

# Light Shines in the Darkness

(John 1:1-18)

## Introduction

➤ As many of you are aware, we have been living in the midst of a pandemic for a while now. It has drastically affected our lives and families, and essentially gripped the whole world. Consequently, we have all become very used to using and hearing (and perhaps sick of) the word “pandemic.” In our contemporary English vernacular, the word pandemic refers to a contagion or an outbreak of a disease that affects (at least) a significant portion of the population.

The English word “pandemic” comes from the Greek word *pandēmos* which, in its compound form (*pan* [all or every] + *demos* [people]), literally means “of all the people” or “widespread among the people” [note: “epidemic” (*epi* + *demos*) means upon the people].

➤ The once “novel coronavirus” has morphed into many variants of Covid-19 (which has caused us all to become more familiar with the Greek alphabet). In midst of it all, and in response to it all, there has been tremendous instability and volatility in our nation (and the world). But this current pandemic is only the latest in a long line of disease outbreaks that have wreaked havoc on humanity over the centuries, and it will very likely not be the last.

As serious and deadly as Covid-19 is, we need to understand that there is a greater – more serious, more deadly – pandemic that has affected mankind for millennia (ever since the fall of Adam and Eve; Gen.3). I am referring to the pandemic of sin. It is clear in God’s Word that every person is a sinner in desperate need of God’s saving grace.

**Jer 17:9** ~ “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

**Rom 3:10-12** ~ “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’”

**Rom 8:7-8** ~ “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup>Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

**Eph 2:1-3** ~ “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

➤ In the past couple years, specifically, we have seen countless vivid examples of the ravages of sin and the darkness of evil. All the hostility and animosity in the world today should cause even the most casual observer to conclude that there is an ominous darkness over the land, and an innate darkness in the heart of every person.

➤ In Scripture we find that this is nothing new. The darkness of sin and evil, of worldliness and godlessness, has affected every person since the fall of Adam and Eve. Thankfully, there is a cure – only one cure – the Savior, Jesus Christ, who came to earth to live the righteous life we could not live, and to die on the cross for our sins. He alone can dispel the darkness as He alone is the true light of God. This is the heart of the true Christmas story, and main point of the prologue of John’s Gospel.

**John 1:1-18** ~ “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. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>But to

all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup>(John bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’) <sup>16</sup>For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

- Although this passage of Scripture requires several sermons to truly mine the depths of its teaching (e.g., James Montgomery Boice’s commentary has 15 chapters on the first 18 verses of the Gospel of John), for our purposes this morning I want to look at the overview of its main points concerning Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, and the light of the world.

## I. The pre-existence of Jesus Christ (vs.1-3)

- As God, the Son of God has always existed and will never (cannot) die. The apostle John declared the pre-existence of the Son of God in the very first three verses of his Gospel: *“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. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made”* (vs.1-3). From these verses we can glean at least three attributes of the Son of God, who pre-existed before He was born as Jesus Christ.

### A. His eternality (vs.1a, 2)

- Echoing the very first words in Genesis, John begins his Gospel by describing the eternality of the Word (Son) of God. The phrase, *“In the beginning”*, does not indicate a specific date but is in reference to the beginning of time or the creation of the world. As God was in the beginning, before creation, so too was the Word (Son) of God. This parallels the same phrase in Genesis 1:1, when God created the heavens and the earth. From eternity past, the Son of God was – existing in divine fellowship and relationship – with God: *“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”* (vs.1-2). As God never had a beginning, He has always been God, the Son of God has always existed with God – eternally before the beginning of all creation.
- Jesus, the incarnation of God’s Son, was born in human flesh to the virgin Mary. But before His incarnation, the Son of God has always existed with God for He Himself is God (Jn.1:1). The Word (Son) of God, the second member of the Trinity, is eternal and He is equal to God because He is God. He is the self-existing (never created) preeminent revelation of God. While the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity is found throughout the pages of Scripture – One God in three persons (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit; see Deut.6:4; Gen.1; Matt.3:16-17, 28:19; 2Cor.13:14).

This is a mystery that is ultimately incomprehensible to our human brains, but it is nonetheless true according to God’s Word and must be embraced as the truth of God. There is only one God, and His fullness exists in three persons. As God has self-existed before the creation of the word, and from all eternity past, so too has the Word (Son) of God.

