

## **“The Word Became Flesh”**

John 1:1-18

Somewhere in a secluded corner of London’s Highgate cemetery, there’s a large marble stone monument tangled in ivy creeping up it. The inscription reads, “Dedicated to the memory of Thomas Sayers.” More than likely, you’ve never heard of the man. But at the time of his death, the situation was very different. It was the winter of 1865 and Thomas Sayers, who began his career as an bricklayer, had climbed the ranks to become the most celebrated athlete of the Victorian era.

He was England’s first boxing champion. In his final match which he fought largely one-handed, he was cheered on by thousands. Special trains were chartered to transport the spectators, including celebrities like the novelist Charles Dickens. The Prime Minister of the day even attended. Parliament shortened its hours and Queen Victoria herself asked to be informed of the result. When Thomas Sayers died, his funeral procession stretched for two miles with more than 100,000 people. The cemetery descended into chaos as people climbed trees and trampled tombstones, hoping for a better view. But 159 years later, his name is known only to a few history buffs. To the rest, he needs an introduction.

How true it is that very few people after they’ve lived and died are remembered for very long, even those who have been well known. However, there is One who stands far above all the rest as the central figure of history, and that is Jesus Christ. No human being in history has ever been the focus of so much attention as He has. Twenty centuries later, and here we are still considering the impact His birth has had on the world.

If you have your Bible, I want to invite you to turn with me this morning to the first chapter of John, where we find some of the most profound truth in Scripture explaining the true identity of Jesus. Typically, when you think about the Christmas story, we turn to those passages in the Bible that give us the descriptive details surrounding Jesus' birth. It is Matthew and Luke who give us the details involving the manger scene with the angels and the shepherds, or the wise men who come a bit later. These opening verses in John's Gospel may not have anything to say about Christ's birth, but these verses do have something to say about His incarnation, which is really what the birth of Jesus is really all about. John wants us to know what the nativity means. Who exactly is this Child born in Bethlehem, and laid in a manger? That is the question that he gets to.

I imagine most people think that the Christmas story begins in Bethlehem. John's retelling of the Christmas story goes back much farther than Bethlehem. It goes far beyond the visit of the Magi, going far beyond the news announced to shepherds, and even far beyond Mary and Joseph. There is no Christmas card that has ever been able to adequately convey the truth that you and I will consider for just a few moments of our time this morning. John will take us all the way back into eternity past, even before the beginning of time itself. I find it interesting that 99% of the four gospels primarily deal with three and a half years of Jesus' life from age 30 to 33. While only 1% include events that happened before those years such as His birth and childhood. In His birth and life, Jesus grew just as any other child. And yet at the same time, He was not like any other child, for this holy Child is God in human flesh. John goes back even further than that and tells us of the eternal Word of God who has always been. He writes in this first chapter about the Word who existed in the beginning, who was with

God, and who was God. He says in verse 14 that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (Read)

The gospel of John has been identified by many through the centuries as the 'holy of holies' of the New Testament. It's the most sacred place you can go. John is referred to as such because in his gospel, the glory of Jesus Christ is fully displayed. John presents us with an up-close portrait of the Son of God, deity wrapped up in humanity, God in human flesh, and as Paul expresses it in Colossians—the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form. What was not accessible in the Old Testament (the Holy of Holies) is now become accessible to us because the veil has been torn, the way to God is opened up, and we come boldly into the presence of God. Christmas honors the most wonderful of divine accomplishments recognizing that the eternal Son of God was born into our world. He became human and lived a sinless life and died as a perfect sacrifice for sin, and was raised to life again to give eternal life to all who repent and believe in Him. The prophet Isaiah said:

**Isaiah 7:14—“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”**

The birth of Jesus Christ is fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. God became Man in the unique person of Jesus Christ in an event known as “the incarnation,” which comes from a Latin word that simply means ‘in the flesh’ or in human form. God becoming human through ‘incarnation’ is what Christmas is all about.

