

# Theanthropos—Who Is This?

“The God-Man”—Expositions of the Incarnation of Christ



**Main point:** John provides evidence for the deity of Jesus so that readers might believe it and commit their lives to Him.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God.

**JOHN 1:1-2**

## Introduction and Purpose:

The story is told of a Christian student in the University of Edinburgh who thought he would be what Christians call a “good witness” by going into his philosophy lecture early and writing on the blackboard, *‘Jesus is the answer,’* before heading out of the lecture theatre. When he returned with his fellow students, he was somewhat pleased to see that his chalk-written words were still there for all to see. But underneath someone had written *‘What’s the question?’*

Many of you here today agree with the university student, as I do, that *Jesus is the answer*. But the question many are asking outside this room, and even inside the church today, is, why are you a Christian? Or, why be a Christian as opposed to a *Mormon, Muslim, Buddhist, or an Atheist?*

There is only one answer to *why you are a Christian or why be a Christian*, and John gives us the answer in his gospel. It is because of *Jesus Christ*. This is not a soundbite answer or a cute cliché.

- *If Christ is NOT God*, then what we are doing here in this gathering is *idolatrous*, and we ought to stop. However, *if He IS God*, and we fail to worship Him, we are *the worst rebels of all*.
- *If Christ is NOT God*, then He was a *blasphemer, a fake, and an impostor*. We cannot even accept Him as a good man, because His claims to deity were clear. However, *if He IS God*, but we talk of Him only as a good man, it is we who are the *blasphemers*.

There is no question so crucial and as far-reaching as this one: *who is Jesus?* Is He, or is He not, God? What does the Bible teach?

From the very start of John's gospel, **the Apostle's intent** is not merely to lay out historical data concerning the story of Jesus, and then to insist, "Just believe and have faith in Jesus." Dear friends, you can't believe—you can't have faith—without knowing something about the One you are to believe in. We are not Christians because we took a "blind leap of faith." True faith is not blind. We believe because we see Jesus. David Robertson, the author of *The Dawkins Letters*, once said, "Blind faith is a rather successful lie put about by the Father of lies, (the devil, not Dawkins!)." John's purpose is to present the evidence of Jesus Christ in the hope that we will *see and believe, love and adore, commit and follow* Him for the rest of our days (*John 20:30-31*).

**The reason why you need this message today** is not that you might load your theological pistol to fire at non-believing skeptics or family members. We are not Christians because of *arguments*, though our faith is based upon factual, historical evidence. You need this study because, as one struggling soul put it, "*My life is in need of a workable and available deity*." Not a God who works *for* us, but works *in* us and *despite* us, in every *aspect* of our lives and personalities. We have a need that only an all-sufficient Savior can satisfy! And this God in Christ is available and accessible by faith today!

Now, if Jesus was *only* a man, then you can safely forget Him and go your own way. But if He is God—as *He claimed to be*, and as *all true Christians believe*—then you must yield your life to Him and worship and serve Him faithfully.

To help us, John makes a three-fold declaration about Jesus Christ in verses 1-5, designed to introduce us to Christ, that we might believe and obey Him. John declares that...

- Jesus Christ is God. (*vv.1-2*)
- Jesus Christ is Creator. (*v.3*)
- Jesus Christ is invincible. (*vv.4-5*)

Today, we'll look at the first declaration, and Lord willing, the second and third in the weeks ahead.

### Transition:

**John's gospel begins with a prologue** (*pro-before, logos-word, speech, discourse*), which is like the foyer of a building or the front door of a house (*John 1:1-18*). The prologue takes us into the home of the gospel so that we might meet the Owner. In the preface, the main themes of the gospel are played beforehand in anticipation of the entire mission of the Son. The rest of the book is nothing other than an expansion of the theme stated on the outset.

