

“THE LIGHT HAS COME”

Part 1

John 1:1-18

As we approach the coming of Christmas, for the next two weeks we’re going to look at the first 18 verses of the book of John. John does not record the classic Christmas story with Mary and Joseph, the manger, the shepherds and wise men, as does Matthew and Luke – but John does tell the Christmas story from a profound, theological perspective in describing the coming of Jesus to earth as the light of the world.

Ray Stedman, who was a well-known pastor in the California bay area, told of a time when he and two friends traveled from Texas to California, and decided to go see the Grand Canyon along the way. They didn’t have enough money for a motel room, so they drove straight to the national park and got there around midnight. They took out their sleeping bags and laid down in the brush near the side of the road. When they woke up in the morning and the sun had come up, they discovered that their sleeping bags were less than three feet from a 500-foot drop off.

Light is a wonderful thing – without it we wouldn’t know where we were or where we should go – we’d walk right off a cliff and not know it’s there. Light reveals what is real and gives us a reference point so we can navigate life correctly. If we have to be in the dark, we like to be able to control it by turning on a light switch or having a flashlight. I remember going to the Oregon Caves as a kid and there was a point in the tour when the lights were turned off so that we could experience what it’s like to be in total darkness. There’s dark and then there’s dark – this was so dark that you couldn’t see your hand waved in front of your face. Even a few seconds in total darkness is enough to spook you and beg for the lights to be turned back on.

It is said that during wartime, one of the most effective tactics in gaining information from the enemy is to subject them to darkness. It doesn’t take long for a person locked alone in a dark room to make them crack. Without light we go crazy, we lose touch with reality, and don’t know which way is up or down. Light is fundamental to our very existence.

Yet the Bible begins, in Genesis 1, with darkness hovering over the face of the deep – before creation, the entire universe was shrouded in complete darkness. But then God spoke and said, “Let there be light.” God turned the light switch on and brought order out of chaos. Throughout the Bible light and darkness are often-used metaphors for contrasting spiritual realities – those who walk in the light of God’s truth, and those who dwell in the darkness of sin – those who are saved and those who are lost.

The Bible says that God is light – perfect, pure, and holy – and He created us to walk in His light and enjoy fellowship with Him. When Adam and Eve sinned, the world was plunged into spiritual darkness, and the whole human race became separated from God. At Christmas, God set in motion a plan to save mankind and reconcile us to Him – He sent His Son to be our light and show us the way back to God.

The first 18 verses of John are among the most profound words in scripture – it’s a literary masterpiece in which the Apostle John takes us behind the scenes to show us what really happened at Christmas. First, He explains who Jesus – the light of the word – is; second, why He came; third, how He came; and fourth, the response to His coming.

In verses 1-3 John tells us who Jesus is... “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

John begins his Christmas story long before Christmas morning – he takes us all the way back to the beginning – in eternity past – before the world came to be. These verses tell us four amazing things about Jesus.

First, Jesus is the Word... *“In the beginning was the Word.”* Why would John call Jesus the “Word?” What does that mean? The Greek word for “the Word” is *logos*, a very familiar word in first century culture. The Greeks understood *logos* to be the power or force that gives order to the universe, and Greek philosophers taught that a wise person lives in harmony with that order. To them the *logos* was not a person, but an impersonal force.

Jews, on the other hand, connected the word *logos* with God and His powerful activity in creation, revelation, and deliverance. God spoke and the world was created. With His word He said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” The “word of the Lord” came to the prophets bringing revelation. And by His word God delivered His people from peril.

John takes these familiar concepts about the *logos* and applies them to Jesus. The Word is more than a force or power – He is the person through whom everything exists. The Word is a title of God’s self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ. The only way for us to know God is for God to reveal Himself to us, and He reveals Himself to us through Jesus – the Word.

Second, not only is Jesus the Word, but John makes it clear that **Jesus is eternal**. He says, *“In the beginning was the Word.”* In verse 2 he says, *“He was with God in the beginning.”* As far back as you can go, before creation, the Word, who is Jesus, was there. You and I have a beginning – the moment we are conceived in our mother’s womb – but Jesus has always been. Long before He was born as a human baby on Christmas morning, He existed as God from eternity. He’s the “Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.” He always has been and always will be.

Sometimes people will show up at your door and try to tell you that Jesus is a created being – maybe a level or two above you and me – but who had a beginning like you and me. They’ll point to John 3:16 which says Jesus is the “only begotten Son.” Begotten, they say, means He was born – He’s God’s Son, but He’s not eternal. But the Greek word for “begotten” means “unique” or “one and only” – not that Jesus was born or produced by the Father. No one has ever entered the world like Jesus – fully God and fully human. He is eternal, existing as God from eternity.

