

John 1:14-18

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son^[d] from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.^[e] ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God,^[f] who is at the Father’s side,^[g] he has made him known.

I. Intro

- a. Good morning, my name is John Seago, I’m an elder here at City Life Church. I’m happy to be continuing our Advent Series this morning with you.
- b. I have two young kids, 5 and 7, and as a parent I have a front row seat to their discovery and development of language.
- c. They’re to an age now where we get frequent random questions of what specific words or phrases mean. My daughter, Sophia will be talking and use a word, usually incorrectly, and then ask, ‘what does that word mean.’ Its great, she’s troubleshooting the English language in our daily lives.
- d. Just the other day in the car, Sophia said that something is awkward. Then followed up by asking me ‘Dad, what does awkward mean?’ I said “well, awkward is like if a situation is uncomfortable or embarrassing” She said “Oh ok.” Then she said, “It would be awkward if I married a tree.” Interesting... Not quite the most appropriate word, but I mean she’s not wrong.
- e. Its moments like these I love and cherish, then quickly stress out about because I realize we’re like her main dictionary for now. Yikes. We as parents could really mess up her perspective of the world and her ability to communicate. That's a lot of responsibility.
- f. Similarly, today we’re looking at a text in Scripture that tells us about a tool, that God used to exegete, to explain something to us. Well, it wasn’t just a tool and wasn't just something, it was an empowering being to reveal the truth about God and ourselves to us.
- g. So this morning we’re going to gaze at, ponder, and ask questions about the **incarnation** of the word, and see it brings us a better **revelation**, a better **dwelling**, and better vision of God’s **Glory**.
- h. May the Spirit give us childish wonder and curiosity as we peer into the Word become flesh.
- i. Let’s pray.

II. First, let’s look at the Incarnation

- a. Let’s start at verse 14, “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us”
 - i. Like a kid in the backseat, we need to stop and ask questions about this ridiculous claim means: The word became flesh.
 - ii. This is the first time the term “word” shows back up since verse 1.¹
 - iii. Remember, we’re in the introduction to John’s gospel, his retelling of the ministry of Christ on earth and he starts his gospel with this poetic prologue.
 - iv. Already in John 1 we’ve learn about the pre-existent Word that was God and created the universe then came into the world as the source of life and light.
 - v. So John goes back to focus on this point so we don’t miss it.
 - vi. We see that pre-existent creative God became flesh, a material body.
 1. This is what we mean by the word ‘incarnation,’ or literally “to make into flesh.”

¹ V18 reflects and expounds v1 and encloses the whole passage – inclusion –DA Carson

2. To summarize what historically Christians believe about the incarnation, we affirm that 'Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever.'²
- vii. This is phenomenal.
 1. You may not be into the Christmas Spirit, you may have lost that childish awe of what we're celebrating during advent.
 2. I admit, I'm tempted to focus on the time off of work, having a good time with friends, getting new gadgets, etc.
 3. But let's ask the Spirit to grant us a new wonder at this incarnation.
 4. Think about it, the very author not just of human anatomy, but the person wrote the code of DNA and the biological mechanisms to read that code on the cellular level, he came into his creation, he took on flesh. He was born like you and me.
 5. He existed outside of space and time, but entered these products of his own creativity and power to be born.
- viii. But let's think about what this means.
- ix. Jesus was actually human: he existed as an embryo, grew in Mary's womb, he experienced the drama of birth, he grew up and experienced human limitations and frailties: he got tired, he got hungry, he grew physically weak, he had a human mind that learned new things, he had human emotions like being troubled, stressed, and even wept over the death of a friend.³ He wasn't just pretending to be human.⁴
- x. So he was a real man in flesh, but also he is the pre-existent creator "who was with God and who was God."
 1. Also throughout the gospels we see Jesus is divine. He demonstrated his power with miracles like calming the storm and sea, multiplying food for thousands of people, healing the sick, he knew peoples thoughts, he knew the whole life story of a woman he just met at the well, and then throughout his ministry he himself claimed to be divine.⁵ Later in John 8 he says "before Abraham was, I am." A claim the Lord made in the OT.
- xi. When trying to wrap our heads around him being fully God and fully man there are some errors we could fall into:⁶
 1. Jesus wasn't a hologram: not God giving off the illusion he was human. – "Help me Obi-Wan"
 2. Jesus wasn't a jigsaw puzzle: Some parts were divine like his mind and Spirit and other parts were fully human like his body and they just fit together.⁷
 3. Lastly, Jesus wasn't a milkshake: Jesus Christ was not a mix of divine and human nature all mixed up to produce a third new type of nature.⁸
- xii. No; He was fully God and fully man in one person.

² Grudem, 529. The theological term we use for this is the 'hypostatic union.' *Hypostasis* is the Greek word for 'subsistence' or 'being.'

³ John 4:6, Matt 4:2, Luke 23:26, Luke 2:52, John 12:27, John 11:35

⁴ In fact this was a problem in his own hometown, when he taught them they could accept his teaching because they were astonished and said "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? He's just a guy, we saw him grow up. Matt 13:53-58.

⁵ Matt 8:26-27, Matt 14:19, Matt 16:19, John 21:17,

⁶ There was another view, that there were two separate persons in one body of Jesus Christ: a human person and a divine person. This is the historical heresy called Nestorianism.

⁷ This is the historical heresy called Apollinarianism.

⁸ This is the historical heresy called Monophysitism or Eutychianism.

1. The early church trying to sort this out wrote,⁹ “one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person.” Wow.
- xiii. Have I lost you yet? I know some of you science & tech people out there probably tried to avoid philosophy requirements in college, but stick with me.
 1. This is not just academic or dry theology, without the incarnation the whole gospel falls apart. For example:
 2. Only someone infinite could bear the full penalty for our sins throughout history. So he had to be divine to take that on.
 3. But also, Jesus was the second Adam, and had to be human as our representative to live an obedient life for us, where Adam and all of us failed.¹⁰
- xiv. There are also so many other facets of this Word-in-Flesh phenomenon to reflect on: The means that humanity, materiality and divinity, the supernatural are ontologically compatible. Our culture likes to typically think of religious people and Christians as dualists thinking that material/matter/natural stuff as bad and the spiritual/eternal/the divine as good. But the nature of Jesus Christ says a lot about what we are and what it means to be human: a composite both spiritual and physical. This is probably gives us insight into how the Holy Spirit can dwell inside of us and not take over like a robot or be cast out by our sin.¹¹
- xv. **I admit I prone to skepticism instead of wonder.** When I see a plastic nativity set in a neighbor’s yard, instead of reflecting on what we’re celebrating, I criticize those that made and sold these cheap, poorly made plastic yard decorations to Christians, who, to be honest, are probably just a bunch of materialistic suckers and buying this stuff up.
- xvi. But this week, when you see that little porcelain Jesus in the middle of the tacky nativity set, imagine full divinity and true humanity all in the tiny body of a new born baby. Infinite power and wisdom, in a diaper.

We have the wonder of the incarnation. John highlights three ways the Incarnation was better than God’s past relationship and interaction with humans.

III. First, Jesus is a better revelation

- a. This gets to why did the incarnation happen?
 - i. Look at verse 18 – he [the Word] has made God known.

⁹ Chalcedonian Definition: “truly God and truly man, of reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledge in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten , God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has been handed down to us.

¹⁰ Romans 5:18-19; cf Hebrews 2:16-17

¹¹ “The ontological compatibility between human and divine spheres of existence is a corollary of the incarnation. The fact that the Logos was able to take on human form suggests that divinity and humanity are not mutually exclusive modes of being. The incarnation is not simply God assuming human form, as if human flesh were a mask over his real nature. Rather, the incarnation is God as a human being and completely sharing in human properties. The incarnation shows us what God intended humanity to be and what it finally will be.” Other insights include that “divinity and humanity are not mutually exclusive modes of being.” Also, “the incarnation shows us what God intended humanity to be and what it finally will be.”

- ii. The incarnation is the beginning of the turning point of the gospel.
 - 1. The Bible tells the story of how God made a good creation but humans rebelled against God in the Fall, but God promised to redeem them, which required the cosmic arrival of Christ who would live a perfect life, sacrifice himself, raise from the dead defeated sin, death, and evil paving the way for his second coming when he will finally reunite all believers with their God in the New Creation. This is the gospel.
 - 2. With that narrative in mind, John's focusing on the point that the Word had to come to open up access and better communication to the Father, whom we've rebelled against.
- iii. The Greek word here in verse 18 for "made him known" means to set forth, expound, or exegete.¹²
 - 3. That's our goal when we preach: to take the passage and expound its meaning, not put our wisdom or meaning in the passage, but to shine the light on the verse so it speaks itself.
 - 4. Similarly, that is what Jesus was doing on earth. Jesus is the fuller exposition or explanation of God.
- iv. One question for us this morning: what are we depending upon and using to interpret God? To explain or understand God and what he's doing in our lives?
 - 5. Do we use our circumstances? – If you have a good job, stable bank account, then God loves you, he's pleased with you, but if you've lost your job, things are hard, there are trials then that must mean God is upset or not as satisfied? Maybe not even paying attention?
 - 6. What about Relationships? Do you primarily depend on your relationships with others to understand God? Only if you feel accepted or loved by someone adequately, then you feel like you know what God is doing with your life? Maybe you'll turn from sin, and seek holiness only if someone points you to that conclusion?
 - 7. These are examples of us gazing upon other things to find God.
- v. The Word entered the world to tell us something about himself and our God. Are you looking and listening to him to explain, interpret God to you?
- vi. I confess I don't. I often depend upon the opinions of others to exegete God for me. If I've convinced others in my life that I've got it together or am holy enough then that must be how God sees and accepts me. So compliments become an excuse to be less disciplined; criticisms from those I look up to echo in my mind. Jesus is better.
- b. We don't have to look to these other things to understand our Creator, he actually sent Jesus as a form of self-disclosure.
 - vii. In fact, the incarnation is far superior to all of God's other forms of communication in human history.¹³
 - viii. God no longer talked to us in just spoken declarations, or words written on a scroll, but by God with a human face.¹⁴
- c. This is John's point here in verse 15.
 - ix. John puts in this parenthetical statement to refute a possible objection.
 - x. John is essentially saying just because John the Baptist or Moses came before Jesus doesn't mean Jesus is dependent on them or of lower status. Jesus was

¹² This is the Greek word we get our term "exegesis" from.

¹³ The incarnation is better in "immediacy, clarity, and [the] personality of its revelation." Michael Bird, 205.

¹⁴ Michael Bird, 205.

not just a prophet following in their footsteps, but was better in authority and reliability.¹⁵

- xii. Jesus himself is the best Revelation of God.
- d. Like many of you this weekend, I saw *The Last Jedi*. Don't worry no spoilers. But while I anticipated this movie and I read there are new characters in this film. So I started reading and watching some YouTube videos of the backstory and guys, that rabbit hole goes deep. There are 30 min videos of nerdy fanatics explaining that this one character shows up in this Star Wars cartoon, but then is important to the plot of these two novels that give some insight into their backstory, and there was this rare deleted scene that mentions their last name... Wow. They are digging deep just to expound, to mine any facts they can about these fictional characters.
- e. Its goofy, but I pray we get a passion like that this upcoming year to understand Jesus Christ. We have unbelievable source material here (Bible). He's got a long backstory as John tells us, we have four gospels representing four different perspectives on his ministry, we have expert commentary in the rest of the New Testament about him. He's not just some random supporting character in some SciFi movie (I know, Star Wars is not just SOME SciFi movie) – **But I'm talking about the pre-existent Creator in Flesh!**
- f. Friends, whether you're a Christian or not this morning, let's draw near and dig deep to gaze at Jesus, he's a better revelation of God.

IV. Second, Jesus is a better dwelling place

- a. Look back at verse 14, “the world became flesh, and made a dwelling place among us”
 - i. John uses the word ‘to make a tabernacle.’ So he's is pointing to the Old Testament symbol of the Israelite's tabernacle.
 - ii. “This was [a temple-like tent building and] a sign of God's presence with Israel.”¹⁶ This is where God's presence dwelt among the Hebrews. They carried it around with them in the dessert.
 - iii. In Ezekiel 37 the Lord says, “²⁷ My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”
- b. The this was an important event in the OT and Jesus is a better tabernacle showing God's commitment to us and gives us better access to Him.
 - i. Remember the Word is coming in flesh so that his body may break for our sins on the cross.
 - ii. All the sacrifices and ceremony at the Tabernacle in the Old Testament were temporary and never fully atoned for sins.
 - iii. But, as Athanasius wrote “God became what we are, so that we might become what he is.”
 - 1. Think about this, Jesus became flesh, which we think of as a downgrading, he did that to atone us and to elevate us into good standing with God. He could only do that by coming and dwelling here.

¹⁵ “because he was before me” – This was in a society where age and precedence bestowed peculiar honor, that might have been taken by superficial observers to mean John the Baptist was great than Jesus. Not so, insists the Baptist.

¹⁶ Michael Bird, 503. The tabernacle “foreshadows the incarnation of the Logos (John 1:14) and God's majestic presence that will come to earth in the new Jerusalem (Rev 21-22).”

