**Sermon from the late Rev. J. van Bruggen in Assen. ~ John 1 vs. 1**

Liturgy: Votum and blessing

Sing: Ps. 103: 1, 2

Prayer

Read ~ John 1: 1-18

Sing: Ps. 119: 36

Text ~ John 1: 1

Sermon

Sing: Ps. 136: 11

Creed

Sing: Ps. 2: 2, 3

Prayer

Collection

Sing: Ps. 118: 4, 5

Blessing

Text: In the beginning the Word was and the Word was with God and the word was God.

**Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ**

"And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" - this is what we heard John exclaim in our Scripture reading.

For, beloved congregation, the evangelist was filled with the glory of Christ. He had seen it in His miracles.

Later when describing the Lord's first miracle at Cana, he says that Christ revealed His glory in it.

John had observed that glory in Christ's words.

He tells with reverence how one word from Jesus caused the entire armed force that wanted to capture Him to fall to the ground in Gethsemane.

John had seen that glory shine in the prayer of Christ, in which He spoke to the Father about the glory that He had with Him before the world was.

And he cannot remain silent about that glory. He must speak of it, and write a whole gospel full of it. For the fourth gospel is not called: the gospel of glory by mistake.

Oh, certainly, the other evangelists also speak of the glory of Christ. But they show you more of His humiliation, of His real humanity.

But John constantly emphasizes that his, and my, Jesus is: THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD.

And he does that, as he says himself, so that you would continue to believe and believe more and more fully that Jesus is: the Christ, the Son of God.

In the first 18 verses, which he wrote and which we have read, John offers a short summary of this gospel of glory, as a prologue. There he says in a few words, yet they have such a depth that nobody can gauge the bottom of it, that the Christ of whom he is going to speak is: The Son of God, and that He is: the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

And there he explains in a few words what it means, that He has become "man" and came to us in our nature.

As a result, John says, grace and truth have become ours and the Father, whom no one has ever seen, has been made known to us.

In the first verse of that introduction, which now requires our attention, John immediately speaks of this Christ.

Certainly, he's talking about the Word here. But in verse 14 he will say that this Word has become flesh. And that is what John already has in mind. He already speaks of the Christ here; of Jesus, born as a child in Bethlehem. But he now calls this Jesus, this child of Bethlehem, The Word, because he wants to point Him out as the Only Begotten of the Father.

In this first word of his gospel, he wants to speak to us immediately of his Glory; particularly of His glory in His relationship to God.

And I have to point that out to you now: The Glory of Christ in His relationship to God.

That is suitable material for us today. For the preaching is to prepare us to have a fuller understanding of the Christmas gospel of the birth of Christ.

This can be done in more than one way.

It is possible by seeking answers from the scriptures to the question: Why was it necessary for the Son of God to become man.

It is also possible to examine how that birth was announced and prepared for historically

But - and we want to do that now - we can also try to understand from the Scriptures who it is, that came to us in our nature from Bethlehem

And that is what John points out to us here, when he speaks to us of:

**THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN HIS RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.**

That glory shines

1. in His exaltation above everything created;

2. in His fellowship and oneness with God.

**ONE**

The remarkable designation "The Word", which we find here in our text, can only be found with John. He uses it not only in his gospel, but also in his letters and once in Revelation.

We said in our introduction to this sermon that John signifies Christ with that designation.

That this is so is certain and so there needs to be no doubt about it. Because, when John describes the Christ in glory, he says in chapter 19 of his book of Revelation that His name is called: “The Word of God“.

We must now pay more attention to why John uses this name for Christ and what he wants to express with it.

John did not snatch this name out of the blue. Its use was already prepared for by the Old Testament. Because it was already written there on the first page that God caused everything to come into existence by His Word.

So it has already been said that the Word of God sounded, that it was there before anything existed outside of God.

And when Psalm 33 sings: The heavens are made by the word of the Lord, and all their host by the Spirit of his mouth. Then it appears that the Word of God has its own and independent existence.

So John finds this special name, by which he calls Christ, already in the O.T.

Although Christ himself never called himself by this name, as far as we know, nevertheless whatever John writes about it He takes over from the Lord’s own preaching.

Because everything that John lets us know about His special name is already found there.

Did not Jesus make himself known as the Son of God?

Did He not preach that the Father revealed Himself through Him? He who has seen the Son - so He spoke - has seen the Father.

And does the letter to the Hebrews also not point to Him as the appearance of God's glory and the express image of His independence?

And that which you find scattered in the writings of the other evangelists and also in the letters of Paul, is summarized by John in that special name, by which he denotes Christ, when he calls him: The Word.

