

Christmas

Lesson 4 | December 22, 2024

The Incarnation

Study Text

John 1:1–18

Central Truth

God's purpose in the Incarnation was to reveal himself through Christ.

Key Verse: John 1:14

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (KJV).

The Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will define Incarnation and explain why it is important.
- Students will rejoice in all the blessings available because Jesus came into the world.
- Students will share the good news that Jesus was born to be the Savior.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Jesus' birth was a turning point in human history. The Son of God would dwell among His people for thirty-three years, but His kingdom would be eternal.

Discussion Starter—Turning Point

Say: Can you list a few turning points in your life? (*Examples include salvation, marriage, completing a degree, becoming a parent or grandparent, etc.*)

Say: In telling the story of Jesus' birth, Matthew focuses on Joseph's perspective, while Luke focuses on Mary's perspective. Meanwhile, Mark skips the story of Jesus' birth and begins his narrative with John the Baptist's introduction of the Messiah. Today, we'll focus on John's Gospel, which relates Jesus' birth from a divine perspective. As John explains, Jesus is the eternal Word of God sent from the Father.

In the busyness of this time of year, it's all too easy to lose focus on the reason we celebrate Christmas—the miraculous, life-altering birth of Jesus Christ. We call this the *Incarnation*, which means “take on flesh.” God's purpose in sending His divine Son to live a human life was to reveal His own nature. The Son of God became the Son of Man to show people who God is so that they could experience salvation and eternal life.

Part 1—The Eternal Word

Scripture Reading

King James Version

John 1:1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2. The same was in the beginning with God.
3. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
4. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

15. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

16. And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.

17. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

18. No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

New Living Translation

John 1:1. In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2. He existed in the beginning with God.

3. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

4. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

5. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

6. God sent a man, John the Baptist,

7. to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony.

8. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.

9. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

10. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him.

11. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.

12. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

13. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

14. So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

15. John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

16. From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.

17. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ.

18. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

Jesus Was in the Beginning

John 1:1–2

Say: Even people who don't believe the Bible is God's Word would admit that a man named Jesus was born in Israel near the beginning of the first century. Most would say He offered good teachings that can help people live better lives. But Jesus' existence didn't begin with His birth. He was, and is, eternally existent. He was with the Father in creation, He came to earth to redeem humanity, and He will still be with the Father at the end of time (Revelation 22:12–13, 16).

Resource Packet Item 1: Biblical Men Named John

The author of the Gospel of John is not the only John mentioned in the New Testament. This handout will help students identify each of the five men named John mentioned in Scripture.

Before beginning our study of the beginning of the Gospel of John, it would be helpful to read the end: "The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name" (John 20:30–31).

John's Gospel is sometimes called "the gospel of belief." It was written, in part, to correct wrong beliefs in the first century about who Jesus is and why He came. It still serves that purpose today. John understood that to deny the truth of Jesus' identity means denying the power of the gospel. On the other hand, accepting that Jesus is God's Son is the foundation of the Christian faith.

One of the errors creeping into churches in John's time was the denial that Jesus is, always has been, and always will be God. John's opening remarks refuted this false teaching. When the universe began, Jesus was there (1:1). As the second Person of the Trinity, He was there with God the Father and God the Spirit before the work of creation began.

John's opening words described Jesus as the Word. Much discussion has taken place as to all that is conveyed in this Greek word *logos*, translated "word." What is clear is that Jesus is the means God chose to reveal himself and communicate His message and will. Hebrews 1:1–4 provides insight into this: Jesus "expresses the very character of God" (verse 3) or is "the express image of [God's] person" (KJV). Jesus spoke of how He reveals His Father's nature by His words and actions, because He is one with the Father (John 5:19; 14:9–11).

John wanted to make sure he was clear in his declaration that Jesus is eternally God by emphasizing that Jesus was with God and existed before creation (John 1:2). Contrary to false teachings about Him, Jesus isn't just one god among many. Nor is it accurate to say, "Jesus is like God." The truth is, Jesus is God—one in nature or essence with the Father and the Spirit. In the verses that follow, John will explain what makes this truth

so vital. Jesus is the Word made flesh—God incarnate—through whom people receive grace and truth (verse 14).

Discuss

? In what ways does Jesus reveal to people who God the Father is?

