

John 1:1–18 and The Incarnation of Jesus

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- What is the incarnation of Jesus? Why is it an essential truth within the faith?
- What do so many self-professing Christians emphasize the incarnation of Jesus to the neglect or the exclusion of other facets of his life and ministry?

Introduction

John 1:1–18 introduces the book of John, and it reveals truths about Jesus that stretch from his pre-existence, to his entrance into and presence in the world as “the God-man.” What is the incarnation of Jesus and what makes it so significant within the Christian faith?

1. **Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, has always existed in perfect fellowship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit:** “1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1; cf. Gen. 1:1–2).
2. **The incarnation is the truth that Jesus took on human flesh; he became a human:** “14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).
3. **Jesus is both fully God and fully human in one person:** “9 For the entire fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily in Christ” (Col. 2:9; cf. 1:19).
4. **Jesus’s conception within the virgin Mary was a miracle of the Holy Spirit—a miracle in which Jesus was conceived without inheriting a sin nature:** “18... After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18; cf. Luke 1:35; Rom. 5:12–21).
5. **Jesus’s incarnation and death fulfilled God’s promise of salvation through the offspring of Eve:** “14 So the LORD God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than any livestock and more than any wild animal...15 I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel [the proto-gospel]”” (Gen. 3:14–15).
6. **Jesus was born to die—to save his people from their sins:** [The angel said to Joseph in a dream regarding Mary,] “21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21; cf. Luke 2:11).

We organize John 1:1–18 into four sections: (1) The Eternal Word (vv. 1–5), (2) The Witness of John the Baptist (vv. 6–8), (3) The Responses to the Light (vv. 9–13), and (4) The Multifaceted Uniqueness of the Incarnate Word (vv. 14–18). We conclude by summarizing how we should live in light of the doctrine of the incarnation.

1. The Eternal Word

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome [or understand] it. (John 1:1–5)

In the beginning of the universe, the Word existed (v. 1; cf. Gen. 1:1), and we know that Word is Jesus, for “the Word became flesh” (v. 14). “The Word” is a fitting title for Jesus, because he is the perfect self-expression of God the Father. In the beginning, the Word was also *with* God the Father, and the Word *was* God in his essence (vv. 1–2). He is also the one through whom God created the universe (v. 3; cf. Col. 1:16). In Jesus was life, which “was the light of men” (v. 4). That last expression refers to “either our essential constitution (i.e., humans are made in the image of God) or the Word’s reflection in the universe he created (i.e., what theologians call “general” revelation) or more specific revelation bound up with the Son’s coming” (*NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, 1892). Jesus reveals God and his truth to all. Verse five is intentionally ambiguous to make two points: (1) the *literal* light shines in the *literal* darkness, and the *literal* darkness did not *overcome* it AND (2) Jesus is the *moral* light, who shines in the *moral* darkness, and the *moral* darkness did not *understand* him (v. 5; cf. John 3:19–20).

- Why do those who are living in moral darkness fail to understand and obey Jesus?
- What are examples of how we love sin? What false promises does sin make to us?

2. The Witness of John the Baptist

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. (John 1:6–8)

God sent John to testify about the light (who is Jesus), for the purpose that all people would trust in Jesus through John’s ministry (vv. 6–7). John was not the light, but he testified about the light (v. 8). John serves as an excellent contrast “for the true light because he is transitory [not permanent, not eternal] and functions as a witness” to Jesus (*ibid.*, 1892).

- What did it mean for John the Baptist to witness to Jesus?
- What did it mean for the apostles to witness to Jesus after his resurrection?
- What does it mean for us to witness to Jesus?

3. The Responses to the Light

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, 13 who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:9–13)

Jesus is the true light—revelation that truly discloses God and his will for humanity (v. 9). Jesus is both the one through whom God created the world and the one who entered the world as a human being (v. 10). All people are therefore accountable to him and face a choice. Most people fail to recognize who he is, and therefore they do not receive him into their lives by trusting him (vv. 10–11). But for all who receive him by faith, he gives them the right to become God’s children (v. 12), which reflects a supernatural birth from God (v. 13).

- Why did Jesus’s own people (the Jews) fail to recognize and receive him?
- Given that Jesus is our creator, what responses honor him?

4. The Multifaceted Uniqueness of the Incarnate Word

14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified concerning him and exclaimed, “This was the one of whom I said, “The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.”) 16 Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, 17 for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side—he has revealed him. (John 1:14–18)

The Word became a human. He dwelt (tabernacled) among us—a clear reference to the place where God met his people in the wilderness (v. 14; cf. Exod. 25:9). The apostles observed Jesus’s glory, glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (v. 14). John testified to Jesus’s exalted rank and preexistence (v. 15). The Mosaic law was a gracious gift from God, but the arrival of Jesus is a new, superior grace from God (vv. 16–17). No one has ever seen God the Father, but Jesus—who is God’s unique Son, is himself God in his essence, and exists at the Father’s side—has revealed God to us (v. 18; cf. Heb. 1:3).

- Read John 17:1–5. Where do we see Jesus’ glory (his radiant, supreme importance)?
- In what ways does Jesus reveal the Father to us?

Sound Doctrine: Living in Light of The Incarnation

Below we outline ways to respond to the truth of Jesus's incarnation.

1. **Jesus is not a baby, and we must strive to see Jesus holistically as he is presented in the Bible.** Jesus, the eternal Word of God: (1) became a human (John 1:14), (2) lived a perfect life (Heb. 4:15), (3) died to atone for sins (1 John 2:2), (4) was raised from the dead by God (Acts 2:24), (5) ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9), (6) sat down at the right hand of God to rule (Heb. 1:3), (7) sent the Holy Spirit into the world (John 15:26), (8) intercedes for his people (Heb. 7:25), (9) will return in judgment (Rev. 19:11–21), and (10) will rule forever in the new creation (Rev. 21:23; 22:1,3). These truths are foundational and essential for our lives with God.
2. **We grieve because of our sinful condition and sinful decisions.** God sent Jesus into the world for a reason: to die on a cross so that all who believe in Jesus would not perish eternally, but have eternal life with God (John 3:16, 36). Jesus came to die—for sinners.
3. **We use the truth of Jesus's incarnation as one way of spotting and removing false prophets and false teachers from our midst.** “1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world” (1 John 4:1–3).
4. **We humble ourselves before one another—considering others more important than ourselves and serving one another.** Jesus' death on a cross atoned for the sins of his people. But Jesus's willingness to become a human and to die on a cross are also the ultimate examples of humility. “3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others. 5 Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, 6 who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. 7 Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, 8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross” (Phil. 2:3–8).
5. **We worship God and Jesus Christ—for who they are and for what they have done, including Jesus coming into the world to die.** “9 For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—11 and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9–11).

- What comments and questions do you have about this lesson?
- What is one thing you can do in response to this lesson?

Prayer