



Homily for 2nd Sunday of Christmas

A great friend of mine used to love the King James Version of the Bible, and today's Gospel especially, the Prologue. It was more than the theology or the meaning, there was something about the language that he just loved listening to. He felt that God was speaking to him through the beauty of the language.

This is the legacy to us of the translators at the beginning of the 17th century when King James asked for a new translation that would be fit for a new Britain, a new English-speaking people, and for what he saw as a new start for Christianity in Britain too. Some people would say that the result was more than just translation, but in its own way inspired, along with Shakespeare's writing at about the same time, to create a new English. But most of all for the translators to renew people's relationship with God. To build a personal relationship with God through the Bible they could read and enjoy.

The words we heard today in the gospel were not the King James Version, but the original writer back in 1st century AD had the same hope. That this gospel, John's, would take people deeper into their understanding of who Jesus was, is, and so deepen their relationship with God now revealed through his Son. This after all is the intention of every gospel. At the start you can imagine the writer or writers reflecting on their community's thoughts about Jesus and wondering what sort of a gospel they are being called on to write in response to their questions.

Already three gospels have gone before and now believers' questions have gone beyond asking about the birth of Jesus as an answer to where he came from, or how he came to be in human terms. John's community are looking to go further back into time, into more than time, and they ask themselves, not about the Trinity here, but about how this man Jesus relates to God, now that we know he is not just a human being but God too.

Unlike any other gospel, this one presents Jesus to us as divine right from the start.

But then someone decided or saw the need for a particular opening. Something that would set the reader on the wavelength of this gospel. That would alert us to the fact that this was not going to be like to other gospels. But how could they do that?

They needed an introduction. If you like a sort of overture that would introduce the themes of the gospel. At the same time they had written a meditative gospel, so they needed a different kind of language. So they decided on poetry.

And this is what the opening to the gospel is. It is a hymn. A song if you like. In the shorter version we heard today we have the hymn as it originally was. In the full gospel as it reads, the editors have intertwined the story of John the Baptist into it, knitting the hymn into the gospel.

The hymn is about Jesus, about the Son. It chooses to start as the whole Bible starts. 'In the beginning...' In Hebrew "Genesis" is called just that 'In the beginning' Bereshit. The writers are making a link to Creation. In the first story the Spirit is breathed into the world. Now, as God renews his relationship with us, his revelation, his creating power, is spoken into the world. The Son is God's Word to us. Dramatically the gospel makes it clear that who we know as the human Jesus was with God from the beginning. Not only that, in the second verse, we next find that it is through the Word that everything is made. This is a new understanding, throws a new light onto the person we see and know as Jesus, as Richard Rohr would say in our own time, the Universal Christ. The one who holds all together as St. Paul explains in Ephesians. Then in the third verse this Word enters our world, in our time, as the light.

Finally in the fourth verse what is crucial is the community's engagement, our engagement, with the Word. How his arrival affects us. We can become children of God, we can see God's glory.

And this is what the Gospel is all about. Revealing to us God's glory through the Word, his Son. A glory that can only be explained through beauty.