Third, John also draws out the fact that **Jesus is a person**. He says, *“and the Word was with God.”* The word “with” draws out the idea of a face-to-face relationship. If I am “with” you, we have a relationship. When people meet at the coffee shop, they go to be “with” someone. When we are “with” each other at church we have a face-to-face relationship. God the Son and God the Father enjoy an intimate, personal relationship. This is what makes Christianity unique – it’s not based on an idea or a philosophy, but on a person. Religion is based on rules and principles in which people must do something to achieve eternal life, but Christianity is based on a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Fourth, John tells us that **Jesus is divine**... *“And the Word was God.”* This one phrase reveals that Jesus is more than a great teacher or moral example, He is God. He was God before the manger and He is God today. The previous phrase, “the Word was with God,” shows that Jesus is distinct from the Father. He is the second person of the Trinity who is distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit. But the phrase, “The Word was God,” shows us that Jesus is fully God in His nature and being. He’s not less than the Father or the Spirit in His essence – He is equal.

This is called the doctrine of the trinity – that God is three-in-one – three distinct persons existing equally as God. The trinity is not something our finite human minds can grasp, and the Bible does not ask to understand it, but believe it. The doctrine of the trinity is foundational to Christianity because it reveals that Jesus is not merely a man, but He is God.

To further cement the fact that Jesus is God, in verse 3 John says that Jesus was involved in creation... “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” In the first century John and the other apostles battled false teachers who said that Jesus was a created spiritual being, along with other spiritual beings such as angels. The Apostle Paul joined John in declaring that Jesus is not a created being – He is the Creator. In Colossians 1:16 he says, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”

All three persons of the trinity were involved in creating the world. Genesis 1:1 says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The very next verse says that the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. John 1 and Colossians 1 says that all things were created by Christ. If Jesus created the universe, then He is not a created being – He is God.

In these three verses John declares in no uncertain terms who Jesus – the light of the world – is. He is more than just a mere human – He is the Word – the personal revelation of God. He is eternal – He has always existed and always will. He is a person – not an idea or an impersonal force. And He is divine – He is God – He is the creator of the universe – equal in nature and being with the Father and Holy Spirit.

After establishing who Jesus is, John tells us why Jesus came to earth. First, **He came to reveal God to us**. In verse 18 he says, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” If Jesus had not come to earth, we would be left in the dark in our understanding of God. God would forever be a mystery to us. The closest anyone came to seeing God was Moses. As the leader of Israel, Moses made a bold request – “Lord, let me see your glory.” He wanted a visible sign of God’s presence. God said, “If you see me in your fallen, sinful condition, you will die.” A full-force exposure to all of the God’s glory was more than Moses, or any person, can handle. But now in the person of Jesus, God reveals Himself to the world. All of God’s glory is seen in Jesus.

One of the key distinctives of the Christian faith is that we have a God who communicates and discloses Himself to His creation. Perhaps you’ve heard people say, “If God is real, why doesn’t He make Himself known? All He has to do is send a thunderbolt of lightning from heaven or speak in a deep, loud voice.” God has made Himself known to us in the person of Jesus. In verse 14 John says, “We’ve seen Him – we’ve seen His glory.” If you want to know God, look to Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. If you want to know how God feels or thinks about something, Jesus reveals God to the world. In John 10:30 Jesus said, *“I and the Father are one.”* To see me is to see God.

Jesus came not just to reveal God to us, but to **show us the way to God**. Verses 4-5 says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Jesus came, John says, to give light to a spiritually dark world. Light was the first thing God created, separating it from the darkness. But when Adam and Eve sinned, a spiritual darkness fell over the world – through sin they became alienated from God, and the consequence of their sin was death. Every person since then, because of sin, is separated from God, and apart from His intervention is doomed to die and spend eternity apart from God.

Christ came to earth to bring life – both eternal life and abundant life. He is the way, the truth, and the life – no one comes to the Father except through Christ. 1 John 5:12 says, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

God’s Word makes it clear that there is nothing you or I can do to remedy our situation. There is no amount of works or good deeds that we can do to merit God’s forgiveness. And because we live in a spiritually dark world, we don’t even see our true condition. We get so used to living in a dark, fallen world that we think it’s normal. It’s like when you walk into a dark restaurant and you can’t even hardly see the menu, much less what food is set before you. But after 10 or 15 minutes your eyes become used to the darkness. When people live in spiritual darkness, their thinking becomes distorted. As the prophet Jeremiah said, they start calling evil good, and good evil.

2 Corinthians 4:4 says, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel.” Satan – the prince of darkness, does everything in His power to keep people in spiritual darkness – thinking that there’s nothing wrong with the way they’re living and that they have no need of a Savior. In order to be reconciled with God we must see our true condition as sinners and our desperate need for a Savior.