John writes his gospel with the purpose of leading people to believe in Jesus. He wants people to read his gospel and come to faith in Jesus. He says in:

**John 20:31—“But these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”**

Since that is John’s objective, he immediately sets out in establishing for his readers the true identity of Jesus. And John 1:14 is the most concise statement in the Bible that describes the ‘incarnation,’ the word used to describe what we celebrate at Christmas. It is the amazing claim of the gospel that God the Son took on humanity, deity wrapping Himself up in humanity. John’s message is that God has become one of us in the unique person of Jesus Christ. The Creator has been born into His creation, fully God and fully man. Why? That He might save sinners from their sin and death. That’s the message of the gospel of John. The God who is infinite and all-knowing, all-powerful, He who is everywhere present and unchanging—He has now become Man. This is what the apostle means as he says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

### **1—The MIRACLE of the incarnation (1:14a)**

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”*

In the opening verses of the chapter, John has told us that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God through whom creation has come into existence. The psalmist said in Psalm 33:6, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” For the Jewish mind who was quite familiar with the Old Testament, it was evident that the word of the Lord could not be separated from the work of the Lord. God’s Word going forth is His activity. For instance, when the creation account in Genesis 1 says, ‘And God said...and it was so,’ it means that God acted by means of His Word. Words have power to communicate and to do something. The fact that John refers to

‘the Word’ points to the truth that it is the very nature of God to reveal Himself. A person’s ‘word’ is the means whereby he reveals what he is thinking. This is key to our interpersonal relationships. It is impossible to get to know someone unless they choose to speak. And so you’ll notice John uses personal language in describing the ‘Word.’ In so doing, John is making it clear to us that God’s Word is His ultimate self-disclosure—the person of His One and only Son.

**Hebrews 1:1-2—“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”**

Scripture says that you and I are entirely dependent upon God’s revelation of Himself if we are to know Him. God must speak if we are to know Him. So in speaking, God creates the material universe out of nothing. In speaking, He gives us the wonderful words of Scripture. In speaking, He communicated the most clearly in the person of His Son, whom John now refers to as the Word made flesh. In this text, John offers some reasons for us to believe that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is God:

- The Word is eternal, meaning He had no beginning and He will have no end (1:1-2)
- The Word is the Creator, and all things were made through Him (1:3)
- The Word is the Source of life, and nothing remains alive apart from Him (1:4-13)
- The Word, though completely human, fully reveals the Father (1:14-18)

'Word' translates the Greek term 'Logos,' a term which John uses three times in verse 1 now once again in verse 14. The word means reason or explanation. Think of what we mean in English through our words such as 'logic' or 'logical.' Three centuries before John, the term 'logos' had been a very significant concept among philosophers. It referred to an uncreated divine mind that gives meaning and order to the universe. 'Logos' was used to define what the Greeks called the fundamental principle behind the way that the universe functioned. It was the primary principle of the universe for the Greek mind, or the rationale behind the universe. The 'logos' was at the beginning of everything for the Greek, that which was launching everything. And the Jewish mind understood the Word as that which launched everything, thereby providing a great opportunity for them to talk to one another about the nature of origins.

Imagine a member of the Greek intelligentsia sitting down with a Hebrew and saying, "The logos is the fundamental principle behind everything." The Jew says, "You know, it is interesting that you should mention that because I think you are right, but what do you think the rational principle of the universe is? Do you think that it is an 'it' or some kind of construct or concept? Or do you suppose that it is a Person?" And so the Greek mind recognized that there was some type of principle which explained the nature of the universe. The Jew comes along and says that it is not a principle, but a Person. (illus. of gospel conversation)

John uses this word 'logos' to communicate who Jesus Christ is. Christ is the fundamental principle behind the universe, the logic behind the universe. Christ is the One who is the explanation for it all. Aside from Him, nothing else makes sense. He is the communication of God to man. He is God's Word to man. A word is a visible expression of an invisible thought or idea. That is what John is saying here. Jesus Christ is the visible Word of the invisible God. Now, it might

seem strange to us to describe a person as a 'Word.' John makes it clear to us just who exactly it is he is describing. He wants us to know that this Jesus whom the other gospel writers tell us was born in Bethlehem existed long before His birth and is the eternal Word. That means there never was a time when the Word was not, and there never was a thing that did not depend upon Him for its existence. Galatians 4:4 says it this way when it says God sent forth His Son into the world, which is to say that He is the preexistent Son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. Scripture says that Christ existed before the world began, and He entered our world and became one of us.

So John takes us back through time, before creation, even before time itself, and he makes the staggering and mind boggling claim about Jesus—He was there. He was the Word through whom God spoke the entire cosmos into being. Long before there was a beginning, there was the Word, and the Word was with God.

Not only does John say the Word was with God, notice he says, “and the Word was God.” He possesses the unique attributes of God. Verse 3 says all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. He is the Creator. Scripture is filled with evidence that Jesus Christ is God. We find it everywhere in the New Testament. For example:

**Philippians 2:6-7—“who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”**

He thought it not something to hold onto, to be equal with God, but humbled Himself and was found in appearance as a man. It doesn't mean He ceased being God, but that He took on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Verse 14 says, “The Word became flesh.” The Creator entered into His creation came to

live among us as a member of our human race. But that doesn't mean that He ceased being God.

