

The Word Became Flesh

John 1:1 18

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I SPENT some time this week reading academic research about Christmas.¹ The narrative takes you to western Turkey in the fourth century with Nicolas the bishop of Myra. The story goes allegedly that he gave Arius a black eye at the Council of Nicea. Then you go to southern Italy in the eleventh century where Nicolas' bones were taken after being stolen because Islam had overrun Turkey. Then there's Wodin the white-bearded Norse god who rode a horse in the sky throwing his spear down to kill the naughty people while saving the good. Then there's the Dutch Sinterklas who on St. Nicolas' birthday, December 6, does around on a flying horse from house to house dropping presents down chimney's of good kids while his servant Zwarte Piet drops coal. Then there's Father Christmas in England. And finally you come to Madison Avenue where everything we do for Christmas was invented in praise of the Almighty Dollar!

¹ <http://www.arthuriana.co.uk/xmas/>

We celebrate Advent and Christmas to get our minds off these false gods of ancient pagan societies, to get our minds off the works-oriented schemes of naughty and nice, and to get our minds off the idolatry of consumption in our culture. We celebrate Jesus Christ! Amen? We celebrate with four profound words: **The Word became flesh.** The eternal Son of God entered our world as one of us that he might take us to God!

W*HO is the "Word?"* John opens his Gospel by taking us back to creation. But notice how Genesis 1:1 opens with, "In the beginning God created," meaning, the beginning of time, John takes us beyond time: **in the beginning** meaning, before creation **was the Word** (v. 1). Why does he speak of the **Word**? How did God create in the beginning? "And God *said*." God created by means of his word.

Theologians have grasped for centuries what is beyond our comprehension that the **Word** that God spoke to create was his Son, the Word, who was in the beginning, who was God, and who was with God.

According to St. John, this **Word** is a Person! And that **Word was with God** (v. 1) meaning in relation to God the Father. **And the Word was God** (v. 1). Here is that mystery of our Holy God, who is one essence yet in

distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And to put to rest any idea that this **Word** or Son was somehow a creation of God, less than God, John says **he was in the beginning** meaning eternity **with God** (v. 2). His distinction from the Father yet his relation to him is why John says while **no human being has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known** (v. 18). The Word is the “only-begotten Son” who alone has been in the “bosom” of the Father, that secret place of fellowship and intimacy. For he alone has seen the Father.

So who is **the Word**? He's the eternal Son of God who has always existed in perfect felicity and fellowship with the Father and Holy Spirit.

Who is **the Word**? Notice the parallels here to the creation story. *First*, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1); John says **all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made** (v. 3) and again **the world was made through him** (v. 10). Everything exists because of the Word's power. *Everything!*

Second, “In the beginning” when “darkness was over the face of the deep” (Gen. 1:2), God’s first word was, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). John says the Word is **the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it** (v. 5); John says the Word is **the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world** (v. 9). The darkness of the first creation was because there was no created light; the darkness of the fallen world is the darkness of sin and rebellion. The entire *kosmos*, the universe, the “world” is simply put, **darkness**.

Third, “in the beginning” God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures” (Gen. 1:20). Now John says **in him was life, and the life was the light of men** (v. 4). The Word is the source of life. In the first creation God gave natural, earthly, physical life. The Word gives eternal, heavenly, spiritual life.

Fourth, “in the beginning” at the first creation God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26a); when the Word came to begin recreation John says **all who did receive him, who believed in his name, the gave the right to become children of God** (v. 12).

So who is **the Word**? He's the eternal Son of God who has always existed in perfect felicity and fellowship with the Father and Holy Spirit and who together with them created all things, gave light to all things, gave life to all things, and who now gives new life to all who receive the gift that is Jesus Christ! The Word, who is the Son, who is our Lord Jesus Christ, is so much more than Santa Claus, whom Madison Avenue created! "He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he's knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness' sake." I don't think so! Give me Jesus instead!

W^{HAT} did he do? We're told in a matter of fact way of the Word's coming into the world (v. 9) and that **he was in the world** (v. 10). But then there's that not so matter of fact stupendous declaration: **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us** (v. 14). Did you hear that? You and I are here today and we're thinking of who's coming to town for Christmas, but God wants us to know about the greatest coming into the world ever known!

The same eternal **Word** that we just saw who created all things came from perfect love with Father and Spirit and **dwelt** among loveless

sinner who destroyed his good creation. Now you gotta see that this term **dwelt** means so much more than just what you might be thinking. John is saying **the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us**. Just like he's using creation themes here he also uses Old Testament redemption themes too. Jesus Christ is the eternal Word and Son of God as we saw; he's also that glorious presence of God shown in cloud and fire in the ancient tabernacle and temple. Amen? But note the great paradox: his glory was not seen in outward splendor but in lowliness as he becomes flesh and as he suffered for sinners. Here is his glory!

And because he has **dwelt among us** we who have received him have experienced genuine grace and glory: **and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth** (v. 14).

By faith we can sing:

The everlasting Son
incarnate stoops to be;
himself a servant's form puts on,
to set his people free.

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becamest poor;
Thrones for a manger didst surrender,
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.

Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest man;
Stooping so low, but sinners raising
Heavenwards by thine eternal plan.

It's by faith that we recognize this lowly man for who he truly is: God in flesh. By faith we perceive that he is "the LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abounding in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6). Those terms "**grace and truth**" speak of his covenant keeping. **For from his fullness** (of grace and truth) **we have all received, grace upon grace** (v. 16). The super-abundance of grace that God is and that God gives to sinners like you and me is piled up in one place: Jesus Christ! What we experience in him is inexhaustible! **For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ** (v. 17).

Have you received eternal life in Jesus Christ? This is the purpose of John's Gospel. He tells us at the end: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:30-31). Receive him today! Recognize him as your Creator. Believe he is your Savior. And become a new creation with a new beginning today!