

As we celebrate Candlemas the Christmas season is finally behind us, so you may be wondering why the people who put the church's cycle of readings together have chosen to repeat the gospel from Christmas morning today.

The author of John's Gospel was writing at a time when Christianity was spreading and he put to good use his understanding both of his own Jewish traditions and those of the Greek (Hellenistic) world. Early Christians knew that 'the Word' with a capital 'W' referred to Christ (God's revelation and his meaning). The opening lines of John's Gospel set a scene. It is a scene that cannot easily be depicted on a Christmas card: the words take us way beyond our human frame of reference. But there are clues to lead us in the right direction.

The opening words 'In the beginning...' resonate with those of the book of Genesis, alluding to God as the first readers of John's Gospel knew him: the God of the universe, God of all creation and God who brings order to the chaos of pre-existence. They point us to God's continuous creative action and purpose in restoring order in the chaos and darkness of the world in almost every age.

At Christmas we may focus on the baby in the manger, on Christ's humanity. The opening verses of John's Gospel express Christ's divinity as well as his humanity. The Word is *with* God at God's most magnificent and powerful: God of the cosmos, God before time and for all time; God creating order out of chaos. All of today's readings (Proverbs 8.1, 22-31 & Colossians 1.15-20 as well as John 1.1-14) have the same truth at their heart: the eternal pre-existence of the Word.

I think this gospel reading has been chosen because we're at a pivotal point in the worshipping year. With the story of Christ's birth behind us, the first chapter of John sets the scene for what is to come. The Word made flesh will perform miracles, he will heal and preach and teach. But

he will also be despised and rejected. Though innocent, he will be sentenced to death and die on a cross. He will die for us so we need never again face the formless void of separation from God.

Let us this Lent reflect on God who by sending us his Son once again created order out of chaos. Let it be a reminder to us, as we approach Lent, to sort out our lives, re-aligning our will with God's will for us.

Amen.