### B. His deity (vs.1b)

- Not only was the Word (Son) of God with God from all eternity, but Scripture explicitly declares that the Word of God actually is God: *“and the Word was God”* (vs.1). The fact that this is a reference to the deity of the Son of God is abundantly clear in both the grammar and context of this passage [“was God” not “was a god”]. As the Son of God, Jesus is not half God and half man. He is fully God and

fully man. Jesus is not half God, mostly God, or even sometimes God. He is fully God always and forever.

**Heb 1:3-4** ~ “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. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”

- The Son is not merely a reflection of God, or merely similar to God. He is the exact and definitive representation of God’s divine being. Unlike every other human being, Jesus is the full and exact manifestation of God’s divine being. Furthermore, unlike every other human being, Jesus is sinless and therefore unmarred by sin and therefore He is not only the full and exact manifestation of God’s divine being, but also the perfect manifestation of God’s divine nature. Scripture tells us that in His humanity Jesus willingly divested Himself of some of the divine rights and privileges He had as God in order to be born as a human (Phil.2:6-8), but at no point did He ever cease to be God in any way or to any degree (God retained, not God reduced). Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God – fully God and fully man (Col.1:19; 2:9).
- As the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God was in intimate fellowship with God the Father throughout all eternity. The Triune God has always existed as God, before all creation. Throughout all eternity past God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit enjoyed the unity and purity of divine fellowship – something that Jesus longed for in His incarnation.

**John 17:4-5** ~ “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”

### C. His authority (vs.3)

- In verse three, John succinctly states – both in the positive and in the negative – that the Son of God is not only the Creator of our bodies, planet, galaxy, etc., but the Creator of everything that has been created: *“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made”* (vs.3; see vs.10).

John 1:3 ~ “All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.” (NET)

John 1:3 ~ “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (NASU)

- As the self-existing Creator, the Son acts as the agent of all God’s creation. When God spoke creation into existence, He did so by His divine power in and through His Son. Throughout each of the six days of creation, God sovereignly created everything according to His own sovereign purpose and pleasure, and He did this through His one and only Son. The Son of God is the divine expression of God’s nature and power. When God spoke creation into existence, He did it through His Son – the “Word” of God. As the Creator God, the Son of God was never created – He is the self-existing eternal God (1Pet.1:20). In fact, logically, since everything was created by, through and for the Son, He simply could not have been created for He would have had to create Himself. Since nothing was created apart from Christ, we see again that Jesus Christ has always been Creator and was never created.

**Gen 1:1** ~ “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

**Gen 1:1-3** ~ “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>And God said, ‘Let there be light...’”

➤ While John 1:3 is specifically referring to the Son of God's authority in and over all creation, it more generally declares His authority over all things. God created the heavens and the earth by the authority of His Word ("divine fiat"). Remember, Jesus is the incarnate Son of God (God wrapped in human flesh). But prior to his birth, as Jesus the Christ, the Son of God was the divine expression of God's creative power and will. The Son of God is the Word of God which created and has authority over all things.

**Heb 1:1-2** ~ "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

**Col 1:15-17** ~ "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

- The Word (Son) of God is the self-existing Creator. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is not mostly God, kind of God, sometimes God, or merely a reflection (symbol) of God. He is nothing less than fully and perfectly God; the one and only Son of the one and only God. If this is not your understanding of the Incarnate Son of God, your version needs to be corrected. If your thoughts of Jesus are only of a babe in a manger, your understanding of Jesus needs to be updated.
- So, what keeps the earth from freezing, or melting, or disintegrating, or dropping, or floating away from within the safe confines of our galaxy? Wrong question. It's not what, it's Who! Jesus Christ, the one and only Son of God, is the one who is (right at this very moment) holding together all of creation. The universe is held together not by an idea, or by chance, or by some cosmological accident, or by "mother nature", or by some strange or unknown force. It is held together by none other than the Son of the living God. Who as perfectly framed His creation according to His own purpose and pleasure.