? Why is it important to recognize that Jesus is fully God, rather than just a man empowered and guided by God? How would you respond to someone who struggles to see Jesus as more than a man?

Jesus Is Creator of All Things

John 1:3–5

Say: Jesus is not part of God’s creation. He is fully God, with no beginning and no end. As such, He was intimately involved in creation. When God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like *us*” (Genesis 1:26, emphasis added), His chosen words demonstrated the totality of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is also mentioned specifically in Genesis 1:2 as “hovering over the surface of the waters” before creation began. The one true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has always existed and will always exist.

Jesus is God. He is eternal and the means by which everything was created (John 1:3). The phrase “in the beginning” in verses 1 and 2 is crucial. (See also Genesis 1:1). Not only was Jesus there in the beginning with God, but John says He is the One who “gave life to everything that was created” (John 1:4). No doubt is left here. Jesus is the Creator—not a created entity, as some in John’s day were wrongly teaching.

Jesus is not only the Source of biological life—including the plants, animals, and humans that were formed at creation—but also of spiritual and eternal life. Closely related to Jesus being the Source of life is that He is also the Source of light (verses 4–5). Here, as throughout John’s Gospel, light is defined in terms of spiritual enlightenment. What people can know about God comes through Jesus, who is the Light of the world. The light of the knowledge of God shines into the darkness of humanity’s sinful condition. Though people may reject that light, darkness can never overcome it.

Resource Packet Item 2: Shining a Light

Students will use this handout to plan how they can shine Jesus’ light to certain groups of people this Christmas week. This would work best as a take-home page for personal reflection and commitment.

Discuss

? How does false teaching about Jesus’ identity change the message of the gospel? What are some examples?

? What does it mean that Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12)? What does it mean that we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14–16)?

Part 2—The True Light

A Witness to the Light

John 1:6–8

Say: As we discussed in our last lesson, John the Baptist was born with a clear purpose: to prepare the way for Jesus. He fulfilled that purpose well. Crowds of people heard him, repented, and were baptized. Then, at just the right time, when he saw Jesus approaching the Jordan River, he bore witness to the Light. “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The apostle John, after establishing Jesus’ true nature as God, moved his Gospel forward with the story of Jesus as the Word made flesh, who came into this world as the Light of the world. John the Baptist was the only child of an older couple; his mother had been barren before God intervened. His ministry was to bear witness of Jesus as the Messiah, the Light who would reveal God’s nature to the world so that they might believe (John 1:7).

John’s Gospel is clear that the ministry of John the Baptist was pointing people to faith in Jesus. Statements of John the Baptist recorded in John’s Gospel bring out this truth.

- John denied being the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet the people were expecting (verses 19–21).
- John described himself as a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord’s coming (verse 23).
- John explained he was far inferior to the One who was coming, who had “existed long before” him (verses 15, 26–27).
- John declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God and the Messiah (verses 29–36).

Discuss

? Was there someone who pointed you to Jesus? If so, tell us how they influenced you to believe in Him.

? What are some specific ways that Christians can point others to Jesus?

Recognizing the Light

John 1:9–13

Say: When sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the relationship between people and their Creator was broken. Reconciliation could come only through Jesus—the perfect, sinless sacrifice for sins. He alone is the Light who can rescue us from darkness and restore our connection with the Father.

Jesus came into the world He created to reveal the Father to people. The tragedy is, although He had created the world, “the world didn’t recognize him” (John 1:10). Even

His own people did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, rejecting Him despite the many Old Testament promises and prophecies He fulfilled (verse 11).

Obviously, not all Jewish people rejected Jesus as Messiah. John's Gospel goes on to tell many stories of those who did put their faith in Jesus, such as Nicodemus, Mary and Martha, and the Twelve. Yet many of the Jewish leaders saw Jesus as a threat. Their opposition combined with the corruption of human nature eventually led many Jewish people to reject Jesus as the promised Messiah.

The contrast between rejecting or receiving Jesus is dramatic. Denying Jesus leads to condemnation and death (3:18), but placing faith in Jesus leads to new birth and eternal life (1:12–13; 3:16). This is the work of God alone. Salvation never results from anything people can offer or accomplish. Instead, it is a matter of choosing to believe and follow.

Resource Packet Item 3: Receive or Reject?

The most important decision a person can make is how they will respond to Jesus. This handout lists a few of the many biblical examples of how people either received or rejected Jesus and encourages students to reflect on the receptivity of their hearts. This would work best as a take-home page for personal devotions.