The Old Testament prophets predicted that when Messiah came a great light would dawn on those dwelling in darkness. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Jesus came to turn the light on – to open up the eyes of the heart so we could clearly see our problem – that we’re sinners – and to see the solution – that Jesus came to die and save us from our sin. When you trust in Him, He transfers you from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Everything changes once you come into the light.

So far, John has told us that He is God, and that He came to reveal God to us, and to be the light showing us the way to God. Next, John tells us how He came into the world, and how He came shows why He is uniquely qualified to be our Savior and our only hope for salvation. In verse 14 John says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The miracle of Christmas is the incarnation, a Latin word that means “to make flesh.” The fact that God would come to earth in a human body was inconceivable to a first century Jew – even blasphemous. How could the God of the universe – who is so unlike us and so above us – how could He take on human flesh? And if He did become human, how could He still be God?

The answer is the virgin birth. Prior to Jesus' birth, we read in the gospel of Luke that God sent the angel Gabriel to a young virgin girl in Nazareth named Mary who was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive and give birth to a Son, who would save the people from their sins. Mary was perplexed. "How will this be?" she asked, "Since I am a virgin?" Gabriel said, "What is conceived in you is from the Holy Spirit."

Like the trinity, the virgin birth is something that doesn't compute in our human minds, but without the virgin birth Jesus could not be our Savior and there is no hope of salvation. The miracle of the virgin birth is that Jesus had an earthly mother, Mary, but He did not have an earthly father. Jesus was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit. Why is that important?

- God could have sent Jesus down from heaven without taking on a human body. If so, it would allow for His deity, but not His humanity.
- God could have had Jesus born from the relations of both a man and a woman. If so, this would allow for His humanity, but not His deity.
- To be our Savior, Jesus had to be both God and man.
- He had to be fully man so that He could die in our place and be our representative on the cross. He had to be fully God to be the perfect sacrifice for sin – without spot or blemish.
- If Jesus had been born of Joseph, He would have possessed Joseph's sin nature – since the Bible teaches that the sin nature comes through the seed of the father. And if He possessed Joseph's sin nature, He could not become our Savior. He would be just like us – needing a Savior Himself.
- But Jesus was born of a virgin, by the Holy Spirit, so that He would remain untainted by sin.

That is the miracle of Christmas – that God took the genetic code of Mary and mingled it with a divine genetic code producing one who was fully human and fully divine. As God, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. As human, He took all of our sins upon Himself so that God could look at us through the blood of Jesus as perfect.

Jesus' incarnation also meant that God's presence and glory came to earth. In verse 14 John says the word became flesh and "*made His dwelling among us.*" The people of Israel had longed for several centuries for the presence of God to be with them. When Israel left Egypt God provided a cloud and a pillar of fire to guide them, assuring them of His presence. Later when the tabernacle was constructed God's presence was manifested in the Holy of Holies, between the cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant. It was the place where God dwelled with His people, where he met them and where they met Him. But God's presence always seemed remote and distant due to sin.

But in the incarnation, God's immediate presence was manifested. The Greek word for dwelling means "tabernacled." In the same way that God's presence was manifest in the tabernacle, His presence was now manifested in a person. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

No one in the first century looked at Jesus and said, "There is God." When the shepherds came to the manger, they saw an ordinary baby. He had real flesh and blood and hair and bones. He talked and dressed like a human. He felt hunger and thirst. He hurt like we hurt, He wept like we weep. He experienced every temptation and trial we experience.

Philippians 2 explains how when Jesus came to earth, He laid aside the divine privileges He had in heaven. He never ceased to be God during any part of His earthly ministry, but He veiled His glory. The disciples saw glimpses of His divine glory when He healed the lame and walked on water and turned the water into wine. On one occasion Jesus showed His full glory to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.

But throughout the four gospels we see Jesus as both fully human – just like you and me – and yet fully divine – performing signs and wonders which only God could do. After His resurrection He returned to His glory in heaven, and one day will return to earth in His glory.

God could have chosen to remain in heaven, above the chaos of a fallen world. He could have looked at sinful people and said, “They made their choice, let them suffer the consequences.” But God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. In love Jesus came as the light to shine grace and truth in a dark world.

Next week we will see the response the world had to the light, but this incredible portion of God’s Word lets us know who Jesus is, why He came, and the unique way in which He came. Jesus is the light – showing us who God is and the way to God. Your response, my response, is to receive the light that has been revealed – to put our full trust in Jesus Christ as God come to earth in the flesh to be our Savior from sin. Step into the light and you will never be the same.

CELEBRATE THE CHILD WHO IS THE LIGHT

