

## THE EXTRAORDINARY PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

### John 1:1-18

The years just go by faster and faster it seems. It's hard to believe that the Christmas season is already upon us again. What's not hard to believe is that over the next month, each of us might gain a pound or two eating all the pie and sugar cookies and candy canes! That's pretty typical. That's normal. That's ordinary. When we celebrate Christmas, however, we're celebrating something that is not normal. The birth of Jesus Christ is anything but normal or ordinary. It's extraordinary! That's why I've titled our Christmas series "An Extraordinary Christmas." I want to focus a lot of what makes Christ's birth extraordinary.

Theologian Lewis Sperry Chafer said that there are seven stupendous **advancements or new beginnings** in God's mighty program that include: (1) the creation of the angelic hosts (Col. 1:16); (2) the creation of material things, including man (Gen. 1:1-31); (3) the incarnation/Jesus' birth (John 1:14); (4) the death of Christ (John 19:30); (5) the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 28:5, 6); (6) the second advent of Christ (Rev. 19:11-16); (7) the creation of the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1).<sup>1</sup> Three of these we celebrate as holidays every year. At Easter time, we reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (4, 5). But at Christmas time, we reflect on #3, His birth/incarnation. The doctrine of the incarnation is such an incredibly important Christian doctrine that even if there wasn't a holiday for it, we would see it as necessary to preach on it every year anyway. His unique birth is one of the hinges that the door of our belief system hangs on and so we're going to take the whole month of December to focus on it. All believers need to understand this doctrine because it filters into so much of the other doctrines we believe. Not only that, but practically speaking, the incarnation is basically defined in Scripture as the supreme example of Christlike humility (Philippians 2).

To start off this series I'd like us to turn to John 1:1. As always, first we need some context. Many of you know there are **four gospel accounts** in the Bible. Four books that we call the gospels that record the life of Jesus Christ: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are what we call the **synoptic** gospels because they are very similar in their accounts. They recorded similar teachings and miracles and important moments in the life of Christ. However, **John was written later** than those other three and much of what John wrote is unique to John. John shares things with us from Christ's life that the other gospels don't. In fact, most of what he says is not in the other gospels and he writes with an evangelistic touch. It's a very purposeful book designed to help people understand who Jesus really is so that they will believe in Him and have everlasting life. And we know that because John just flat out says it in his purpose statement found in **20:31** – "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written **so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ**, the Son of God; and **that believing you may have life in His name.**" John wants us to know the real Jesus so that we believe and then have the real abundant life that is to be found in Him. Unlike the other Christmas story accounts of Matthew and Luke, in John 1 there is no manger or star or wise men or Mary or Joseph, but you could still say this is the Christmas story account of John.

What we just read is what we would call the prologue or introduction of John. The first 18 verses are an introduction, a sort of taste testing sample as to what is going to be discussed in the rest of the book – it's a simple but complex and highly cherished portion of Scripture. Leon Morris said these verses are like, "a pool that is so shallow, a child can wade in it, and so deep, an elephant can swim in it." It is so simple that anybody could understand it and but so deep that I don't think we could ever feel like we've ever totally

plumbed the depths of it. Today my plan is to swim in both ends of this swimming pool, using the first verse as our basic outline.

The first verse has a 3-part structure you'll notice. The first part says, **"In the beginning was the Word."** So first thing you'll notice about this passage is that it's similar to Genesis 1:1 – "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Both begin with, "In the beginning." So when John does this, he's intentionally **emphasizing the theme of a new beginning** which will be carried throughout the book. Remember how Chafer said that the incarnation was like a new beginning? In this book, John reveals the new beginning of the Church (mainly Gentiles and not Jews), the beginning of the New Covenant (moving on from the Old); and the new beginning or born again life that is available for those who believe in Jesus Christ. There's an emphasis on new beginnings. So what I think John is hinting at is that just as the original beginning of the creation was through Christ, so every new beginning is through Christ. **If you want a new beginning, you want this life, it's only going to come through Jesus Christ just like everything else.**

