

The Incarnation of God #5 The Prologue of John

Intro: As we've seen in our past few lessons, Jesus claimed to be the incarnation of God; but He did not ask people to believe in Him based solely on His claims. He offered them legal proof as a basis for their faith, i.e. witnesses who could testify as to who He was. Jesus offered three witnesses to back up His claims: 1) the testimony of His forerunner John the Baptist; 2) the testimony of His works (or signs) that He performed; and 3) the testimony of the Father through the OT Scriptures that He fulfilled.

As John witnessed Jesus' life first-hand, he became persuaded that Jesus was no mere man, but rather God in the flesh. So before presenting the claims of Jesus and the evidence that He offered to prove those claims, John makes a statement of faith about Him. He begins his gospel with a prologue, a foreword if you please, that anticipates and distills the truth about who Jesus is and what it means to the world He entered. It is one of the greatest statements of faith about Jesus in all of Scripture.

As we conclude this series on the incarnation of God, it is important that we have the most accurate understanding not only of who Jesus is, but also what His incarnation means to us.

With that in mind let's turn to John one and see what John affirms about Jesus.

Jesus was the eternal God who created all things.

"In the beginning was the Word" (Jn. 1:1)

John's statement connects Jesus with the opening words of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And as he proceeds you'll hear many linguistic connections between John 1 and the creation account (light, darkness, life to name a few). Jesus is not only the source of the original physical creation; He is also the creator of a new spiritual creation described in this chapter.

In this opening statement John makes clear that Jesus existed before "the beginning" of the created universe. *"And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."* (Colossians 1:17) He is eternal. Moreover John chooses to describe him as "The Word." The idea is not that Jesus was some abstraction—the spoken word or breath of God, but the idea is that He is the one who communicates and reveals God the Father to man. That will become clearer later.

The next phrase advances the idea further:

"...and the word was God."

If Jesus "was" in the beginning the implication is clear, He is the God of Gen. 1:1. He has all the attributes of deity.

And we now see that the “God” who created heaven and earth was not a single personality but a perfect union of three persons—the Father (God), the Son (The Word), and the Holy Spirit.

“...and the same was in the beginning with God.”

The Word existed in the presence of the Father in loving unity and glory. Later in John you’ll hear Jesus say in His prayer in John 17:

“And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” (John 17:5)

As one in essence with God (the Father), Jesus was also the creator of all things:

“All things were made by Him and without him nothing was made that has been made.”

John affirms that Jesus was himself the creator of all things that were created; and as the creator of all things made, He is Himself excluded from things made. He was not merely the first created thing God made as the JW’s teach (“a” god as the New World Translation says); but the eternal God who created all things.

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.”

(Colossians 1:16)

That creative power will be seen in Jesus’ miracles such as turning water to wine or feeding the five thousand from a boy’s lunch.

He entered our world of darkness in order to illuminate it.

John starts with Jesus’ nature as God:

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:4-5)

For us, life is a gift given by God; for Jesus, life is intrinsic to His nature as God. We have life from Him; He has life in Himself.

“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;” (John 5:26)

This divine life in all its qualities is the source of man’s illumination.

Ours was and is a world of darkness (ignorance and sin); but Jesus came to be “the light of the world.”

“Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.”” (John 8:12)

This “light” could not be “overpowered” or “comprehended” by the darkness. The Greek “katalambano” can be used in both senses; so commentators vary in their explanations, some choosing one or the other, some even affirming both meanings. If the light is not “overpowered” it suggests the ultimate victory of the light over the darkness. If it is not “comprehended” it anticipates the rejection of the light by the world because it did not understand the light.

Amazingly He entered the world He created, as one of us, in order that we might see the glory of God.

Such an important event surely called for a special announcement.

Consequently God sent a prophet to announce His coming!

There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light.

(John 1:6-8)

That “man sent from God” was John the Baptist who God had prophetically announced through Isaiah and Malachi would “prepare the way” for His coming. John said many things about Jesus, namely, that He was the “Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” and “the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit and fire.” But for John’s purposes he appeals to a single statement that pointed to Jesus’ pre-incarnate existence:

*John *bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” (John 1:15)*

Even though John’s birthday was six months before Jesus,’ he made the astounding declaration that Jesus existed prior to him. It was His pre-existence that gave Him “higher rank” and making clear that John was not the light, but rather a witness to the light.

And so the prophet John came to announce the arrival of God and the light that He would bring to the world. Thus, John adds about the one that John testified about:

There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (John 1:9)

Later John would summarize all this again with a single phrase:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us... (Jn. 1:14)

The one who was God, who was with God, who created all things, became flesh (incarnation)! He entered our world as man without ceasing to be God!

The early church vehemently debated the nature of Jesus’ earthly existence, some emphasizing the human nature of Jesus, others the divine nature, some the merging of two natures into one. But the concept that eventually won the day was the concept that in Jesus two natures, human and divine, exist together in one person. What is important is not that we somehow explain the miracle of the incarnation, but that we believe and acknowledge that the creator came into our world and experienced the life that we live with all its temptations and yet without sin.

