

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ

John 1:14

John 1:1 says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John 1:18 says: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

I. THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

John 1:10 says of Jesus Christ: “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.” This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. It gets worse. Verse 11 says: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” When Jesus came, the world did not know its Creator and Israel did not receive its Messiah. But there is good news. **John 1:12-13** says: “But to all who did receive him, who believe in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh or the will of man, but of God.” The one who receives Jesus and believes in his name becomes a born again child of God. But how does Jesus have the right to make sinners children of God? **John 1:14** answers: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” This opening clause makes two statements about the mystery of the incarnation.

A. GOD THE SON BECAME FLESH.

Verse 14 says: “And the Word became flesh.” We are introduced to “the Word” in the opening verse of John’s Gospel. **John 1:1** says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This verse does not state the identity of the Word. It reveals the nature of the Word. John’s Gospel opens with the same words that start the book of Genesis: “In the beginning.” This is a subtle way of placing the Word on the same level as God. The verse itself makes this point explicitly: The Word is God. The Word is eternally God: “In the beginning was the Word.” The Word is equally God: “and the Word was with God.” The Word is essentially God: “and the Word was God.” The Word is co-eternal, co-equal, and co-essential with God the Father. The evidence that the Word is God is that the Word co-created the world. **John 1:2-3** says: “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

Greek philosophers and Jewish rabbis would have no problem with these opening verses of John’s Gospel. They acknowledged the eternal Word to be the living God who created world. But Greek philosophers did not believe that God would take on flesh. And Jewish rabbis did not believe any human being could be equal with God. Yet **John 1:14** declares, “And the Word became flesh.” The verb “became” is significant. The birth of a child is the creation of a new life that did not previously exist. Every person born into this world will live forever in either eternal life or eternal punishment. But we have a definite starting point. We will live after we die. But we did not exist before we were born. Not so with Jesus. The Word was God before the Word became flesh. And the word did not stop being God when the Word became flesh. And in the mystery of the incarnation, the eternal Word and the

Jesus of history are one. **Philippians 2:6-7** says of Christ Jesus: “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking on the form of a servant, being found in the likeness of men.”

The word became flesh. Note, John did not say the word became human, or became a man, or took on a body. John uses the crude word “flesh.” In the writings of Paul, the word “flesh” often carries negative connotations, indicating the manifestation of our sinful nature. But John does not use the word here to indicate sinfulness. He uses it to indicate humanness. John is not making the scandalous claim that Jesus was a sinner. He is making the scandalous claim that Jesus was the Son of God who became a human being. **Hebrews 4:15-16** says: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” This is why we have access to the throne of Grace. The Word became flesh.

B. GOD THE SON DWELT AMONG US.

Verse 14 says: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The second part of this clause emphasizes the first part. In the Old Testament, God manifested himself various ways. The manifestations were unique, supernatural, and temporary. But the incarnation of Jesus was more than another manifestation of God. In Christ, God did not show up to make a special appearance. God moved into the neighborhood. The incarnate Word dwelt among us. The word “dwelt” literally means to pitch one’s tent. John’s Jewish readers could not help but think of the Old Testament tabernacle when they read these words. The tabernacle was the tent of meeting, where God met with his people, before the permanent temple was erected in Jerusalem. **Exodus 40:34** says: “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” As the glorious presence of God dwelt among Israel in the tabernacle, the glorious presence of God dwells with Christians in Christ.

Jesus lived among us in a tent of flesh. Paul uses the image to illustrate the temporary nature of our earthly existence. **2 Corinthians 5:1** says: “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” We live in tents of flesh. They provide shelter. But you don’t buy a big screen and install a satellite dish in a tent.

This is a powerful metaphor for the presence of God.

II. THE MAJESTY OF THE INCARNATION

In **Exodus 33:18**, Moses said to the Lord, “Please show me your glory.” Moses was God’s man. Yet his passionate plea was denied. The Lord permitted Moses to see his passing goodness. But God did not allow Moses to see his glory. It

would kill him. No one can look on the face of God and live. This is the human dilemma. We long for the glory of God. Yet sinful man cannot survive the glory of a holy God. But the prayer of Moses was ultimately answered in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. **John 1:14** says: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory."

Here is clear illustration of the harmonious relationship between the divine and human authorship of the Bible. **John 1:14** is God-breathed scripture. But John is no dispassionate reporter simply reading from a divine teleprompter. John reports the personal testimony of an eyewitness: "we have seen his glory." The divine glory of Jesus was veiled in human flesh. But the disciples saw glimpses of glory in the miracles Jesus performed. They saw the moral glory of Jesus in the righteous life he lived. And Peter, James, and John were exclusive witnesses of the TRANSFIGURATION of Jesus, when his divine glory shined through his human flesh. John declares, "And we have seen his glory." The apostles saw more than a ghetto carpenter turned upstart rabbi. They saw the incarnate Word dwelling among us.

