

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

If St. Luke gives us the fullest account of the facts of Jesus' birth, St. John provides the greatest theology. He does not tell us about the birth in Bethlehem, but explains that the child Jesus is the Word incarnate.

John's gospel is written by the Apostle John toward the end of his long life. While the synoptic gospels were completed before 65 AD, St. John's gospel may have been written as late as 95 AD. Those intervening thirty years gave the early Christians the time to really begin to understand who Jesus was and why he came.

In the majestic opening passage of his gospel John says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . . all things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."

The term "Word" is the translation of a Greek philosophical concept called the *logos*. The *logos* was the creative power of God. This echoes the creation story in Genesis where God speaks all things into creation. It is by the power of His Word that all things began to be. St. John takes this ancient idea and says this same creative power "became flesh and dwelt among us."

As the final gospel, St. John's Christmas theology becomes the foundation for all the rest of his story telling. St. John is a great theologian and constantly reveals the mystery of Jesus Christ, God incarnate through the use of stories, symbols and physical pointers to the greater realities of God among us. For John, because God took flesh the whole world speaks of this truth—the whole "world is charged with the grandeur of God."

As an old man, St. John must have pondered the amazing experiences he had sixty years earlier as he spent those three years with Jesus. He was the one who stood by him even at the cross and with Peter, he was one of the first to encounter the risen Lord. John's gospel, therefore, is the most beloved of the four gospels for many people. It is an account rich in theology, but a theology that comes from a personal, powerful and poignant relationship with Christ.

As we move toward Christmas and the New Year, why not make it a resolution to read all four gospels through from beginning to end as you would read any other book? We read them in morsels and chunks at Mass, but reading the whole book through from beginning to end helps us see the flow and development of the greatest story ever told.

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker