

Incarnation  
(John 1, 1 John 1)

Turn to John 1. Christians believe two preposterous things about Jesus of Nazareth. The one that's part of the gospel is the resurrection. People killed Jesus, and buried him, and on the third day God brought him back to life. The tomb was empty, that cold dead stiff body was alive and well, scars of crucifixion still clear, but a new kind of body, will never be cold and dead again.

That's the first nearly unbelievable thing about Jesus that the NT teaches. When NT preachers spoke the good news, they always included that he was crucified and God raised him to life.

The second was not a part of gospel preaching, but once we are in God's family we are taught this. The second preposterous thing we believe about Jesus is the incarnation, that Jesus of Nazareth was God come to earth as a human. That's what happened at Christmas.

Christmas is not just the birth of the saviour, although it was the birth of the saviour. At that point in time, when Jesus was conceived in Mary, that was God the Son becoming human. When Jesus was born, God entered the world. That's what we'll talk about today.

It is fairly common for Christians to have doubts about one or the other of these things. Don't be ashamed of your doubts, and don't be too discouraged by your doubts. It is not unusual, and some loyal servants of Christ have at the same time had regular doubts.

I have a powerful commentary on 2 Corinthians, by a fine old Scottish scholar, and a devout Christian, who in his preface says he sometimes still wonders if it is all true, and then goes on to write wonderful things about Christ and about following Christ.

For several years in my 20s I had serious doubts about the deity of Christ. I was unsure about the very things I will teach today. After awhile it went away, but that does not happen to everyone.

I read a little book by Karl Barth, and he included this wise advice about doubts. Three things. One, don't be proud of your doubts, as if they show your superiority in some way. Two, if you have doubts, don't pretend you don't. Three, just carry them, they are like a burden, carry them until our Lord arrives.

Today we'll look at how the Gospel of John starts, then we'll look at how the first letter of John starts. That will give us the basics of the incarnation. But I will tell you now where ends: God loved people, bad people, living in darkness. He came to us and became human so he could bring us light, and bring us life, and tell us truth straight from God. He came to bring us grace, and joy.

He became human, he became a clay jar, because he loved us. He was weak, and tempted, and had troubles and pain, so he kindly help those who are weak, and tempted, and have troubles and pain. That's where this ends, but that's not where it starts. Let's go to the beginning.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*  
<sup>2</sup> *He was with God in the beginning.*

“In the beginning” – can you think of another part of the Bible that starts like that? Exactly: Genesis 1. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* That is the first line of the Bible, and John wants to take us back to that line.

Back there at the beginning, before God actually made anything, the Word was there already. The Word was not made, it was already there, at the beginning. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

So back there at the beginning, before God created the heavens and the earth, the Word was there, and was with God. God and the Word were together. AND: the Word was itself God.

Verses 1-2 expanded: *In the beginning, back there when God was about to create the heavens and the earth, the Word was there, and the Word was with God, they were together back there at the beginning, and the Word itself was God.*

The Word was God, but the Word does not replace God. God is there, the One who created the heavens and the earth, and the Word was with that creating God, and, the Word was itself God. And then we have again: *He was with God in the beginning.* That apparently deserves repeating. Back there at the beginning, when God was preparing to create: God and the Word together.

John 1:3 - *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* <sup>4</sup> *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.* <sup>5</sup> *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

The Word is not just there, with God, at the beginning. In the beginning, when God made the heavens and the earth, the Word was working together with him. Just as in Genesis 1, God creates through speaking, like “Let there be light,” in John 1 God creates through the Word. In

Genesis 1, creating light and creating life are a big part of what God made. And just as God has life in himself, the kind of life where he can give life to things that don't have life, so also the Word has life in himself, and can give life to things that don't have life.

Verses 3-5 again: *Through him [the Word] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* <sup>4</sup> *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.* <sup>5</sup> *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

The Word brings life and light to people. People live in darkness and death, and the Word came into the darkness, that would be our world, to bring light and life to the dark human world. The light has not gone out. Darkness would like to put out the light, but it can't.

Now to v9: *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.* The Word is now called “the true light.” The Word, who is also the True Light, and comes into the world. (That's Christmas!) When Mary gave birth to Jesus, that was the Word, the True Light, coming into the world. Just one more baby boy born to the Jews.

John 1:10-11 *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*

Did not recognize him, and did not receive him. These are two separate problems. The world could have recognized him without welcoming him. “We know who you are, we were made through you, we recognize you, but we do not want you here, go away.”

Or the world could have welcomed him without recognizing him. The world could have said, “We don't know who you are, but we want you, we need what you can give us.” As it was, the world made both mistakes. The world in effect said, “We don't know who you are, but whoever you are, we don't want you.”

At the end of John 18, during his trial by Pilate, Pilate was trying to figure out why the Jews were so angry with Jesus. After a bit, Jesus said, “I came to speak the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” Pilate said, “what is truth?” and he walked away.

That is a snapshot of Jesus' whole life, right there. The world that was made through him did not recognize him, and that which was his own did not want him. Jesus said, “everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” And the world said, “what is truth?” and walked away.

Verses 12-13 - *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Finally we get some good news. There were some who welcomed him and received him. Did they recognize him? No, certainly not at first. But they did receive him, they did welcome and accept him, which means to believe in him, put trust in him.