To find the substance of this word you must begin by taking it in its simplest and most familiar sense. What are words to us? Well, words are how we express ourselves. By our words we come out of our inner privacy; we make known what is in us, what we think, or desire and want.

And that word then, when we have spoken it, also has its own independent existence outside of us.

Some one can use it against us, remind us of it and hold us to it. Our words expose our thoughts before us and beyond ourselves. You see that even more when the words are written. It can make us remember years later, what we once thought.

Our thoughts receive their own existence by our word, so that we can see and hear them to our enjoyment, or, unfortunately, and that also happens to people, to our shame.

In this way our deepest inner form takes shape in our words and this becomes known to the outside world. And not only that. In our words, not only our thoughts take shape and have permanence - but also our will asserts itself. By word we command and impose our will on others.

Now, in that way Christ is "The Word." In and through Him the Father makes Himself known, He expresses Himself. For He who has spoken many times and in many ways to the fathers of old has spoken to us through the Son. He is The Word.

John will later also say of Him: He has declared the Father unto us. He is the WORD, through Him the Father exercises his power and accomplishes his will.

The name "The Word" therefore says exactly the same as the name "Son". For just as the Son receives life from the Father, so also the Word come from Him who speaks it.

As the Son shows the image of the Father, so the Word makes known Him who speaks it.

And as the Son does the work of the Father, so the Word brings into reality the will of Him who speaks it.

The Son is the Word and The Word is the Son. Both names refer to the same and say the same of him. But by now referring to the Son as "The Word," John makes us understand that in the relationship between the Father and the Son, every thought of material and fleshly relationship must be cut off. There is only a spiritual relationship here.

That name "The Word" is beautifully suited to indicate the relationship of Christ towards the Father. And that is what John wants to do in the first verses of his gospel. That is why he uses the name The Word there.

And the first thing John tells us about The Word is that He stands in the duality of Creator and Creature. He is above everything created. Not only in the sense that he is the strongest of all creatures, the most powerful, the most exalted, who is raised above all and rules over all. Oh, no - very different and much more glorious.

The Word is of a completely different order than the creature. He did not come about alongside with that which was created. Before there was anything, He existed already. In the beginning it was The Word.

In the beginning . . . there you have exactly the same words as in Genesis 1. They also speak of exactly the same thing and point you toward that wonderful beginning, when the cycle of time began. But, if there is a similarity here between the initial words the first Bible book and the fourth gospel, there is also a big difference.

Because Genesis starts from that first moment, from that: "in the beginning", and goes with you into history and takes you through the flow of time, telling you what happened during that time. But John goes from that "in the beginning", if I may say so, into the opposite direction. He takes you back beyond that first beginning and does not speak of what began at that "in the beginning", but of what already was before. In the beginning it was The Word.

And so this evangelist unveils the deepest origins of salvation here, that has been given to us in Christ.

Mark pointed this out to us in his gospel, which begins with the preaching of John the Baptist. He wrote that the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ was: and then he started by telling us of the coming of the Baptizer; and in such a way that it was made known to us that the prophecy and Council of the Father were realized in the performance of that Baptist. And what Mark wrote is true! The preaching of the Baptist was, in a certain sense, the beginning of the salvation of Christ: in that preaching salvation was to come to the people. But behind this beginning, which Mark pointed out, lay a deeper beginning which Matthew made known to us. He leads you back to Bethlehem and preaches to you, that by the birth of Jesus, which happened there, salvation come to us. And beyond Bethlehem, Matthew points even further back to Abraham. He wants to say, see, the establishing of the covenant with this Father of all believers, that's the beginning. There God takes up his work of salvation.

And it is true what Matthew preaches. Yet behind that beginning with Abraham lies a deeper one that Luke uncovers for us, when he traces the genealogy of Bethlehem's child back to Adam. To Adam, in paradise, that's where God has already begun to seek man. Already there salvation was coming.

He, who was born in Bethlehem, was already announced and promised then.

But now comes the fourth gospel and it leads you still further back. Not to the Baptist and not to Bethlehem, not to Abraham and not to Adam.

It tells you that the child born in Bethlehem was already before Abraham, just before Adam. In the beginning was The Word.

He did not arise with the creatures. He was before anything that was created.

He has been exalted above everything created.

The salvation bestowed upon us in Christ did not have its origin within the circle of every created thing.

It came forth in eternity. In the beginning it was The Word!

How (great it is that) John opens such a beautiful view of the Christ of God.

How great a comfort he delivers in His first gospel words against the sorrow which fills us when we think of that “in the beginning” of Genesis.

