

## Sermon Christmas 2 Sunday 4/1/2026

*Sirach 24:1-12; Psalm 147:13-21; Ephesians 1: 3-14; John 1:1-18*

*May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit, Amen.*

This morning's Gospel should be very familiar to us, given that we only heard it proclaimed a week and a half ago on Christmas morning. Those of us who were present in the Cathedral that morning will have heard the same 18 verses of John's Gospel read by Canon Arbuthnot and then unfolded by the archbishop. This morning, that call to unfold scripture falls to me. The wonderful thing about Scripture is that there is always something new to be discerned each time we approach it afresh. So let us approach the Word together.

In our worship, we approach the word both literally and metaphorically. Bernard proclaimed the Gospel a short time ago, reading from this book of holy Scripture. When we entered the Cathedral in procession about half an hour ago, he held this book aloft. He carried this book, led by candle-bearing acolytes to the centre of the Cathedral to proclaim the Word a few minutes ago and was led back by them again after he had concluded. We sang praise and worship, before and after his reading. Some of you bowed as the book passed you by. Terence, you always do so. Before this morning's service, you very kindly talked with me about why you reverence the Gospel book and permitted me to share it this morning. You said first that you reverence the Gospel book out of respect, but you returned to me five minutes later to explain further. You said, and I quote: 'the Word was made flesh and DWELLS among us'. What a beautiful insight Terence - thank you!

Language can be literal. You all have service sheets in your hands – those service sheets are covered in words. Those words are the linguistic codes we share to name things in our material world. They enable us to communicate. We humans are relational beings and our use of language is core to our relationality and shared understanding. It is also an essential tool in another great gift we have. Our

imagination gives us the capacity to tell, hear and remember stories and to understand and create images and metaphors.

Words are much more than just shared ways of describing things in our physical world. Words can also be metaphorical – they can take on new layers of meaning by becoming symbolic of something we discern or feel but cannot see. We reverence the book of Holy Scripture because we as Christians believe and feel that its words are sacred; that they have the power to give us a deeper understanding of, and insight into the nature of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That insight comes less from the literal meanings of the words contained therein, but mainly from their metaphorical meanings.

At the start of this morning's Gospel we heard these words: *'In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God.'*

The Word that we are presented with at the very start of John's Gospel is a metaphor for the second person of the Trinity – Jesus Christ, the Son – and we are left in no doubt that Jesus the Son and God the Father are one. These opening words of John's Gospel give us an insight into the divine power of God the Father and God the Son as the creator of all things that have ever been and ever will be.

God's Word is the creative force which calls everything into being, which breathes life into the material world. The opening lines of John's Gospel hark back to the opening lines of Genesis where God spoke into the darkness and the chaos to create light. That metaphor of light is repeated in the opening lines of John's Gospel – the Word brought both life and light, and darkness can never prevail. We learn that the words spoken by the Word are powerful. Both John's Gospel and the book of Genesis tell us that light came into darkness through the Word. Life-giving light is both a physical reality and also a metaphor where light signifies goodness, godliness and the Gospel.

Jesus the Word, in his earthly ministry spoke words of divine power to make literal changes. He used words of divine power to heal the sick, raise the dead, calm the storm, turn water into wine and feed the five thousand. He gave the same power to use words of divine power to make literal changes to his faith-filled followers as both the Gospels and the Book of Acts report.

We Christians continue to use words of divine power through prayer and worship, through the celebration of the Eucharist. As Christians, we are called to have faith in the power of sacred words to change both our metaphorical and our literal experiences. Let us be therefore be careful what we pray for; let us be mindful always when we use sacred words. There is an old saying ‘be careful what you wish for’. I would admonish us in the same way to be careful and mindful in what we pray for. Scripture and prayer contain words that are sacred because of their context; words that are powerful because they are sacred. We should use these words both faithfully and cautiously.

Our faith inspires our spiritual engagement with the world, with one another, and with the divine mysteries. It invites us to grapple with sacred words as metaphors that bring us into closer relationship with God and give us a deeper spiritual understanding of the divine nature of God. Two of the great gifts God has given humanity are language and imagination. Harnessed wisely, these two gifts can bring us moments of illumination.

One of the things I enjoy about those days between Christmas and New Year is the chance to live in a world of imagination and of story, whether through reading books or watching favourite films across our many TV channels. A glance at the listings each evening of the last week and a half indicated that there were repeat showings of one of my all-time favourite films – *Indiana Jones and the Last*

*Crusade.* For me, that film has everything – it has archaeology, it has action, it has humour, it has Sean Connery, and it even has a bit of Christian mysticism and metaphor. For those of you who do not share my eclectic passions, the film is about the hunt for the holy grail, the legendary chalice used by Christ at the last supper. At the very end, the chief characters are asked what they found when they discovered the holy grail. Dr. Jones senior responds simply that he found illumination.

If we are willing to open ourselves to the Word as both literally and metaphorically sacred, if we engage respectfully, creatively and faithfully, we too may find the gift of illumination.

*Let us pray*

Lord God, we give you thanks for the gift of the Word, the light of the world. We thank you for the capacities of language and imagination that you have given us so that we can understand words both literally and metaphorically. We thank you for inviting us again and again to encounter holy scripture, to pray and to share the Eucharist as we seek deeper understanding and knowledge of you. Bless and guide us as we seek divine illumination. This we ask in Jesus' name. **Amen**