Jesus said, “I came to speak the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” And a few people said, “Good! We're staying for this. We want the truth from you, we believe what you say.” Most people meet Jesus and do the Pilate thing. But some do the Peter thing: “Where else would we go, you have the words of eternal life.”

Incarnation! v14 - *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The Word became flesh. The Word took human form, took on humanity. “Carnal” comes from the Latin word for “flesh.” Carnivores eat meat. The Word became flesh = incarnation.

The Word, who was there at the beginning, made his dwelling with people. That started with his birth to Mary. John writes that “we saw him, we saw his glory, the Son who came from the Father, full of grace and full of truth.”

The Word became flesh, the Word became a clay jar living among a world of clay jars, the Word had the weaknesses and vulnerability of all humans, he had the troubles and temptations and pain of all clay jars, all humans.

That part all could see. The preposterous thing about this is that this person was also the Word, the one who in the beginning was with God, and was himself God. The preposterous thing is that that Word, with God at the beginning, through whom everything was made, came to earth as a weak troubled human, to bring us light, and life, and truth, and grace, and joy.

Verses 17-18 - *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the bosom of the Father [in the embrace of the Father], has made him known.*

Here John finally give us the human name of the Word: *Jesus Christ*. In v14, we got grace and truth from the Word, here grace comes through Jesus Christ.

Now lets take a look at the opening words of v14, then turn to 1 John. John 1:14 says: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

Now, turn to 1 John 4. After John wrote his Gospel, some Christians got very excited about the deity of Christ, that Christ was actually the Word who was with God at the beginning, and that was himself God. They got so wrapped up in this that they left the flesh behind. They could no longer imagine that the Word actually became flesh and lived with us.

So they basically left the human Jesus behind, as not important. They just believed in the eternal Son of God. The raw human meaty Jesus, the clay jar, was a troublesome extra they did not need.

1 John 4:1-2 *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling with us.*

1 John 1:1 John goes after these deceiving spirits and false prophets at the beginning of his letter, by emphasizing the Jesus they saw and heard.

1 Jn 1:1 *That which was from the beginning.* John again takes us back to Genesis 1, *in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*, and John also takes us back to his Gospel: *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

His letter begins, *That which was from the beginning*, in other words, “*That Word, which I explained in my Gospel, who became flesh and lived with us.*”

Let’s start 1Jn 1:1 again. *That which was from the beginning [in other words, that Word who was with God, as I explained in my Gospel], which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched [we heard him with our ears, we saw him with our eyes, we touched him with our hands]—this [what we heard and saw and touched] we proclaim, concerning the Word of life.*

<sup>2</sup> *The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.* <sup>3</sup> *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.* <sup>4</sup> *We write this to make our joy complete.*

As far as John is concerned, our only access to the truth and to eternal life is the real human Jesus of Nazareth, what that man said and what that man did. “All we have,” says John, “is what our ears heard, our eyes saw, and our hands touched.”

“All we have to give you, all we have to preach, is that person whom we heard and saw and touched.” Our fellowship with each other, and with God himself, depends on that Jesus.

Theology – Here are the three main points of the Council of Chalcedon, 451, my paraphrase. One, Jesus Christ was completely Divine, not half God but all the fullness of deity was in Christ, as we read in Colossians.

Two, Jesus Christ was completely human, not half human but full human nature, body and soul. As it says in Hebrews, he was made like us in every way, and tempted in every way, as we are.

Three, he is one person. The two natures (divine and human) are not confused, but joined inseparably and indivisibly. Jesus did NOT go back and forth between humanity and deity, though was sometimes speak as if he did, he did NOT have a dual personality.

Jesus the Lord is fully God and fully human. Not half God and half human, as if he was a cross between the two, but fully God and fully human, in one undivided Person. He is the God-man.

Where we differ from Chalcedon, the Scriptures themselves will slowly get us back in line.

Why? Why Incarnation? Why Christmas? Why did the Word become Flesh, Live with Us?

Not complicated. God loved the world so much, that he sent his one and only Son. There are many good things on earth, but there was also too much darkness, too much death, too many lies, too much pain and trouble and sadness.

So God the Father sent God the Son, to bring light, to bring eternal life, to tell the truth, to bring God's grace. To be fair, that did not start with Jesus. God had been bringing these things already, through Abraham and Moses and David and Israel.

But when God send his Son, we realized that those earlier messengers of God had all been preliminary, those had been like the introduction to the real truth and life from God.

And the Son came into the world that had too much darkness, too much death, too many lies, too much pain and trouble and sadness. He was not going to get rid of all that right away, so he came and lived in it.

He became a clay jar, weak and troubled, all the things that go along with being born and growing up and living and also dying, so he could understand what it was like for all of us who are weak and troubled.

Jesus said, "I came to speak the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." Pilate said, "what is truth?" and he walked away. Earlier in John, Jesus said to the twelve, "Are you going to leave too?" Peter said, "Lord, where would be go? You have words of eternal life." That is the right response to the Incarnation. Amen.

Council of Chalcedon, provided by Google 17 Dec 2017:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] 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 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 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 handed down to us.