Discuss

? What are some reasons people reject Jesus today?

? How can you prepare yourself to share the gospel with those who are skeptical about Jesus?

Part 3—The Word Made Flesh

Jesus Lived Among Us

John 1:14

Say: When we think of the glory of the eternally existing Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity, it's difficult to imagine why He would willingly give up the glory of heaven to live among us. Paul described Jesus' humble attitude in Philippians 2: "Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross" (verses 6–8). What a wonderful Savior!

In John 1:14, the apostle again referred to Jesus as "the Word." John was stressing the truth that Christ was the manifest "Person" of God in all His sovereign wisdom and power. We're reminded of another beginning, when God spoke in all His wisdom and power and the universe came into being.

When "the Word became human" (verse 14) or "was made flesh" (KJV), it was the ultimate expression of God's love, mercy, and compassion for people who were hopelessly lost in sin (1 John 4:9–10). Jesus came to earth so people might not perish because of their sins, but instead receive true life that is full and eternal (John 10:10).

As an eyewitness to Jesus' life, the apostle John could testify of the way His glory was displayed through signs and miracles (2:11). Though there were glimpses of His glory—at His Transfiguration, for example—Jesus humbly set the fullness of His glory aside. Rather than arrive on earth in His full majesty, Jesus came to serve. His humble obedience to the will of the Father led to the cross, where He became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all people.

As the “Father’s one and only Son” (1:14; “only begotten of the Father,” KJV), Jesus is utterly unique. He was, is, and always will be God. By His coming to live on earth and humbly obeying the will of the Father, Jesus made the way for people to become God’s children by faith. The unmerited favor and knowledge of God come through Jesus. Only through Jesus can we have hope in this life and in the life to come.

Discuss

? How might we see glimpses of Jesus’ glory today?

? How would you explain the significance of the Incarnation to an unbeliever?

Jesus Revealed God’s Heart

John 1:15–18

Say: Because of Jesus, we can have peace with God. Think of the grace it took for Jesus—fully God—to humble himself and take on flesh. He was born as a helpless baby in a sinful world, and He faced temptation, rejection, and death—all for the purpose of setting us free from our immeasurable burden of sin. “When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:6–8).

“From his abundance” in John 1:16 is a callback to verse 14 where Jesus is described as “full of unfailing love and faithfulness.” That means we receive “grace for grace” (verse 16, KJV; “one gracious blessing after another,” NLT) out of His fullness. This full expression of “grace and truth” (verse 17, KJV; “unfailing love and faithfulness,” NLT) comes only through Jesus. Yes, God had already shown grace and truth to people, particularly in the Law of Moses, but through Jesus the favor and knowledge of God finds its ultimate expression. He is “the visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and “expresses the very character of God” (Hebrews 1:3), making the truth of God’s nature more clearly known. While Moses revealed what he was shown, Jesus revealed what He knew.

Discuss

? What does it mean to say that Jesus is full of grace and truth?

? What do you find most amazing about God’s grace?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The incarnation of Jesus truly is the reason for this season. Because Jesus came, people can know God and receive eternal life (John 17:3). This lesson is more than a token review of what we already know about Christmas. It's a reminder for all of us to stay centered on Jesus every day of the year. He is the eternal Word who was there in the beginning. He is the Creator, the Source of life. He is the true Light who reveals who God is and what He does. He is the sacrifice who made it possible for us to become children of God. He is grace and truth. Being a Christian is all about Christ—believing in Him, following Him daily, and being conformed to His image. Don't let anything (not even the rituals of Christmas) take your focus off Jesus Christ.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Intentionally reach out to someone this Christmas season who needs Jesus' light to shine into their darkness.
- Ask God to cause His light to shine through you during the stressful moments of the Christmas season.
- Set aside quiet time every day this week to prayerfully reflect on all God has given you through Jesus.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God with Us.

Isaiah 7:10–16

Tuesday:

The Everlasting Kingdom.

Isaiah 9:1–7

Wednesday:

The Message Foretold.

Isaiah 40:1–5

Thursday:

Christ's Birthplace Announced.

Micah 5:2–4

Friday:

Christ Is Born.

Luke 2:1–7

Saturday:

Shepherds Worship Jesus.

Luke 2:8–20