And here he “dwelt.” John uses a form of the word sometimes translated “tabernacle.” Just as the OT tabernacle became the dwelling of God among Israel to reveal His presence and glory, so God now

took residence in flesh to reveal His presence and glory. He fulfilled all the types of the Mosaic sanctuary.

He is the altar which makes atonement, the laver which cleanses, the menorah which enlightens, the bread of the presence which provides fellowship, the incense which intercedes, the torn veil which gives access to the eternal presence of God, the author of the new covenant, the divine king enthroned above the cherubim.

When we think of the wonder of His coming to earth, one might have expected such a coming of God into flesh would produce the most hospitable and glorious welcome recorded in human history; but instead:

He was rejected by the world He had made, and even by His own people.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (John 1:10-11)

John shows us an amazing truth of Jesus' incarnation, namely, that the Creator of all things entered His own creation and those He created did to know who He was!

But even more, He came into the world of His own people, the Jews, who had heard His voice centuries before and been given His Law and exhorted by His word through the prophets and had been delivered countless times by His power. But even they did not welcome Him! No, they did not give Him the deserved and expected response; they did far worse! They rejected and crucified him!

“But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?”” (John 12:37–38)

And thus the eternal God who made all things became the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 who died for our sins, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

And yet, John's message is, that there were and are those who saw Him and believed:

But to those who see His glory and believe in Him, He gives His grace!

“and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

What did the disciples of Jesus see that the world missed? They saw His glory! By glory we mean the “outward shining of his inward person as the light.” Of course God's glory had always been seen in the creation; but Jesus brought the glory of God down to earth for mankind to see. They saw His glory in His miracles! In His teaching! In His personality and character! In His crucifixion! In His resurrection! In such things John says we saw that Jesus was no mere man, but that He was “the only begotten from the Father,

full of grace and truth.” What all these things declared about Jesus was that He was the “unique or one-of-a-kind Son of God’ and as the Son of God, He was full of grace and truth for those who would receive it!

These disciples had been born under the Law and had grown up in a culture that honored Moses as the great prophetic law-giver of the past. But what they saw in Jesus was someone far greater and whose word would not bring spiritual death like the Law, but eternal life.

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

Moses revealed in the Law the justice of God; but the Word in His person revealed the grace of God!

Moses revealed in the Law revealed God’s presence in the types and shadows of the OT economy; but the Word revealed God’s presence in truth or reality!

In Jesus is found the most complete declaration of God possible! John is therefore moved to write:

No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18)

Yes, people in the OT were said to “see God,” but only in theophanic or anthropomorphic expressions, not in His full essence.

But to see Jesus Christ was to see God Himself! Jesus had said so to Phillip:

“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” (John 14:9)

“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3)

Jesus is the “exegesis” of God!

And now He enjoys the close fellowship He once had with the Father in heaven—“in the bosom of the Father;” (a beautiful portrayal of the intimate relationship of the Father and the Son) but he has left with us the abundant blessings of His coming.

Of His fullness we all have received & grace upon grace (Jn. 1:16)

Jesus came to give to us “out of” His fullness, the fullness of His light, life, grace and truth, what Paul called “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). And this grace comes in continual supply, never exhausted for those who continue to walk in the light.

Or to put it another way, the Son of God came to give those who believe the right to become sons of God with all the blessings of divine sonship.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

And so John shows us how we can share in the fulness of the only begotten Son. By believing in Him, by receiving Him, by being spiritually born of God, so that we can become His children.

And notice that this birth is not a physical one brought about by a man's will to have a child or by mere ethnic descent as a Jew, but a spiritual one brought about by the will of God. James says: *"In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures."* (James 1:18)

It is appropriated by "receiving" Jesus (that is by accepting Him into our lives as the Christ, Savior, and Lord (Col. 2:6). Or to put it another way, it is appropriated by "believing on His name," that is trusting in and acting upon who He is said to be.

It is, as Jesus would explain to Nicodemus, a new birth of water and the Spirit, *"a washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit"* (Titus 3:5).

Or to express it in terms of our response:

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:26–27)

And thus John comes full circle to tell us that the one who created the world in the beginning is in fact the same one who is the creator of a new creation, a spiritual family that belongs to God and is destined for eternal life with Him.

Conclusion: The prologue of John then tells us the story of Jesus as the incarnation of God. In all its richness and depth it declares a simple and powerful message which would be derived by reading John's gospel: The eternal God who created all things came into our world to illuminate it. He was rejected by the world He made and even by His own people. But to those who see His glory and believe in Him, He is the source of light, life, grace, truth, and divine sonship. This is the story of Jesus!

This is the message that John hoped to bring before our spiritual eyes in the course of his presentation. He wants us to watch Jesus' every act—to marvel at His miracles, listen to His claims, and evaluate the testimony so that we might see His glory and believe, and that in believing we can have the life He came to bring to us. In a word his exhortation to us is "see His glory...receive His grace." Have you?