

**The Revd Canon Stan Evans**

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ANGLICAN PARISH  
ST. LAURENCE IN LANZAROTE

## John 1:1-14 Christmas Lanzarote

### The Rt. Reverend Dr. Robert Innes – Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe

Dear people of the Anglican parish of Lanzarote, Fr. Stan Evans, those listening to this message from far afield. I am delighted to be with you in spirit if not in body, and united with you through our wonderful technology.

I can never read the awe-inspiring Prologue of St. John's gospel without a tingle running down my spine. Partly that is because this chapter is so deeply associated for me with carol services, the church choir of my boyhood, standing shoulder to shoulder with worshippers in the candlelight. But beyond that, this chapter itself lifts me beyond and out of my present world, beyond my own preoccupations and into a mystery, the glorious technicolour world of God's eternity, glory and saving purposes. St. John reveals the nature of God. He speaks about who Jesus is. And he announces who we can become through believing in him. That is the kind of good news we all need to hear after a year like none other and during a Christmas like no other.

In the beginning was the Word. Notice how St. John alludes to the opening words of Genesis: 'In the beginning God created...' In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The good news with which John opens his gospel is that we human beings are not first in the world nor are we alone in the world. Loneliness and isolation have been two of the curses of this last year. So recall the words of St. Patrick's breastplate: Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me. Christ is before all things, and in him all things hang together. We are not alone. Christ is before us and Christ is with us.

John continues, "without him was not anything made that was made, and what has come into being in him is 'life'". John will later describe that life as 'life in all its fulness' or 'life abundant'. I read this morning the grim news that 73,000 people this year in the UK were certified to have died from Covid-19. I struggle to imagine those numbers. In a year where so many have lived in fear of becoming very ill, and many have lost a loved one, we take comfort from knowing that Jesus is 'life', 'abundant life', life that bubbles up and springs forth, irrepressible resurrection life.

"The life was the light of all people, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." This year my local commune in Belgium has put up many more lights than usual to try to cheer us up, and we have a magnificent Christmas tree at the heart of our local shopping square. All those little twinkling lights, point to a much greater light – the one who is the light of the world. You'll know of course the painting by Holman Hunt of Christ standing outside a closed door overgrown with vegetation, bearing a lamp and knocking. The point is that the door has no handle on the outside and can only be opened from the inside. You have to open the door of your own heart to let in the light.



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Jesus is sent from God bringing light and life. The early Christian writers said he is like one torch lit from another. But the light is in continual tension with darkness. The darkness doesn't understand or comprehend the light. But neither can it overcome the light and put it out. There is a blindness in the world which means that people do not recognize the light when it comes. So when Jesus comes to his own people they receive him not. The door stays shut.

Yet to those who do believe, Jesus gives the power to become children of God, children born not of flesh and blood or of the will of man, but of God. St. John describes a spiritual adoption ceremony into a new family. Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of this Christmas is that many of us find ourselves separated from our human families. For Helen and me, this will be the first Christmas we have ever had without any of our children with us. So there has seldom been a more significant time to give thanks that we are children of God, we are spiritual brothers and sisters, and we look forward eagerly to a time, not too far ahead we hope, when the physical togetherness both with our human and our church families can be restored.

The final verse of St. John's prologue is the climax to which whole passage is building. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.' The God who is eternal spirit, before all things, creator of all things, this God invades our space. God becomes man in a particular time and a particular place in human history. God becomes flesh – flesh which is mortal, which grows old, which is so fragile, so easily damaged.

Amongst all the Christmas gifts, this is the supreme gift – God's greatest ever gift to the world. It is the gift of a person full of grace – of loveliness, goodness, graciousness. And the gift of a person full of truth – of reality, integrity, trustworthiness. How much we need this person in our lives. How much our world needs this person in its affairs. Today. We call it the incarnation, God taking human flesh. Its an event that humanity gradually realized was of world changing significance. Which was why, amongst other things, our Western calendar was reset to Zero to mark this unique birthday.

Covid-19 has limited and attenuated so much of what gives us delight in life: physical closeness, singing carols together, family gatherings. We are right to lament those and many other losses. But in this first Chapter of St. John's gospel we find real hope. Life in all its fulness, life with God, a way ahead lit up by him who is the light of the world, membership of the family of God in which we know the fatherly care of the heavenly father.

So today, lets truly rejoice that the light still shines in the darkness, and that the darkness has not, and will not overcome it.

I wish you and those you love, whether close at hand or far away, a very happy Christmas. And I hope that during 2021, whatever the year ahead brings, God will irradiate your lives with his presence and his peace.

