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“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1).

*1 John 2:18-21; John 1:1-18*

Aristotle, one of the most systematic thinkers among the early Greeks, wrote that “a small mistake at the beginning is a big mistake at the end.” The phrase contains in a nutshell the need to carefully determine first principles and basic assumptions in any system of thought. An error or logical flaw at the outset will undermine subsequent development and conclusions throughout the system.

John the Evangelist, revered in Christian thought as the most theological and mystical of the Gospel writers, uses the Greek word *logos* to convey the idea that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the essential plan and reason underlying the cosmos, the template for every created thing. Jesus is the grammar that makes sense of the structure of reality that reveals the design and purpose of nature and the meaning of human existence.

In the three letters ascribed to John, the author fiercely defends the assertion that Jesus is the Incarnate Word. He condemns breakaway teachers who deny either the humanity or the divinity of Jesus, the seeds of subsequent heresies like Docetism and Arianism that led to the first church councils. To get Jesus wrong at this level was to miss the fundamental message of the Gospel -- that the Incarnation transforms humanity and opens it to a divine destiny.

The Prologue, like the discourses toward the end of John’s Gospel, is a majestic meditation about who Jesus is and why accepting him as the organizing principle of our lives is the key to full human maturity and spiritual development. There is no other theory of self-realization, no self-help plan, no philosophical and theological program that can address the deepest longing of the human heart or promise a way of living in which love overcomes death.

Why is this so important? On the eve of the New Year, we traditionally end one year and begin another. We start over, resolving to live more authentically and purposefully. The Evangelist John invites us to mark the blank page before us with the words, “In the beginning was the Word,” and to make Jesus Christ the organizing principle of the next 12 months of our lives. Our stories will both happen and be formed by the attitudes, goals and priorities we select from the cultural norms and influences around us. To cultivate an intimate conversation with God at the

beginning of our day, to practice a mindful awareness of the presence of grace in all things and in every encounter, are ways to let the Word speak to our hearts about what gives life and encouragement to our existence.

The Prologue (verses 1-14) is itself a prayer worth committing to memory, to know by heart as the *logos* that creates us anew each day in the image of God, that lights our path in danger and in darkness, that shows us how to become our true selves, full of grace and truth.

We say to one another, “Happy New Year.” But we can deliberately and by design make it happen for ourselves in 2020. And if it happens for us, it will happen in some measure for everyone around us in the year ahead.

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