## II. The work of Jesus Christ (vs.4-13)

- The apostle John began his Gospel not with the birth of Christ or the beginning of Christ's ministry, but with the preexistence of the (pre-incarnate) Son of God – who is self-existing, eternal, creator God (i.e. the Word of God; 1:1-3). In verse four, John further elaborates on the deity of Jesus (the incarnate Son of God; 1:14) by describing as both the "**life**" (source and sustainer of all creation) and the "**light**" (truth and purity). Both "life" and "light" are used as divine titles for the Lord Jesus Christ, as He is both self-existing Creator and the Lord and Savior.
- The opposite of life is death, and the opposite of light is darkness. Apart from receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, everyone is spiritually dead in sin (Eph.2:1), engulfed in the darkness of sin (Eph.4:18), and therefore facing the just wrath of God (Eph.2:3). Jesus Christ is the antithesis of everything that is sinful, evil, and ungodly. Consequently, a person's conversion to Christ represents a radical transformation – being called out of darkness to His marvelous light, children of God's wrath to adopted children of God (Eph.2:3, 1:4-5), dead in sin to alive in the Savior (Eph.2:1, 5).

### A. To give spiritual life (vs.4)

- In verse four we read, "*In him was life, and the life was the light of men*" (vs.4). The word "*life*" (*zoe*) can refer to physical life, but more specifically is in reference to spiritual life. To be sure, as the Creator of all things, the Son of God gives every living person life

**1 John 5:11-12** ~ "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

<sup>12</sup>Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

➤ Jesus Christ, the Son of God, not only gave all mankind physical life (as the Creator of all things) but He also is the One who offers spiritual life to all mankind (as the Savior of the world). Those who refuse to believe that Jesus is the Christ remain spiritually dead and (if they persist in unbelief) to be destined to the condemnation of eternal death.

**John 3:16-18** ~ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

**John 3:36** ~ “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

**Rom 6:23** ~ “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (see Rom.5:12)

➤ The point is that, through the birth of Jesus Christ, the light of God has pierced through the darkness of this sinful world (vs.5a). Jesus Christ has, in the flesh, revealed the truth of God and the way to God.

### B. To give spiritual light (vs.4-13)

➤ When then read: *“The light shines in the darkness”* (vs.5). While these words may sound ambiguous and innocuous to us today, the teaching of God as light is replete in Scripture (see Ex.13:21, 22; 14:19-25; Ps.27:1; 119:105; Prov.6:23; Ezek.1:4, 13, 26-28; Hab.3:3, 4). In the Bible, darkness represents sin, evil, despair, falsehood, godlessness, and condemnation. Light, on the other hand, symbolizes righteousness, goodness, hope, truth, godliness, and salvation.

**John 3:19-20** ~ “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”

**John 8:12** ~ “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

**John 12:35-36** ~ “So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. <sup>36</sup>While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’”

**2 Cor 4:4-6** ~ “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup>For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. <sup>6</sup>For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

**Col 1:13-14** ~ “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

**Eph 6:12** ~ “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

➤ The word *“overcome”* (vs.5; *katalambano*) literally means to seize, apprehend, or possess. In this context, the word could either be translated “comprehend” or “conquer.” This truth is, the light of Christ is both incomprehensible and inextinguishable. The sheer brilliance of Christ’s glory is

ultimately incomprehensible to our human brains. We cannot fathom His purity and perfection as the Son of God.

But the light of Christ is also inextinguishable. This is great news, and important for us to understand. For darkness, especially spiritual darkness, can seem overwhelming and without hope. A person who is engulfed in darkness can be lost, disillusioned, afraid, and despairing. Think of what a small candle or flashlight can do in a pitch-black room. Now imagine what the glory and radiance of the light of the incarnate Son of God would do in the dark realm of Satan's kingdom.

✓ Illust: "Satan is not God's opposite, fighting a cosmic duel with an uncertain outcome. What's the opposite of light? Darkness. What's the opposite of good? Evil. When asked to name the opposite of God, people often answer, "Satan." But that's false. Michael, the righteous archangel, is Satan's opposite. Satan is finite; God is infinite. God has no equal. ...

Satan gathers people for battle and they march. But in the end one suffers not a single casualty, while the other side has not a single survivor. Fire consumes all the enemies of God. The whole conflict ends before it begins. It's not a battle at all; it's an execution.

Satan and God do not engage in hand-to-hand combat, with Satan sometimes getting the edge. That's not the Bible; that's Star Wars. Many of us make Satan too big, and God too small" (Randy Alcorn, *"If God is Good..."*; p.51-52).

➤ God has already won the war! All that remains is His pending judgment against all evil and evil doers. Those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will be victory Him (1Cor.15:54-57), and those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will be eternally condemned (Jn.3:18, 36).