Because that first "in the beginning" of Genesis brings a glorious message. It proclaims to you that everything, and therefore also you, can thank your existence to God.

Our lives and the life of the world do not arise from mist and darkness.

It has no uncertain beginning.

It comes from the hands of God.

And that's why it doesn't have an uncertain future, it wavers, but not so as to fall..

Risen from God's hands, it's lies fast and secure IN those hands.

Oh, how wonderful that "in the beginning" of Genesis is.

But. . . that radiant beginning fades behind what followed. It is veiled behind the terrible fall of man, through which man, and in him as head of creation every creature, tears away from God and rebels against Him.

That fall has spoiled everything that was so beautifully made.

And wherever we look within the circle of creation, nowhere is there evidence of the beauty of that first "in the beginning."

Everything is set on fire by the infiltration of sin.

Everything has erupted in hatred and enmity.

All creatures clash with each other and work destruction for each other and have no other future other than eternal destruction.

There is nothing within creation, nothing that brings hope and rescue within that “in the beginning“.

It was all corrupted by the fall that followed.

Certainly, humanity has thought differently and it is still trying to think differently. Even though it works less and less.

it thought that the state, the assimilation of all under one power and head, could banish decay and corruption; it dreamed that science would lead to an ever-better understanding, and thus also to an ever-greater integration of all things, and that science would finally bring resolution. It also expected this from technology with which she thought to use every energy source for its service.

But today nobody believes that anymore.

Mankind has experienced that whatever it seizes from the domain of what has been created, whether it is state, science or technology - it has experienced that the one as well as the other will turn against it and work its downfall.

And so humanity no longer has any hope today. Only anxiety and the most sobering expectation. That is its misery.

People are seeking to forget in debauchery and abandonment. But it keeps resurfacing.

It hovers above our world like a ghost.

This fear.

The realization that there is nothing to hope for.

It is all rottenness.

But now the gospel comes.

It takes you back to that "in the beginning".

Although it does not point you to the future. Because no, there is nothing to console there.

Everything that began so beautifully "in the beginning" has become corrupted in time by man’s sin. But now the gospel directs you back to the "beginning."

It says: see, there is still something else behind all things. The Word was already in the beginning.

The one who was born in Bethlehem was already one of us.

He was above all creatures, was not seated with all creatures in the same existence; was not understood as being with all creatures in the same beginning, and therefore did not fall alongside of all those who fell.

He was not co-corrupted in total destruction.

So look, says John, I will now speak of Him.

I'm going to preach of Him who was in the beginning.

About Him who, although he was born among us and has become one of us, was not propagated with us from a corrupt root.

He who was already in the beginning! And therefore one who can save.

For He was not with us in the stream of time, in that stream where everything was corrupted.

But He stood on the bank of that river. Was already there when the stream had yet to begin. And that is why He can give us a hand and pull us up.

HE CAN SAVE! HE CAN GIVE RELEIF.

That is the joyous gospel that resounds here and that we may proclaim in a senseless world. There is nothing in that world that can give hope. Only this: He is the fixed point. He who stood there for eternity, who stood there on the bank of the stream of time. He could reach out the hand and salvation is carried in Him.

No distress can come into this world that would be so great that he cannot save us from it. FOR He is exalted above everything created.

Did you hear it? Your wickedness and your sin is so great that no means of salvation from it can be found in this world. And your guilt is so awful that no one can pay it for you.

If there are any of you who have learned to acknowledge this and have become anxious because of it - let them pay attention to this first word of the fourth gospel.

It gives the message that there is nevertheless One who can help - One who is above everything created and therefore above all the miseries of the creature who has fallen into sin;

Because the WORD was in the BEGINNING!

**TWO**

And the Word was with God - the evangelist now continues, now speaking of the fellowship that Christ has with God forever. Because we must properly understand the word "with" that we read here.

People can be together and yet be and remain completely alien to each other.

Sometimes we are in a waiting room, or in a railway car with others, although we have no fellowship with them.

Yes, sometimes someone is with someone else who seeks for his demise in treacherous enmity. That is how Judas was with Jesus.

But, in our text, the word "with" has a much fuller and more beautiful glow to it.

This is evident from the original language in which John wrote. It actually says:

"The Word was connected to" or "The Word was toward God."

John wants to say that everything that was found in The Word went to God and sought Him with all power.

The Word went out eternally to the Father in love. That was true, already before anything began to live on the earth. When there was yet no man who could think of God, let alone that there would be anyone to love Him, the Word was and there was a life of love and intimacy between God and that Word, of which we, humans, could not have any idea.