**Sinclair Ferguson** — *“The Word remained everything that He always was, but now He was all that in our human flesh—in all of its weakness and frailty, dependent on God for everything, and constantly exposed to the assaults on His senses made by the fallen world...the Word became flesh in the form of an embryo. He lived within the dark chamber of His mother’s womb in the fetal position. He became a tiny human life, dependent on the nourishment He received from Mary—a small human speck in His own vast cosmos.”*

The gospel is not about a man becoming God, but about God becoming a man. The eternal God who transcends space, time, and matter condescends and thereby enters space, time, and matter by becoming one of us. The Word who has existed from all of eternity was born as one of us. And my friend, that is the miracle of the incarnation.

## **2—The MAJESTY of the incarnation (1:14b)**

*“...and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father,”*

So the incarnation is all about God becoming human, the miracle of the incarnation is that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That's an important word, and it translates a verb that means 'tabernacled' among us. It is Old Testament language that John's readers would have been very familiar with. In Exodus 29, the Lord told Moses all that was to be involved with the 'tabernacle.' God said:

**Exodus 29:43-46**—**“There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by My glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the**

**altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve Me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”**

This was fundamental to Jewish worship. Before there was temple that was built, God met with His people in a tent in the wilderness. And John’s readers were familiar with the Old Testament, and his words here would have reminded them of that ‘tent of meeting’ where Moses met with God during the years in the wilderness. It was the place where God came to ‘dwell’ among His people. John draws upon the rich imagery of the Tabernacle where God’s manifest presence resided among His people in the holy of holies within the sanctuary. But now that the Word has become flesh, to look upon Christ is to behold the glory of God. So that John has something to say about the majesty of the Word made flesh as he says, “We have seen His glory.”

Under the old dispensation, whenever Moses went into the earthly tent to meet the glory of the God of heaven, as he came out his face radiated that glory. A sinful man went into the earthly tent and witnessed the glory of God. Now John is saying that the glory of the God has come into our earthly tent to meet with sinful man all in the person of His unique Son. This Word who is eternally with the Father, as one who is face to face with Him in glory, has now become flesh having entered into our sinful world. John says that we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

If you remember, John was in the inner circle of disciples who accompanied Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. He personally witnessed Jesus as He was ‘transfigured’ before their eyes, clothed in light. It was a supernatural event, and the synoptic gospels tell us about it in detail. Interestingly enough, John does not

mention it in his gospel even though he was one of those three who witnessed it. For John, the glory of Christ has something to do with His death and resurrection. Consider what Jesus prayed in:

**John 12:23-24—“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”**

**John 13:31-32—“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him at once.”**

**John 17:1-5—“Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed.”**

According to John’s gospel, what reveals Christ’s glory most clearly is the contrast between His eternal identity and His earthly experience. He left eternal glory where He was worshiped by angels and came into our world of darkness through a virgin’s womb. From there, He entered into the brokenness of our sinful world. From the darkness of the womb to darkness of the tomb, His road was paved with suffering. He was a Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief. In the darkness of Calvary’s cross, the Son willingly offered Himself to the Father as a sacrifice for sins. That the eternal Word would do such a thing—this is His

glory. John says this is what we saw up close and personal, the glory as of the only Son from the Father. There is a third thing and it involves:

### **3—The MISSION of the incarnation (1:14c)**

*“...full of grace and truth.”*

John wants us to know something about the miracle and majesty of the incarnation. But notice finally that he also has something to say about the mission of the incarnation. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us in order to fulfill a purpose and a mission, summed up by John in the words ‘grace’ and ‘truth.’ Jesus came to reveal truth and provide grace. Paul expresses it this way:

**Galatians 4:4-5—“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”**

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son. The word ‘fullness’ speaks of completion or fulfillment.

*“Time” — word is ‘chronos’ and refers to chronological or sequential time; other Greek word used for time is the word ‘kairos’ which refers to an opportune time*

The meaning of the word is significant, for it means that God’s Son was not sent at merely an opportune time, but that it was a fixed time on God’s calendar. He came at the precise chronological point in history that God Himself had determined. Christmas was not an accident, neither was it a reactionary decision on God’s part. Not only was the time right, but the time was planned.

From a religious standpoint, it was the right time. For centuries, the Law had been in place and had conveyed the truth that men and women need a Savior. The Old Testament was established, and a system of synagogues was in place.

Israel had been in 400 long years of silence and there had been no prophetic voice. And it was as if a divine intermission were taking place.