### 1. Proclaimed by John the Baptist (vs.6-8)

To be sure, the greatest revelation of God's light is in His Son. However, Jesus is not the only revelation of the light of Christ. The apostle John recorded that *"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light."* This is a clear reference to John the Baptist, who served as a divinely commissioned forerunner for the Messiah – one who was called to "pave the way" for the king's arrival, as prophesied in the Old Testament (see Jn.1:19-23; cf. Is.40:3-5; Mk.1:1-7):

### 2. Rejected by unbelievers (vs.9-11)

As not everyone believed John's testimony in New Testament times, so too not everyone will believe in Jesus Christ today. By the determination of God's sovereign will, and according to God's unfailing promise, Christ came first to Israel – God's chosen people (cf. Rom.1:16). But, as a nation, Israel rejected Jesus as the Christ and their Savior. This is what the apostle John was referring to when he wrote: *"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him"* (vs.9-11; see Rom.1:18-23; 2Cor.4:4-6)

### 3. Received by believers (vs.12-13)

Although many, even most, people rejected Jesus as the Christ, not everyone did. Others, by faith, received Him as their Lord and Savior. This is what the apostle John meant when he wrote *"who believed in his name"* (vs.12) – they believed that He was the Christ (Messiah) the incarnate Son of God, and received Him as their Lord and Savior.

Still today, many people in the world reject the notion that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Whether hostile, vocal and militant, or passive, silent and indifferent – or somewhere in-between – people today still scoff at the idea that Jesus is the Christ. They refuse to worship Him as the Son of God, renounce Him as their Savior, and rebel at the very idea of following Him as Lord. But not everyone! Today, and over the centuries, countless multitudes

have come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and received Him as their Lord and Savior – even dying as martyrs for their resolute faith in Jesus Christ.

The word “**receive**” (vs.12; *lambano*) means to grasp, take hold of, or obtain. To receive Jesus involves much more than merely believing in His existence or seeking to use Him when it seems beneficial or convenient, or trying to use Him as some “get-out-of-hell-free-card.”

It is imperative to note that it is Jesus who gives us “*the right to become children of God*” (vs.12). Salvation is given by God’s grace to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. The “*right*” (*exousia*) to become children of God is only given by God, and only given to those who receive His Son, by faith, as their Lord and Savior.

True Christians are “*born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*” (vs.13). Here the apostle is being redundant for emphasis and clarity. What he stated in the positive (vs.12), he now states in the negative (vs.13). In other words, no one deserves to be saved or can earn salvation. People are not saved by their racial or ethnic heritage (“flesh”), nor are they saved by their own religious or moral effort (“flesh”), nor are they saved by their own religious or moral efforts (“man”). The only way to be saved is by God’s grace alone through faith alone Jesus Christ alone.

### III. The incarnation of Jesus Christ (vs.14-18)

➤ The incarnation of Jesus Christ refers to the fact that the Son of God was born “in the flesh” (incarnate means “in the flesh”). The Son of God had to become human in order to live the righteous life we could not live, and to die the death we deserve to die (see Phil 2:6-8; 2Cor.5:21; Heb.2:14-18; 4:15-16).

**John 1:14-18** ~ “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup>(John bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’) <sup>16</sup>For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

➤ In these verses, we can identify three aspects of the incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

#### A. His identity (vs.14)

➤ First, John wrote concerning Jesus’ identity – which is two-fold: Jesus’ deity as the eternal Son of God and His humanity as the incarnate Son of God. Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God, which means (as John put it), “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (vs.14). Scripture is clear that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man (not half-God and half-man, or sometimes God and sometimes man).

**Col 1:19** ~ “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”

**Col 2:9** ~ “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”

➤ Perhaps there is no better picture of Christ’s humanity than the picture we often think of every Christmas season – baby Jesus in a manger. This miraculous birth – what C.S. Lewis referred to as “the Grand Miracle” – beautifully showcases the humanity of the Son of God – conceived by the Holy Spirit of God and born of the virgin Mary. Simply put, Jesus was actually born. He had a biological mother who birthed Him and raised Him. The miracle of Christmas is evidence that Jesus is fully human, and fully God.

**Matt 1:18-21, 24 -25** ~ “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to

divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. ... <sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup>but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.’ (cf. Matt.1:23 and Is.7:14)

**Luke 1:26-35** ~ “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you! ... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup>and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ <sup>34</sup>And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ <sup>35</sup>And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.’”