As far as the "Word" is considered, in the **shallow end** of the pool, we know from the context and from John's other writings that **the Word is Christ**. Revelation 19:13, which John wrote, even says His name is The Word of God. Jesus Christ is being described as the Word of God or the **logos of God** (that's the GK word – logos). Anybody studying this could understand that. **Words communicate things and Christ has communicated God to us. As God, He has explained Him (v18)**. But if you were to **swim deeper** into what John meant here and how his original hearers understood it, I think it helps us understand more that he is making Christ more personal than their idea of the logos at this time. The idea of "the logos" was a familiar term for John's original readers. **For Greeks** of the day, this idea of "the logos" was something like this creative and sustaining force of the universe. They viewed the logos as the supreme intelligence or principle that is running the universe<sup>2</sup>, one called it the soul of the universe<sup>3</sup> that could reside all around or within a person but always stood aloof and a little distant (reminds of "the Force" from Star Wars – "the force be with you"). So the "word" to them wasn't personal or relational but was more of a principle.

**For the Jew**, they were used to the Word of God being acquainted with God Himself and His Word being personified (Ps. 33:6; Prov. 1:20-33). And this can get really deep really fast but God's Word is the expression of Himself – written or spoken. We know God from reading His written Word. **God expresses Himself and communicates with us through words, as we express ourselves through our words**. But God's Word is **more than just static information**.<sup>4</sup> **Even God's written Word isn't static** (or motionless). If you get serious about prayerfully seeking God through His Word, you will find out this isn't an ordinary book – it's **alive and active**. It's productive (Hebrews 4:12)! God works through His Word. And on a side note, speaking from experience, some of your guys' relationships with the Lord are more static than alive or active because you aren't getting into His living Word and just enjoying a good word from Him!

But God's spoken words are also alive and powerful. He spoke the world into existence – "Let there be light" and there it was. He speaks and things are created. He speaks and things are destroyed. His mouth can be a sword (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:15). We have clap on and clap off lighting but God doesn't have to clap. He just speaks and makes things happen. So in light of these things, John is saying that the Logos is more than just a distant, standoffish force – **it is a Person and His name is Jesus Christ! And He is incredibly personal. In fact, He is so personal with His creation that He actually entered into it as a man. He is the ultimate communication of God to man because He is God**. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appoint heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."

What relevance does all this have with Christmas? Well, **just because we're celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas time doesn't mean He didn't exist beforehand! That's one of the first things you need to know about Christmas.** John says, "In the beginning was the Word." "In the beginning the Word was." He just was. He was already there. John's first point is that Jesus Christ pre-existed creation. He pre-existed His own birth as a man. By the way, if you want a fun question to ask kids, ask them where they were before they were born! When Jaycee was 2 she said she was probably at home and now at age 3 said probably playing or at the doctor.

#### I. **JESUS CHRIST PRE-EXISTED CREATION. (V. 1)**

**He is not a created being** so His birth is not a normal birth. The familiar term would be the term **incarnation. It means more than just being born but implies "taking on flesh" or "taking on humanity"**. You might recognize, especially you Spanish speakers, the word "carne" in incarnation. Carne is Spanish for meat like **carne asada**. Todas las carnes is an all meat pizza. Carnivores are meat eaters/flesh eaters.

##### ❖ **Incarnation means to be made flesh.**

No other text better describes His birth or the incarnation better than John 1:14 – "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." The word incarnation actually comes from a Latin translation of John 1:14. But John's point is that because Jesus is God and God is eternal, Jesus is eternal. He has always existed and so the birth of Christ that we celebrate at Christmas time is **not His being created** and coming into existence like a normal man, but referring to His stepping into our world as a man, having been **conceived of the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary**.

