

## “*Missional beginnings*”

January 2011

### Hymn

“Let all things now living...”

VU 242

### Scripture

John 1: 1-9 (The Common English Bible)

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

A man named John was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world.

### Prayer

Let us pray together – God of the universe, the world is full of change and rebirth, of new beginnings. You call us to grow, to develop and to endure. Be with us in the changing patterns of our lives and our world. Give us courage to face the unknown, knowing that you walk with us in all the stages of our journeys. Amen

### Reflection

Like the beginning of a job, or the beginning of a marriage, or the beginning of a school semester, or the beginning of life in a new community, or the beginning of a family, the beginning of a new year creates a time for us to stop and think and plan and begin to move in an untested direction.

“Lord, I don't really feel like praying. I'm confused, everything is confused. I don't know what I'll be doing next year – I don't even know for sure what I want to be doing next year, or what I should be doing. I feel guilty praying – turning to you at a time like this because I feel two-faced to pray only when I need help and not to pray when I don't.” wrote Henri Nouwen in his book *The Selfless Way of Christ*.

Chaim Potok in his novel, *In the Beginning*, opens with the thought, “All beginnings are hard...teaching the way I do it is particularly hard, for I touch the raw nerves of faith, the beginnings of things...I say to them what was said to me, ‘be patient. You are learning a new way...All beginnings are hard’.”

In the gospel of John, the author was writing for those brought up in the Greek culture of much of the civilized world around him. He begins with “the Word”, our translation for what the Greeks thought of as the creative and life-giving principle behind the universe. Greek philosophy held it to be the instrument through which our world was called into being and held together, ‘the thought of God stamped upon the universe’.

So John begins his writing with the astonishing statement that the divine principle has become a man, that the Word has come to life, and entered the world as one of us. That same Jesus of Nazareth, whose story John is about to tell, is God's word to us. He comes to bring light and life to the dark places of our lives, even as God's creative

work brought light and order into primeval darkness and chaos at the formation of the world.

As we read in the gospel, John was sent into the world so that everyone in the world would believe in the light. He was aware of his specific mission. His mission was to testify concerning the light.

Beginnings give us strangely mixed feelings of anticipation and uneasiness. We ask, "What will be my role this year? Do I have a mission? Am I ready to commit to new responsibilities?" We listen for the inner voice bidding us to act, and then we put aside the hesitation and respond to God's nudging. In the response the energy comes. Grace always comes in transit. Our part is simply to begin. A Greek sage once said, "He has half the deed done who has made a beginning." New beginnings make new life.

Discussion As Nouwen says, more or less for all of us, how do we know what direction we will take, or what direction we want to take, or what direction we should be taking? And should we be calling on God for those directions? And is it acceptable for us to call on God only when we want help?

Closing prayer Let us pray – God of mystery and wonder, we try to understand the changing patterns of our world and of our lives. Make us aware that you are with us in the new, as you were in the old. Give us a sense of your presence in our new-found patterns and help us to walk in peace and joy through all the fords and forks on our journey. Amen.