➤ To be sure, Jesus’ birth was extraordinary but it also was very ordinary. The angels told the shepherds look for a baby – a special baby, in a specific place, but a baby nonetheless. The miracle of Jesus’ birth was that He was born from Mary who was a virgin, as a supernatural creative act of God. But when He was born, He was truly and fully a little baby boy. God wrapped in human flesh.

**Phil 2:6-8** ~ “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (see Heb.2:14-18; 4:15-16)

➤ The identity of Jesus as the Son of God is further described in Him being *“full of grace and truth”* (vs.14). Meaning Jesus perfectly personified the grace of God and the truth of God. This is yet another reference to His identity as God.

### B. His supremacy (vs.15)

➤ It is clear from John the Baptist’s testimony that he knew Jesus was eternally God (even from the womb, Lk.1:44). This is why John said, *“He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me”* (vs.15). In other words, John was in effect saying, “Although I am biologically (six-months) older, Jesus is greater (*“ranks before me”*) and older (*“was before me”*).” John believed and testified to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God in the flesh (see Jn.1:19-34; Mk.1:1-8).

As we’ve seen (Jn.1:1-2, 14), the apostle John testified to Jesus’ self-existing eternity as the Son of God, as did John the Baptist; and so did Jesus Himself:

**John 8:51-59** ~ “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.’ <sup>52</sup>The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ <sup>53</sup>Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?’ <sup>54</sup>Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ <sup>55</sup>But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. <sup>56</sup>Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ <sup>57</sup>So the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ <sup>58</sup>Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ <sup>59</sup>So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.” (Ex.3:14-15)

John 5:18 ~ “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

John 10:30-34 ~ “I and the Father are one.’ <sup>31</sup>The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. <sup>32</sup>Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’ <sup>33</sup>The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’”

➤ Jesus clearly, and repeatedly, referred to Himself as the Son of God – declaring Himself to be equal to God because He is God. This is also the unmistakable testimony of the apostle John and John the Baptist, and including the apostle Paul:

**Col 1:15-19** ~ “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”

### C. His ministry (vs.16-18)

➤ Jesus had to be fully God in order to be God’s sacrificial offering for sin, and He had to be fully human in order to live a sinless life and bear our penalty for sin. He did this not because we were so deserving or lovable, but because God is so gracious and loving.

**John 1:16-18** ~ “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

➤ In these verses we can identify two major themes concerning the ministry of Jesus Christ.

#### 1. To save us from our sins (vs.16-17)

The word “*fullness*” (vs.16) is another reference to the miracle of Jesus being fully God and fully man (cf. vs.14; Col.1:19, 2:9). And it is “*from his fullness*” that “*we have all received, grace upon grace*” (vs.16). The phrase “*grace upon grace*” (vs.16) could be translated “grace for grace.” The intent is to convey the reality that God’s saving grace is super-abounding in that it covers all sin.

**Rom 5:20-21** ~ “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (see Rom.6:1-2)

Eph 2:4-5 ~ “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved”

Ps 103:11-12 ~ “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; <sup>12</sup>as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

1 John 1:9 ~ “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 3:1 ~ “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ...” (‘84 NIV)

In stating that *“the law [of God] was given through Moses”* (vs.17), John is reminding or informing his readers that salvation did not come through Moses – only the knowledge of our unrighteousness before God. The law of God is not bad, but serves as a vivid reminder of our sin and unholiness apart from Jesus Christ (cf. Rom.3:20, 7:7).

The *“grace and truth”* (vs.17) of God’s salvation comes only through Christ and only because of Christ. The Son of God became flesh so that He could live a sinless life and die on the cross for our sins.

## 2. To show us the Father (vs.18)

Throughout the Bible we read that people have heard the voice of God, and even seen a vision of God or the glory of God, but this side of heaven *“no one has ever seen God”* (vs.18) – for no one can see God and live (cf. Ex.33:20; 1Tim.6:16). Mortal (and sinful) man cannot see the fullness of God’s divine glory any more than we can walk barefooted on the sun. The sheer brilliance and intense radiance of God’s divine glory obliterates our human and finite bodies. Which is one reason why we are to be glorified, with glorified bodies, when we get to heaven. Graciously, God sent His Son to live among us in the flesh so that we could see God.