And this illustration isn't perfect but I like to think of the incarnation as a **cameo appearance**. A cameo appearance is when the choreographer actually steps into the choreography or when a director steps into the movie he is directing. This is the creator of man stepping into creation as a man. However, like I said, the illustration isn't perfect because this wouldn't be His first appearance in this world. Throughout the OT you actually see glimpses of **the pre-incarnate Christ** appearing as an angelic being who looked like a man and the title used in these appearances is "**the angel of the Lord**" or "the angel of Jehovah." Not "an angel" but "the angel". These pre-incarnate appearances of Christ in the OT are what we call "**theophanies**" and they're some of my favorite passages in the OT. I was just reading one of my favorites from Judges 13 the other day in my devotional time – Christ, the angel of the Lord appears Samson's parents and interacts with them, even performing wonders for them around the fire. And the end of it all, they realize the angel of the Lord isn't a normal angel – He is God. In fact, the father, Manoah, said, "We will surely die, for we have seen God." But his wife, the smart woman that she is, said, "If the Lord desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear things like this at this time."

[More 'angel of the Lord' passages if you want to look them up later: Gen. 16:7-13; 18:1; 22:11, 12; 31:11-13; 32:22-30; 48:15, 16; Ex. 3:2, 14; 14:19,20; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 6:11-24; 13, 2 Kings 19:35; 1 Chron. 21:19-30; Ps. 34:7; Zech. 14:1-4]

I've got more of those angel of the Lord passages in the notes but when you study some of those OT passages you'll notice that when the pre-incarnate Christ appeared in the OT, He is often described as a man and does what men do. So what's the deal? Why didn't He just appear as a man and die for us that way? That kind of stuff is reserved for Heaven but the main reasons have to be

that He wanted to reveal His humility and grace but also **He didn't want anyone doubting the authenticity of His humanity**. In a lot of John's writings he emphasizes Christ's humanity because there were false teachers called Gnostics who regularly denied Jesus' humanity. But **His birth as a baby and growing up like us indicates without any doubts that He really became a man like us and really died on that cross**. And that's important because He had to be a man to pay for man's sins. So even though this isn't Christ's first appearance in this world, it is **His first incarnate appearance**, taking on a human body forever. It's the Director of the movie, stepping into His own movie. It's the Painter stepping into His own painting. It's the Creator God stepping into His own created world but most didn't recognize the time of their visitation (Lk. 19:44). Verse 10 says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, [but] the world did not know Him."

Not only did He exist before creation, He was the **active agent in creation**. John 1:3 says, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." The biblical testimony is that God the Father created the world through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:6). Just reading this, you can't help but think of Colossians 1:16 – "For by Him [Christ] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."

If you look at 1:15 it says John the Baptist also testified to Christ's pre-existence: "John testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" That's significant because John was older than Jesus in regard to earthly years. John the Baptist was born *before* Jesus BUT Jesus existed *before* John.

A similar case is given in John 8, when Jesus was conversing with the Pharisees. Jesus said to them, "Your father Abraham [from Genesis] rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." The Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, **Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.** And when He said "I am" this was like the ultimate no-no of the time that was worthy of prompt execution. To them it was blasphemy because **He was claiming to be the OT Yahweh/Jehovah God that spoke with their forefathers like Abraham and Moses**. Do you remember when God asked Moses in the burning bush revelation in Exodus 3 to go to Egypt and deliver the sons of Israel from Pharaoh? It says the angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses in the fire. And in case the Israelites didn't believe Moses, he asked God for His name. And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM... Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" I AM. Yahweh. Jehovah. It means: "The One who is. The self-existent One. The One who depends on nobody for His existence. Uncreated One." Jesus was claiming to be Yahweh, the pre-existent, eternal, and self-sufficient God. This is why they picked up stones to throw at Him (Jn. 8:59) and what ultimately got Him executed.

So it's passages like these that someone said you've got conclude one of a three things when it comes to Jesus – you can't approach Him with neutrality: He either really is the Lord, or He's a lunatic or a liar. He can't just be a good teacher. If you accept His teachings, then you must conclude He is Lord. But if you think He's just another normal man, then you can't accept His teachings because He didn't teach that. There is no neutrality with Christ. Christ was looking forward to being restored to the glory with which He had before He laid that aside as a man (John 17:5). He was not of this world and was loved by the Father even before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).

The second part of verse 1 says, “the Word was with God.”

