



**St. Anne's Episcopal Parish
Church Circle • Annapolis, MD • 21401**

Parish Offices & Education Building
Location at 199 Duke of Gloucester St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Phone : 410-267-9333
Fax 410-280-3181
www.stannes-annapolis.org

Jesus the Word

My head is full of words. I have Shakespeare's soliloquies, the multiplication tables, music theory terms rattling around in my head. They are mixed up with poems – "In Flanders fields the poppies grow....", speeches, "Four score and twenty years ago," the Preamble to the Constitution, the opening paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, the Pledge of Allegiance without "under God" (let's you know how long ago I learned it). The Girl Scout Oath, the Brownie "Smile" song are as familiar as the day I learned them. I think a good chunk of what I know are words I learned more than 40 years ago, some almost 60 years ago.

Among all these words, words which I sometimes think of, sometimes use, are the words that live within me – that are part of who I am, that were and

are experiential. These are the words I have absorbed into the depths of my being, words which changed my life. These words are all intimately connected with God, the Spirit, and Jesus. They include the Venite and the Jubilate, Psalms 23 and 117, the Lord's Prayer, the Prayer of Humble Access, whole sections of the Great Litany, and the Prologue to John. My childhood was filled with them and when I hear them, read them, sing them, or say them, I am now as then filled with a sense of the light and the glory of God.

When I was in elementary school, the young people at St. John's always put on a Christmas pageant. It was a fairly usual sort of pageant – I remember my older sister was Mary for a couple of years and the boy she later married was Gabriel one year and another year Joseph. But the most striking thing about the pageant was the conclusion.

The pageant began with Luke's story – the Annunciation, then came the travel to Bethlehem, the birth, the shepherds and angels and – included Herod and the Magi from Matthew. But it is the conclusion I remember. The lights were turned off and the Prologue to John was read from the

pulpit into a darkened church until we heard, “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” Then a single light would shine on the manger.

When I was eight, I heard the words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people” and “the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” As I heard those words, John’s description of the Word of God incarnate among us, bringing and being life and light moved from my ears into my very soul. In that hearing, all words became more than just a way of communicating but became purposeful and creative; all words became infused with the Word. As John no doubt wanted and expected, I heard echoes of the Genesis story of creation. I was taken back to the beginning of time and I also was brought into the story of the Christ and the Christ story was brought into me. For me, in that hearing, the Word truly became flesh, the flesh of the baby laid so long ago in the original manger, a Christmas miracle I could not explain.

Today I know that what I heard and we hear as “Word” is the Greek word, logos, which means not only word but also reason and the principle of order and knowledge. It is not only the word which God spoke in creation but also the thought of God.

God's word is not only creative, giving order and structure to space and time and life, but communicative and purposeful. Isaiah tells us that just as

the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater so God's word goes out and shall not return empty, but it shall accomplish that which God purposes and succeed in the thing for which God sent it.

We long for our words also to be purposeful and creative. We yearn to communicate – with ourselves, with others, with God. Our desire to understand and be understood is so powerful that we teach chimpanzees sign language. We teach parakeets to talk. How often on America's Funniest Home Videos is there a talking dog? We listen to the babble of babies, hoping to catch a word. I remember my daughter at seven months,

"Nh-Nnnaa, nh-nnnaa," and my mother-in-law saying, "She calling for me, 'Nana'!" "Nana" she became. We send signals into space in an attempt to communicate with life beyond our solar system. We long for a universal language even while we insist on "English only".

It is through words we comprehend the world. It is through words and with words that we express feelings and emotions, even those we wish to hide. "I didn't mean to say that!" "Oops, that slipped out!" We use words to discuss and to debate, to express love and hope and fear, and we use words to pray. When words fail us, we are lost.

Because God knows that words fail us, that we are lost, that we often do not hear and cannot respond to his Word, he helps us. When we pray, when we talk with God, we do not have to rely on our words. St. Paul tells us that God himself will supply them for us. Because words often fail us, we are reassured that when we do not know how to pray as we ought, when we do not have the words,

the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And that God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for us.

For John and for us, Jesus is the communicative, purposeful, creative Word through which God speaks to us. It is Jesus who comes and accomplishes God's plan of salvation. The Psalmist sings, "He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction." It is Jesus who heals, Jesus who delivers.

It is Jesus who succeeds in communicating God to us. We learn in a real sense through our senses – hearing and seeing, smelling and tasting, touching and feeling – and by talking about what we have learned. It is Jesus, the one "close to the Father's heart," who makes God known to us. It is in his words and in his stories that we learn what God's kingdom is. It through him we learn who God is. It is through his life that we "see" God, see the glory, full of grace and truth. It is through Jesus, the Word, that we know what is truth. It is through Jesus, the Word, we experience grace. It is when Jesus, the Word, is absorbed into our depths that our lives are

changed. .And it is through Jesus and with Jesus that we join in the creative, communicative and purposeful work of God on earth. Amen.