

John 1:14 *'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 we approach the end of another year, how will you remember 2017? What and who has influenced our lives this past year? On the world-wide front, we had the arrival of a new American President in the White House, tweeting his personal views to the rest of the world, yet seemingly having a very restricted vocabulary, and therefore short on factual content or reasoning.

The Brexit talks finally got under way, with plenty of opinions being expressed, but with very few facts being made available. But even if we have more facts, more information, how do we separate truth from misinformation, fact from opinion? How do we establish whether someone is telling us the truth, or feeding us with false news?

However, in reality, most of us will remember the year for things which have directly affected our own lives. But the same questions arise. Words are important, but we each have to decide for ourselves how we're going to react to them. And isn't our response dependent on matters such as the motives and track record of the person speaking, and our own understanding of the wider context?

The first chapter of John's Gospel is all about 'The Word'. It uses simple phrases but we are aware that there are hidden depths in them. But what does 'Word' mean. First, we use words to communicate- so this passage tells us God wants to communicate with us. Religion is not the story of our search for God, but of God's search for us. He tells us of his love for us, first through the words of the Bible, but, more importantly, through the words and life of Jesus.

But the desire to communicate is creative. An author tells a story with words in books. A politician uses words to create new ideas in people's minds and new relationships in society. A democratic nation cannot be formed, or remain democratic, unless people, using words, talk to each other. But words have

consequences; they change the situation. So, at the beginning of the story of our universe, John tells us that, through the Word, all things came into being.

Words are used to explain ideas we haven't yet understood. When we find it hard to believe what someone tells us, they may say, 'I give you my word, my word is my bond'. The Word of God is his guarantee that we can depend on him; above all, that we can trust his promise, which we find in the Bible, that he will give eternal life to all believers. While over the years the meanings of many words may subtly change, the clear and enduring message of the Bible is that God loves us. He sent his only Son to us and is there whenever we call on him.

By our words we reveal aspects of our character to other people. So we learn of the character of God through the life of Jesus. His passion for truth, his healing power, his concern for the needy, his willingness to forgive those who repent, his encouragement of those who were lonely or depressed. God is not a remote authoritarian figure - God is like Jesus.

So we begin to get to the heart of the matter. Jesus is the Word of God; his means of communication, and his means of creation - both of the universe and of a society of loving people. The Bible contains the word of God, and Jesus is the Word of God, through whom God reveals his character. Through the way he lived and his explanations to his disciples, Jesus made it clear that God wants **us** to assume his character and to **love** those around us.

John tells us, 'The Word became **flesh and dwelt among us**'. We could not form a close relationship with God if he remained remote, beyond our comprehension. So, one aspect of God's personality became a human being at Christmas. Not only that but, while many of those he loves reject him, he makes his home among and in those of us who do love him. He gives us the power to become his children and to live with him in eternity. That's the meaning of Christmas - God gives us his Word.

From our own experience of how and when God has intervened throughout history, and in our own lives, we know the criteria of motives and track record are impeccably met. So we know we can trust Him, when He gives us His Word.