And that which was already so in the beginning has remained, also when this Word became flesh. Because then He became what He was not: flesh.

But yet remained what He was: The Word, the Son.

And He stayed with God even when He was sent into the world.

Also then, He continued to seek Him, and all his love went out to the Father.

All of the gospel that John is about to write is there to show this to you. Because the whole gospel is the elaboration and proof of this one thing: The Word was with God.

Just remember the word of Christ: I do not seek the glory, but the glory of Him Who sent me.

He died for God and to bring His love to light gloriously.

And it was for God that He rose and went to heaven and will come again to establish His kingdom forever.

Above all of the Son’s work is written: The Word was with God!

This is not only above everything He did for us, but also above everything He does in us. Everything shows this signature of John‘s word: The Word was with God!

When and wherever this Word, sent by the Father into the world, is accepted, and where God intervenes through Him, redeeming and saving, then everything changes and becomes reborn.

That is where obduracy against God gives way to affection for Him, indifference turns to love, where the self-will gives way to obedience, where all that is already in us learns to seek the Lord. The whole life is converted and turned around; and from that Word that was in the beginning, that comes from God himself in us, we say, "Oh, all that is in me, praise Him."

Christ wants to work this in all His own, and this also has to be so with you, congregation.

See if it is the same with you! Test yourself and all your work here, whether it is truly seeking God and being moved by love for Him?

Does the formation of your family have everything to do with Him? And your endeavors in this world?

Test all things by this. For what is not moved by the love of God, that is - however beautiful it may be - NOT out of Christ; not from The Word, and therefore will not remain, for only the Word and what is of the Word endures forever.

Well, does that now apply to you and all your work?

Does your heart go out to the Lord? And do you strive for His glory in all your deeds?

We lack it by nature. Our sin is that we only live for ourselves and what is ours. That can sometimes become very all consuming, so that we start living for what is human and for all humanity, but it remains a life for things below. no matter how sublime we keep our selfishness. And even though grace came over it once, that old nature keeps coming up and making itself felt in our lives.

This can grieve those who love the Lord.

It sometimes bows them down in shame so that they can hardly find joy anymore. They acknowledge that the Lord is worthy of their love and they would like to show Him their love. But instead, they repeatedly violate His commandments and do what He does not want.

But see now, my brother and sister, if this is your burden before the One who came to us.

John was allowed to say of Him: He was with God. He finds no rest until everything praises the Father. He came to us to give us redemption for that end.

Then go to Him, with all the opposition of your old nature.

Go to Him, to the Word that was in the beginning and was with God.

He is not shy of the power of depravity that dwells in us.

Because - and that brings me to my last thought - John finally says:

The Word was God.

It was not just Divine, but God!

It was not just a revelation through which God made himself known.

Christ is not just an intermediary between God and everything created.

He is God Himself!

According to what was said, there is a distinction between God and The Word.

The Word has its own independence in respect to God, and is also God.

Here you are staring at the reverent mystery of the Holy Trinity.

We can confess that. And we may know it from the Word of the Lord.

But who will ever understand?

It would be foolhardy to attempt to decipher this, but it is godliness to believe it and it is eternal life to know that the Word is God.

We will never fully grasp it, but by faith we will one day come to fully enjoy it: The Word was God!

Of course this word "was" does not mean that the Word once was God, as if it would not be now. The Word IS God.

And when it became flesh, the One Who established the Universe lay there, in the manger.

But John uses the past tense because he is talking about what was eternal, what was already in the beginning.

The Word was God.

There the evangelist unlocks the full glory of Christ. In Him you are not only concerned with a being of higher order and of greater power than anything created, but in Him you meet God Himself, the Almighty comes to you.

That is why we were allowed to say that the Word is never embarrassed by the power of depravity that dwells in us and that terrifies us so often. Salvation is in Him.

But now tremble and know what you do, if you, in your ecclesiastical church life, still live beside the Word and allow Christ no power over your life.

Woe, if you close your heart to Him and will not listen to Him.

That is no less than rejecting God Himself. He who rejects Him has rejected the Father.

But blessed are they who accept the Word, the Child of Bethlehem, in whom God Himself came to us to win us for Himself, and which reverberates to us in the Holy Gospel - blessed are they who do not reject this Word, but accept it. What John will say later comes to light in their lives: as many as have received Him, He has given the power to become children of God. In their lives, the ongoing struggle that does not rest until victory is achieved, and the glory of Christ, the Word that was in the beginning, that was with God, and that is God, will shine out.

God from God, Light from Light.

Humanity was lost to God in guilt and curse.

But the Word has become flesh, and we have beheld His glory, a glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

**Amen.**