A NEW WORLD COMING

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"In the beginning"; John knew exactly what he was writing, he knew that he was echoing the early words of Genesis. This wasn't an accident; John starts off his Gospel with a creation narrative.
Category: Observations

I mentioned yesterday that two of the Gospels don't mention the Christmas story at all. Mark and John make no mention of angels, shepherds, the manger or any of the other usual features of the story as we know it.

This doesn't mean that they ignore the fact that God became man. Mark kicks off like this:

> *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

which pretty much lays his cards on the table. John, as we shall see, makes even bigger statements about Jesus and who he is; it's just that neither Mark nor John see the Bethlehem nativity story as being central to what they want to say.

With this in mind, I plan to write a few blog posts over the next couple of weeks that look at the introduction to John's Gospel (John 1:1-18). Jesus without a manger, if you like. The great thing (or one of the many great things) about John's Gospel is that it was written later than the other three and with a slightly different focus. John wroteÂ out of a lifetime of meditating on the events of Jesus life and seeing how those events led to the growth and development of the early church. He didn't so much write Jesus' life-story as write an organised meditation on what Jesus did and said and how this fits into a bigger picture.

> *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word was with God.*

"In the beginning"; you might feel that you've read those words somewhere before! John starts his Gospel by echoing the words of Genesis and as he does so, he does two things.

Firstly, he sets out the amazing contention that Jesus, the man he knew and was friends with, was present and active at the creation of the universe.

> *The Word was with God in the beginning. Â All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.*

Christians get rather blasÃ© about this, but it is an amazing statement and if it is true, it changes the world completely.

But John is doing something else by mirroring the opening of the book of Genesis; he is picturing the story of Jesus as a new creation narrative. Jesus wasn't just involved in the original creation, but his life, death and resurrection point to a new creation. John emphases this point by his repeated use of the number seven in the Gospel; seven miracles and seven major sayings to echo the seven days of creation. And then, right at the end of his narrative we read.

> *Now very early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been moved away from the entrance.*

On the first day of the new week, after the work of creation was complete, Jesus rose from the dead and a new world started.

I was somewhat irritated to discover, having finished writing this piece, that I wrote something very similar five years ago. However, the last paragraph from that earlier post is too good to lose, so I'll quote it here.

> *When God became man, born to Mary and Joseph in Bethelehem, the whole world changed. The Christmas story isn't really about angels, shepherds, wise men, little donkeys or any of the other paraphenalia of Christmas, it is about the recreation of the whole world and a resetting of the fundamental relationship between the creator God and his creation. Could this be why John didn't relate the Christmas story in his Gospel? Perhaps he felt that if he retold the Bethlehem story (which Matthew and Luke had already covered) people would be distracted from the deep reality of Jesus' birth. Looking at modern society and our approach to Christmas, John was spot-on if this was his reasoning!*