**Matt 11:27** ~ “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

John (the apostle) stated, *“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known”* (1:18). Jesus Himself said, *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”* (Jn.14:9; cf. 12:45). This is not to say that God is human, or in human form, for the Bible states clearly that *“God is Spirit”* (Jn.4:24). But even in His incarnation, the Son represented the will and character of God the Father. All that we need to know about God as Sovereign Redeemer is found in Jesus Christ.

**John 12:44** ~ “And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.”

**John 14:6-7** ~ “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him. ... <sup>9</sup>...Whoever has seen me has seen the Father””

God has revealed Himself, and the way to be reconciled to Himself, in and through Jesus Christ His Son; and through Jesus Christ alone. Jesus was born, so that we might be born again; He became like us so we might become like Him; He descended to earth so that we could ascend to heaven; He died the death we should have died, and lived the life we could not live.

## Conclusion

➤ To be sure, we live in a world shrouded in the darkness of sin and evil, worldliness and godlessness. And we see traces of this darkness even in our own hearts. Consequently, it is relatively easy for someone to become discouraged or depressed. For in the darkness there is no hope, no joy, no salvation.

But piercing through the darkness, dispelling is hopeless evil, is the light of Christ – the truth that Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God, and the one and only Savior from God. In Christ, we have hope. In Christ, we have joy. In Christ, we have salvation.

No matter how dark our world becomes, or how dark it appears, you can be assured that – through His miraculous birth, His sinless life, His substitutionary death, and His supernatural resurrection – that Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

✓Illust: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a celebrated literary critic and poet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1807-1882). Longfellow and his wife (Fannie Elizabeth Appleton) were no strangers to suffering. Their youngest of six children died as an infant. Years later Fannie died tragically after her dress caught on fire [Henry, awakened from a nap, tried to extinguish the flames as best he could, first with a rug and then his own body, but she had already suffered severe burns and died the next morning (July 10, 1861), and Henry's own burns were severe enough that he was unable even to attend his own wife's funeral]. At times, Henry feared that he would be sent to an asylum on account of his grief.

About two years later (March 1863), unbeknownst to his family, the oldest son Charles, boarded a train in Cambridge, Massachusetts bound for Washington, D.C., traveling over 400 miles down the eastern seaboard in order to join President Lincoln's Union army to fight in the Civil War. When Charles arrived in Washington D.C., he sought to enlist as a private with the 1st Massachusetts Artillery. Captain W. H. McCartney, commander of Battery A, wrote to Henry Longfellow for written permission for Charley to become a soldier. Henry granted the permission.

Later that same year, on the first day of December, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was dining alone at his home when a telegram arrived with the news that his son had been severely wounded – inaccurately stating that he had been shot in the face – four days earlier. On November 27, 1863, while involved in a skirmish during a battle of the Mine Run Campaign, Charley had been shot through the left shoulder, with the bullet exiting under his right shoulder blade. It had traveled across his back and nicked his spine. Charley avoided being paralyzed by less than an inch.

On Friday, December 25, 1863, Henry – as a 57-year-old widowed father of six children, the oldest of which had been nearly paralyzed as his country fought a war against itself – wrote a poem seeking to capture the dynamic and dissonance in his own heart and the world he observes around him that Christmas Day.

He heard the Christmas bells ringing in Cambridge and the singing of “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14), but he observed the world of injustice and violence that seemed to mock the truthfulness of this optimistic outlook. Yet, the poem ends with a confident hope even in the midst of bleak despair as he recounts to himself that God is alive and righteousness shall prevail.

Within a decade (1872) the poem was put to music, and today is known as the Christmas Carol “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.”

(Adapted from article by Justin Taylor, *The True Story of Pain and Hope Behind “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”*; December 21, 2014)

I heard the bells on Christmas Day / Their old, familiar carols play,  
and wild and sweet / The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come / The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along / The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head / “There is no peace on earth,” I said;  
“For hate is strong / And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep / “God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail / The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men.”

(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow | John Baptiste Calkin; 1863/1872)

➤ Christian take heart, Jesus has overcome the world! As Christians – all those who have truly received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior – we can be assured that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, and through His life, death, and resurrection, and by His grace, He has dispelled the darkness of sin in our hearts and freed us from eternal darkness of God’s just condemnation for sin. And we can be assured of something else: Nothing – absolutely nothing – can extinguish the light of God in and through His Son Jesus Christ. *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2Cor.4:6).