John divides or structures his argument in three simple divisions like slices of a pie: the first slice features seven specially selected "*signs*" (*John 1:19-12:50*—there were more signs that were not recorded *John 21:25*). The second slice is *the secrets* spoken to His disciples in the Upper Room discourse (*John 13:1-17:26*). The third and final slice of the pie is *the sorrows* (*John 18:1-20:31*). Both *the signs* and *the secrets* contain seven "*I am*" sayings which marshal compelling and convincing evidence that we might believe and commit ourselves to Him (*John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1*).

Although the basic structure is simple, John *surprises* us. He says the *simplest things*, uses the *simplest words*, puts together the *simplest phrases* and *sentences*—and in five short verses, he plunges us into the most mysterious, mind-staggering truths of the Bible about Jesus Christ. I like what Alan Redpath says about this book, "John is shallow enough for a child to wade in but deep enough for an elephant to swim in." Let's come to the text.

## Exposition:

Every clause is beautifully and carefully crafted in poetic form. Using a technique called “staircase parallelism,” John introduces a concept at the end of one line, and then he takes it up at the beginning of the next, and lays truth-upon-truth, like brick-upon-brick, creating step-after-step which leads us to the Son. The first declaration that John makes is that *Jesus Christ is God*.

- <sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God.

John transports us through words to the time before time. He takes us back to *eternity past*—when all there was, *was God alone*. This was before God *created the heavens and the angelic beings* that surround His throne. John gives us three declarations about the divinity of Jesus Christ.

### A. Jesus was ***preexistent***—“*In the beginning was the Word...*”

The first three words are familiar to us because John wants us to connect what is said about Jesus to what is said about God in Genesis 1:1, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*”

Later on, in 1 John 1:1, John says this,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

The Bible teaches that *Jesus existed before* His conception and birth. His birth did not mark His origin, but only His appearance as a man on the stage of history. If Jesus is not preexistent, then He is not God.

This is in line with what Jesus said about Himself. Jesus was conscious of His deity.

- **John 3:13**—No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven. Jesus asks His hearers this question, which implies His preexistence.
- **John 6:62**—What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?
- **John 16:28**—I came forth from the Father and have come into the world.

All these statements are Jesus’ own public testimony of *His preexistence*. But who can forget that prayer Jesus offers in John 17:5?

- Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Jesus was not only conscious of His deity, but He exercised *divine prerogatives and displayed divine attributes*. Only God can forgive sins (Luke 5:18-26), and Jesus forgave sins. Only God can command life, and Jesus spoke healing life to the paralytic. Only God can raise the dead, and Jesus claimed power, “*not only to lay His life down but also to take it up again*” (John 10:17-18). Only God is worthy to receive worship, and Jesus received the worship of Thomas, who confessed Him as “*My Lord and My God*” (John 20:28).

We not only have *the public testimony of Jesus*, but we have *the testimony of, according to Jesus, the greatest man who has ever lived—John the Baptist*. Jesus said, “among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matt.11:11). And listen to what John said of Jesus.

- **John 1:15**—This was He of whom I said, “He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.”

Now some quick thinker challenges this and says, “Alright—the Bible is clear about His *preexistence*, but that does not mean *He is God*. Preexistence prior to creation does not prove deity. After all, the angels existed prior to creation, but they are not divine, right?” Yes, you are right, but you are still making a monumental mistake that gets it all wrong.

A group made the same mistake of people in the early centuries of the Christian church called the Arians (not white supremacists). This group said they were willing to accept that *Jesus was preexistent*, but they still saw Him only *as the greatest of all creatures through whom God created everything else*. Many fall into this lethal logic today. The Jehovah Witnesses, the Bahai faith, the Mormons—they would all agree that Jesus preexisted, but He could not be God in the same sense that the Father is God because He was created. To that, John says, “No...Jesus was not only preexistent...

**B. Jesus is coexistent**—“*In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was with God...*”

The tiny preposition “**with**” (*pros*) is significant with meaning. It describes that which is “distinct from, in the direction of, on the side of, or towards—namely face-to-face in divine relationship and fellowship,” with God. Here is a statement of *the separate, distinct personality of the Son*. John is pressuring us to speak of God as a Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:6 says, “*although He [Jesus] existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.*” In John 10:30, Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one.*” In John 14:9, Jesus said, “*anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.*” Co-equal in glory, power, and honor. Distinct in personality, one in essence. There are not two Gods, but one. As Christians, we are not polytheists or tritheists, but monotheists who agree with the Shema (Deut.6:4—*Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!*).