We do not have John's vantage point. But every Christian shares John's testimony. We have seen his glory. **1 Peter 1:8-9** says: "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." When you look at Jesus what do you see? If you can look at Jesus and not see his glory you are not saved! Run to the cross and look again. What does it mean to behold the glory of Jesus today? To see the glory of Jesus is to believe two divine facts about him.

A. JESUS IS THE ONLY SON OF GOD.

John 1:14 says: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."

This is the first of four times this term is used in John's Gospel. It is used here. John 1:18 says: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." And John 3:18 says: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

B. JESUS IS EVERYTHING YOU NEED.

Verse 14 says: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." The glory of Jesus is the exclusive glory of the one and only Son of the living God. But what does that glory look like in practical terms? John answers: "full of grace and truth." In the Old Testament, two attributes are constantly mentioned together to summarize the character of God. They are steadfast love and faithfulness. In our text, John states these Old Testament attributes in New Testament terminology and

applies them to Jesus. The glory the Son of God is full of grace and truth. Jesus is everything you need. He is all all-sufficient Prophet, Priest, and King.

The terms “grace” and “truth” get star billing in this phrase. But the award for the best supporting role goes to the word “full.” Anyone can be gracious. And anyone can be truthful. But our sinfulness makes it difficult to be gracious and truthful at the same time. It is impossible for sinners to be full of grace and truth. Only God can be completely gracious and perfectly righteous at the same time. And John ascribes these perfections to Jesus. **John 1:17** says: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The grace of God and the truth of God both fully reside in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

JESUS IS FULL OF GRACE. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. It is when God gives good gifts we do not deserve. Grace is more than amazing. It is scandalous. Grace loves the ugly, rewards the failure, and blesses the rebel. Any and every favor of God toward humanity is an expression of grace. Grace comes in two forms. First, there is common grace. It is the grace of God bestowed upon all humanity without distinction. **Matthew 5:45b** says: “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” If I were God, I would only let the sun shine over the land of good farmers. I would only let the rain fall on the fields of just farmers. But God bestows grace on the good and the evil, on the just and the unjust. Thank God for common grace. But you can live as a beneficiary of common grace and die in sin and go to hell. You need saving grace to go to heaven. Saving grace is that special grace God gives that saves sinners from his eternal punishment by faith in the atoning blood of Jesus. **Ephesians 2:4-5** say: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.”

JOHN MACARTHUR said it well: “Grace is a single-word definition of the gospel, the good news of God’s offering salvation to sinful and unworthy mankind.” Christian theology is all about grace. The gospel is a message of grace. Grace is the most essential concept in the Bible and in the church and in the world. Yet this all-important word is only mentioned three times in John’s Gospel, all in the prologue. The first reference in **John 1:14**: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” This seemingly passing reference to grace is arguably the most important statement about grace in the New Testament. Hear it again: Jesus, the Son of God is full of grace. What does that mean? **John 1:16-17** says: “And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

JESUS IS FULL OF TRUTH. The word “grace” is only used three times in John’s Gospel. But “truth” is a dominating theme of the fourth Gospel, being used some twenty-five times. What is truth? It is speech, behavior, or character that is consistent with reality. It is absence or rejection of error, falsehood, or pretense. Truth is what is real. Maybe the best way to understand truth is to juxtapose it to grace. Grace is the goodness of God at work. Truth is the holiness of God at work. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. Truth is the uncompromising character of God. Grace is revelation of God’s love. Truth is the revelation of God’s light.

I recently watched a reality TV program. A young lady on the show was making obviously stupid decisions. When her mother finally confronted her, the young girl incredulously asked, "If you truly love me, why won't you support me?" And the mother backed off. Wrong response. Love and support are separate, independent, and sometimes opposing realities that refuse to work together. Sometimes love cannot support a thing. There are some things love cannot support and still be love. Sometimes love has to disagree. Sometimes love has to fight. Sometimes love has to walk away. It's called tough love. And the essential ingredient of tough love is truth. Love without truth is hypocrisy. Are you a hypocrite? God isn't! God's love is real. God's tender love is called grace. God's tough love is called truth. God's tender love and God's tough love always work in perfect concert with one another and one never contradicts the other.

You may ask, "If God is a God of grace why could he not simply declare us forgiven? Why did he have to send his Son to die on the cross for our sins?" To ask that question is to betray the fact that you do not understand the sinfulness of sin. And you do not understand the character of God. The holiness of God demands the wages of sin be paid. Sin created the great debt. Grace paid the awesome price. But truth set the high cost. JOHN A. BENGEL commented: "Truth is grace clad in a promise, and put forth." And that promise is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, Jesus declares, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus did not say, "I will tell you the truth." Or, "I will show you the way." Or, "I will teach you how to live." Jesus declares himself to be the way, truth, and life. And Jesus did not say he was one of the ways or part of the truth or an aspect of life. Jesus declares, "I, and only I, am the way, the truth, the life." Bottom-Line: The only way to God is through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, who lived a righteous life, died on the cross, and rose from the dead.