- iv. So, through the Word we now have hope for forgiveness, reconciliation, being sanctified and raised to worship the Lord in the New Creation.
- c. And with a better tabernacle, we see a better priest.
 - i. In the Old Testament there were priests to mediate between God and his people, they made sacrifices and perform rituals for them.
 - ii. Hebrews 2:17 tells us that Jesus “had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation [payment] for the sins of the people.”
 - iii. Another need for Jesus to be divine and human.¹⁷
- d. How do we respond to this better dwelling of Christ in our midst?
 - i. We need to ask, ‘Do we utilize the better dwelling and the better priest?’
 - 1. Or do we go back and use those things like our circumstances, relationships? Material comfort?
 - ii. We have an infinite, never ending source comfort, and acceptance because of Christ.
 - iii. However, usually we’re reluctant to turn to our faithful high Priest.
 - iv. We’re tempted to try to deal with our sin, make progress, before gazing at Christ.
 - v. This is an Old Testament mentality of cleaning ourselves up enough before coming to the Tabernacle.
 - vi. Church, we have a better tabernacle and a better priest who came to us before we turned to him. He literally got down in the mud and dirt to draw near to us. Let’s gaze upon him and run to him today without hesitation or pride.

V. Thirdly, Jesus brings a better vision of God’s glory

- a. We see that the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us, and look at verse 14. What do we see primarily through Jesus Christ? Glory.
- b. John tells us that we see God’s glory in Jesus Christ
- c. At first glance we not think this is a big deal, but look at verse 18
 - i. John explains, what the Jewish audience would already know, “No one has seen God,”
 - ii. This brings to mind when Moses asked to see God and the Lord replied “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”¹⁸
 - 1. When the prophet Isaiah got a slight vision of God in Is 6:5 he replies “Woe to me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips...and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty”
 - 2. Usually in the OT, the Lord did not reveal himself in a personal way.¹⁹
 - i. But unlike Moses we get to see God in and through Christ,
 - 1. The Apostle Paul said that Jesus was “the image of the invisible God”²⁰
 - 2. Then several times through the gospel of John, Jesus himself claimed “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”²¹
- d. But what is glory?
 - i. The glory of God is not some kind of spiritual shininess. If it was just some supernatural appearance, why did all those we read about last week reject Christ? Didn’t they see his halo or something?

¹⁷ 1 Tim 2:5

¹⁸ Exodus 33:20

¹⁹ Think about the voice out of a bush on fire or the Lord leading the Israelites by a pillar of fire and a cloud of smoke. “Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.” Deut 4:12

²⁰ Col 1:15

²¹ John 6:46 & 14:9

1. The science fiction writer Ted Chiang creates a world in one of his short stories where angels would randomly appear around the world to speak truth to humans, and your salvation was based on whether you listened and learned from their teaching. There was an interesting loophole in the system though you could get an automatic pass to heaven if you were in the ray of light that shoots behind the angel when they ascend back into heaven. So, there are these groups of people on their 4x4 trucks driving around chasing “Heaven’s light,” to get a glimpse of the glory and be awarded a shortcut to eternal life.
 2. God’s glory is not some accidental shininess, but John tells us it is an intentional display of the divine character seen in Christ.
 - ii. The glory was something only God the Son could manifest about God the father. It was revealing a truth about God’s character.
 - iii. Specifically, John tells us it was his truth and grace.**
- e. Here, we have a far superior expression of God’s grace
- i. Look at verses 16-17, there’s this odd phrase “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” Could seem just a superfluous phrase like an Oprah “you get some grace and you get some grace” He’s referring to two specific graces we have already received.²²
 1. Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came from Christ
 2. The grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ is fulfillment and on top of the law of Moses that was itself an earlier display of grace.
 - ii. The OT law, it was a grace: it “taught the Israelites about God’s holiness and severity of sin..., pointed to the coming of a messianic delivered...”²³
 - iii. Christ is that additional grace when the law is fulfilled and our breaking of the law is forgiven.
- f. Rest of John is explaining how the son, the word-made-flesh, narrated, exegetes God to man through his Glory.
- g. When we look to other things like circumstances, relationships, comfort, we are setting our eyes to untrue and far less gracious idols.
- h. Let’s gaze at his character and the grace of Christ who fulfilled the law for us
- VI. Let’s take a childlike position this Advent and linger in wonder over the glory, revelation, and dwelling place of God, in the person of Jesus Christ who came in the flesh to dwell among us as fully God and fully man.

²² Best interpretation is “grace instead of grace”

²³ Michael Bird, 224.