True Christians embrace the mystery of the Godhead—*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*—which means we cannot describe God as more than One, but there is enough revelation that we cannot deny the existence of three Persons. Don’t get entangled in metaphysical disputes. John drives home his point and shuts the door on any speculation by saying, Jesus is not only *preexistent*, but He is also *coexistent*. Just in case you have any doubt about what John is saying about the divinity of Christ, He shuts the front door by declaring that Jesus is full deity.

**C. Jesus is self-existent**—“*...and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*”

Everything that can be said about God the Father can be said about God the Son.

- **Colossians 2:9**—In Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form...

R.C. Sproul described the word “fullness” (*pleroma*) as the kind of fullness that indicates full satisfaction. If I take my glass and put it under the water faucet at home and say, “I am going to fill up this glass,” and I filled it right up to the edge of the glass, that still would not be *pleroma* or fullness. In order to get to what Paul means, I would need to leave my glass under the water faucet so that the water flows over the

top, where it is at the bursting point. That's pleroma, a fullness that is so full that there is no room for another ounce, spec, or drop of anything to be added to it. That's what the Bible says of Jesus. He not only came in the "fullness of time" (*Gal.4:4*), in Him also was *the fullness of God* so that nothing needed to be added, and nothing could be taken away.

- **Hebrews 1:3**— And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.

What does that mean? It means that *all the brightness of God's glory shines forth in the Son*. His was no lesser glory. He is the real, substantial, adequate representation and the manifestation of the King—eternal, immortal, and invisible, God only wise. The Lord Jesus is the perfect picture of what God is like. He is the very impress of His substance. The mystery baffles us, but we cannot deny it and be true Christians. And so, we sing at this time of the year...

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see,  
Hail, the Incarnate deity.  
Please as man, with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.<sup>7</sup>

Here are the three facts about Jesus that we must be sure about: *Jesus was preexistent, Jesus is coexistent, and Jesus is self-existence*, which all say without equivocation, that Jesus is God.

**Application:** Now, why is it important to understand these three facts about Jesus Christ?

Facts, like checks, are not useful unless we know how to cash them. The greatest and the most important reason to understand these facts about Jesus is this: what you think of Jesus is the most essential question you or anyone else will ever have to face. If you miss it with Jesus, you have missed it all!

**Illustration:** C.K. Lee is a native Christian leader from China, and when he was here in this country a few years ago, he spoke at a church in California. At the conclusion of his message, a young college student asked him this penetrating question, "Why should we export Christianity to China when you have Confucianism in your country?" And he replied, "There are three reasons. First of all, Confucius was a teacher, and Christ is a Savior—and China needs a Savior more than she needs a teacher. Second, Confucius is dead, and Christ is alive—and China needs a living Savior more than a dead teacher. Third, Confucius is someday going to stand before Christ to be judged by Him—and China needs to know Christ as Savior before she meets Him as Judge."

Now, these are the three reasons why the facts about Jesus Christ need to be acted on by you today.

- You need a Savior more than a teacher—*for a teacher can tell you what you need to know, but a Savior can give you what you really need.*
- You need a living Savior, more than dead religion.
- You need to know Him as Savior before you meet Him as Judge.

**Let's backtrack** and seek to understand why John uses the descriptive term "**the Word**" for Jesus. What is meant by "the Word"?

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wesley, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*

We know something about the power of words. They can build us up and tear us down. And many of our best memories are connected with what someone said to us. But the most important thing about words is that *they can reveal in a moment what is otherwise entirely hidden*. Socrates said, "Would thou have me see thee? Then speak, for speech reveals the man."