## II. **JESUS CHRIST IS EQUAL TO GOD. (V. 1)**

With God is like saying He is equal to God. It literally means to be **face-to-face** with God, on an **equal level. He is separate from but equal to God.** How can He be separate from God, face to face with God, but also God? Because the Bible teaches that God is a **Trinity**.

### ❖ **Trinity = One God in 3 persons.**

The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God – BUT – the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father (and vice versa). Even if all we had was the OT, we’d still teach the Trinity because that’s the God of the Bible. It doesn’t mean there’s more than one God; more than one God would be **polytheism**. We believe in **monotheism**, but that there’s a plurality to the one God. The Trinity isn’t just a NT teaching. It’s almost as evident in the OT as well. Even Dr. Chafer said the Trinitarian God is so evident even in the OT that the devout Jew could not have failed to observe it. So it wouldn’t make sense even for the Jews of Jesus’ day to deny the deity of the coming Messiah they were waiting for OR deny the deity of the Spirit because for them to depart from that would be to depart from the God of the Bible and to hold to a form of monotheism that the Bible doesn’t teach.<sup>5</sup>

Think about how Jesus said **baptize** them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Prayers are triune:** we pray to God the Father, in the name of the Son (John 16:23-24), by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18). The Trinity is one of those truths that the Bible teaches and cannot be denied but will for now have to remain somewhat of a mystery. God in three Persons, yet only One God. All 3 members of the Godhead are equal in power, respect, nature, attributes, and deserving of equal honor and adoration. However, they have different offices or positions in the Godhead to carry out His plan (such as Christ’s submission to the Father). Just because Christ is subject to the Father doesn’t mean that He is any less God. But it does explain verses like John 10:29-30, “My Father is greater than all...” BUT “**I and the Father are one.**”

So Christ is equal to God but lastly He is also God.

## III. **JESUS CHRIST IS GOD. (V. 1)** “The Word was God.”

That’s pretty much been explained by now in this message. To help you understand the Trinity I think it can be helpful to see what **Trinitarianism is NOT:** the Church has been dealing with errors throughout the centuries.

**Modalism (Sabellianism)** – a guy named **Sabellius started this heresy in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century** by removing the distinctions between the Persons of the Godhead and said that God was one person who manifested Himself in one of three modes at a time. But the Church said, “No that’s not it.” He doesn’t have three modes and it was deemed a heresy. Interestingly enough TD Jakes teaches modalism and speaks often on the Trinity broadcasting network.

**Arianism** – this is the heretical idea from a **4<sup>th</sup> century priest named Arius** that taught Jesus was created by the Father and wasn’t an eternal being. But again it doesn’t line up because Jesus is God and God is eternal. If Jesus was created then He’s not God. But like Micah 5:2 says, “His goings forth are from long ago, from everlasting.” He is God.

Why do I share with you these ancient heresies? Because there’s nothing new under the sun. The same things are going around today. The Jehovah’s Witness bibles have even been misinterpreted to say, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was “**a**” God.” But there is no “a” there. **There is no indefinite article in the Greek.** The Greek says, “the Word was God.” To put an “a” in it is to distort the text. I think that’s a key point you want to keep in

mind when they knock on your door. This verse is one of those verses that kickstarted me to start taking the interpretation of the Word of God more seriously than I ever considered before. One of the first classes in the first semester at Bible school.

It's all so important:

❖ **Because if Jesus is not God, He cannot pay for man's sin. And if Jesus isn't man, He can't pay for man's sin. He has to be both to be the perfect sacrifice that we needed. He must be FULLY God and FULLY man.**

Only the perfect and sinless God-Man could fulfill the Law perfectly. So John says, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were revealed through Jesus Christ." Grace upon grace. Grace upon grace. The King of Heaven left His throne to come into this world as a baby with the ultimate mission of dying for us and being our God-Man forever. What an extraordinary God!

That's the God that John wants everyone to know and find life in His name, beginning now. If you come to Christ by faith He'll come into your life and transform it. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." I can't think of a Merrier Christmas than the receiving Christ and eternal life this Christmas.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1948, 1976), 348.

<sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Vol. V, The Fourth Gospel, The Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1932), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 115.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>5</sup> Chafer, 318.