From a political standpoint, it was the right time. Rome was the world superpower of the day and had instituted what history refers to as the pax romana, or Roman peace. Rome provided the world with political strength and stability as well as an infrastructure and system of roads that made travel as accessible as it ever had been.

From a linguistic standpoint, it was the right time. If Rome had provided a political stability, Greece had provided a cultural stability. The Greek language was the dominant language of the day and spoken throughout the known world. When we look at the religious, political, and social landscape, we can see how it was the right time for Christ to come into the world.

**“Sent Forth”** — *word is a form of the word ‘apostle’ and carries the idea of being sent with a mission*

It means that God the Father sent God the Son into the world with a special assignment. God sent Him, He didn’t make Him, which shows that He has no beginning. The Son of God had a birth, but He has no beginning. He had a conception, but not a creation. In John 17, Jesus prayed:

**John 17:3-5—“And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in your own presence with the glory I had with You before the world existed.”**

He never became God, for He was always God. Yet when the fullness of time had come, God became Man. Jesus Christ is the God-Man, 100% perfect deity and 100% perfect humanity. Two natures are united in one person, the joining of the divine and the human in one person.

**Isaiah 9:6—“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”**

**Micah 5:2—“But you, Bethlehem, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.”**

Long before creation witnessed its first sunrise, before the first star ever dotted the night sky, before the wind roared across the mountain peaks, He existed. Before you and I ever drew our first breath, He existed. He is not the God who was, or the God who will be—He is. It was the name, “I AM,” that He gave to Moses as He called out to him from the burning bush. Not I was, or I will be, but I AM.

**John 8:58—“Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”**

Only He could say, “I AM the God of creation.” He is the agent behind all of creation, the One through Him creation came into existence, the One for whom creation exists. Only He could say, “I AM the God of revelation.” In verse 18, John says that no one has seen God at any time. The only God who is at the Father’s side, He has revealed Him. The word is ‘exegete’ which means to explain.

**Colossians 1:15-23—“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”**

**Hebrews 1:3—“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.”**

Jesus Christ is the God of creation, revelation, incarnation, and humiliation.

**Philippians 2:8—“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”**

The incarnation was a supreme act of humiliation, for He humbled Himself by becoming Man, in order to get those who could never get to Him. God sent forth His Son on a mission of mercy, born of a woman. In order to save you, He had to be God, for only God can defeat the power of sin and death and destroy the work of Satan. And yet, in order to save you, He had to be man because only a man can substitute for man and die man’s death. He had to be God and Man—He had to be God to give His sacrifice infinite value, and He had to be Man in order to bear our sins in His own body. He is the One promised to Eve, her Seed who would one day save the human race by crushing the head of the serpent, though it meant His own bruising.

**Genesis 3:15—“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”**

Adam’s sin plunged the entire human race into sin and separation from God.

Those whom God had created had sinned against Him and violated the terms of

their unique relationship with Him, and became enslaved to Satan and in bondage to sin and death. The salvation of the human race would depend upon the Seed of the woman. The Seed of the woman will be in conflict with the Serpent, and when the conflict reaches its climax, the Seed of the woman will have His heel bruised, but the Serpent will have his head crushed! The promise in the Old Testament is that a unique Man will be born, One who will take back the domain of Satan and redeem those who are captive to his power by giving to Satan a fatal blow.

**1 John 3:8—“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”**

Who is the promised Seed? In the Old Testament, the promise is narrowed down through Noah, through Shem, through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob or Israel, through Judah, and through David. Once we get into the New Testament, the fulfillment to the promise is realized:

**Matthew 1:1—“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”**

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.” Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word, the promised Seed who has crushed the serpent’s head. And all of this so that He could reveal the Father to us and become a Lamb for sacrifice in order for man to be saved so that the dwelling place of God could be with men. The fact that the Word became flesh, that God became a Man and stepped into your world is significant for you. It means that God has identified with us to rescue us.

- It means that Jesus Christ delivers us from sin

- It means that Jesus Christ deserves your worship
- It means that Jesus Christ demands your obedience
- It means that Jesus Christ determines your purpose
- It means that Jesus Christ directs your steps

He came from glory and stepped into our world, was born as one of us, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. For this reason:

**Philippians 2:9-11 — “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

How will the truth of Immanuel, God with us, change the way that you celebrate Christmas? The truth of the incarnation ought to provoke wonder in our minds and hearts, worship in our spirits, and witness to the world.

*O little town of Bethlehem  
 How still we see thee lie  
 Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
 The silent stars go by  
 Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
 The everlasting light  
 The hopes and fears of all the years  
 Are met in thee tonight*