- To both Greeks and Jews, a "word" was *an expression*. By words, we articulate our speech. The Word of God then is *Deity expressing itself in audible terms*.
- A "word" is also a means of *communication*. By words, we transmit information to others. So then, Christ, as the Word, is *the Divine transmitter, communicating to us the life and love of God*.
- A "word" is not only an *expression* and a means of *communication*; it is also a means of *revelation*. The moment I clothe my thoughts in words and say them, it reveals my level of intelligence and moral character. And Christ, as the Word, *reveals to us the attributes and the perfections of God*. He manifested *God's wisdom*, He exhibited *God's holiness*, He made known *God's grace*, and He unveiled *God's heart!* In Christ and nowhere else, is God fully and finally revealed.
- There is an interesting title given to Jesus in Revelation 1:8. Jesus is called, "*the Alpha and Omega*," which is God's alphabet. So, we can say that *Jesus is God's alphabet—He is the One who spells out Deity, the One who utters all that God has to say*.

Every person in this world needs two things: *a Word from God and a Way to God*. And in Jesus, we have both. Do you see, dear friends, what John is saying to us in these opening verses? *He is saying to us that all we need is found in Jesus*—for, in Jesus, the Infinite God can become intimate with us. In Him, the Creator becomes the companion of all who loves and trusts Him! It might interest you to know that if you asked a Buddhist, do you love Buddha? Or a Muslim, do you love Allah? They would all say, "Love? No! Believe? Yes! But love? No!" *But Christianity is the only faith where loving its Master is required and granted by the Holy Spirit!* So, let me ask you, do you love Jesus today? "*If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed*" (1 Cor.16:22). And if so, then what will follow is *the obedience that leads to joy and peace that He freely offers*—Amen!

**What does John want you to get from these opening verses?** Perhaps this example might help.

On the BBC network, there was a program series called "*Everyman*." One of the documentaries was on "How to get to heaven in Montana." It was a fascinating insight into the life of the Hutterite community (radical Anabaptist group). The pastor of the group had died, and his children had, in Hutterite terms, 'gone wild.' They dared to go into town, visit the movie, and even drink alcohol! Then some got converted, and as a result, a split developed in their community. The *Everyman* team spent a year with the community and recorded how the two sides lived together. It was well done and offered some great insights. One of the insights that came out was when the pastor's son (*one of the Born A-gains, who had become the leader of the new group*) was asked by an interviewer, "What does Jesus Christ mean to you? His answer was unforgettable.

His eyes filled with tears, and he spoke in a soft voice and said, "Jesus? He is beautiful...He is my everything...He is my magnificent obsession."

Oh, that this would be ours as well today and during the holiday season. Jesus, my All, my everything! But that still leaves us with the question of where do we find Jesus?

## Where do you find Jesus?

Most reality TV shows are, as my boys say, “Trash!” But there is a great deal of reality to some of them. One such program was called *Parent Swap*. The kids in one home go to live with the parents in another home, and vice-versa, and in this episode, a teenager from England—drunken, sexually promiscuous, rude, and ignorant teen—went to live with a Black pastor and his wife in Atlanta. As they struggled to understand and come to terms with what they had in common, the cultural clash was brutal. When the experiment was over, a producer from behind the camera asked the young man, as he headed back to the airport, what he thought of the whole event. He opined, “These people are all right. They are really into this Jesus, aren’t they? Jesus seems all-right. Where can I find Jesus in England? Is He in the yellow pages?”

This is a haunting question. Here was a young man who was shown respect and love because of Jesus, and he wanted to know where he could find Jesus in his home country. How could he or anyone find Jesus?

The answer is that *He has to find us*. We are so blinded by nature to *who He is* that He Himself has to come and reveal Himself to us. It is as if we have arranged to meet someone at the airport, but we don’t *know who they are* or *what they are like*. So, you stand there with a piece of paper with their name of it. Then there is that wonderful moment when they approach you and identify themselves. You have been looking for them, but they are also looking to reveal themselves to you. That’s what Jesus does. He is the One we were looking for, and He is the One who is looking for us.

Life and light to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings.<sup>2</sup>

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Wesley, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*