATIVE SEQUENCE

- ▶ Key question: to what or whom do these verses refer?
- ▶ John 1:9 The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was created by him, but the world did not recognise him. 11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him.
- ▶ John 1:14 Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory—the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father.

# NARRATIVE SEQUENCE

A (vv. 1-5) and A' (vv. 16-18) should be read together. The preexistent divine one who was the instrument of creation and the source of life and light (vv. 1-5) is also the revealer (the unique son, the divine one, the one who is in the bosom of the Father), the source of grace and truth from whom the Johannine community has received in abundance (vv.

16-18). For the prologue, the one who made you is the one who saves you. The Creator and the Redeemer are the same God.

B (vv. 6-8) and B' (v. 15) may also be read together. John the Baptist is not the light but is a witness to the light (vv. 6-8). His testimony is to the superiority of the Son, based upon the preexistence of the Son (v. 15).

# NARRATIVE SEQUENCE

C (vv. 9-11) and C' (v. 14) also need to be read together. Prior to the Incarnation, the Word was active in the world both in general revelation to all people (vv. 9-10; cf. Justin, 1 Apology 46; 2 Apology 10) and in special revelation to Israel (v. 11; cf. Justin, Dialogue with Trypho 126-28). In neither case did he find acceptance (vv. 10b,

11b). When the Word became flesh and tabernacled among humans, however, he found a positive response among a community that beheld his glory (v. 14; cf. 2:11), "glory as of a monogenes/only Son from the Father." For the prologue, revelation is general (to all people) and particular (to Israel before Jesus and in Jesus).

# NARRATIVE SEQUENCE

D (vv. 12-13) is the centrepiece of the prologue: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." Are we to think of "receiving him" as encompassing all three forms of revelation (to all prior to the Incarnation; to Israel prior to

the Incarnation; through Jesus in the Incarnation), or only a positive response to the Incarnation? In the Johannine literature, "believing in his name" is an activity of positive response to the Incarnate Word (John 3:18; 1 John 3:23; 5:13). This response results in a new birth from God (v. 13).

# CONTEMPORARY REFLECTION

- ▶ Transcendent and immanence
- ▶ Closeness of God to human reality
- ▶ Who can "tell the story"?
- ▶ What is the story?

### PRAYER

We praise you, gracious God, for the glad tidings of peace, the good news of salvation: your Word became flesh and we have seen his glory. Let the radiance of that glory enlighten the lives of those who celebrate his birth.

Reveal to all the world the light no darkness can extinguish, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendour of eternal light, God for ever and ever. Amen.