

# The Word Became Flesh

**The Incarnation Series, November 27 & 28 | John 1:1-3, 14-18**

**Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal**

## WHY DOES THE INCARNATION MATTER?

**People argue that we have blown Christmas out of proportion.**

We boldly proclaim that Christmas is a birthday party for Jesus.

But nobody celebrates a birthday the way we celebrate Christmas.

In response, I can hear people clarify, "Yes, but it's a BIRTHDAY party for JESUS" as if emphasizing "Birthday" and "Jesus" explains everything.

What they mean is admirable: Jesus is not just any person; he is the Savior of the World. So, his birthday celebration should not be like any other person's birthday celebration.

However, Christmas is still more than just a birthday party for Jesus.

**Christmas celebrates the Incarnation of the Son of God.**

The doctrine of the Incarnation has to do with the eternal Son of God taking on human flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.

The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* describes the Incarnation this way: "... the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what he is, God the Son, took union with himself what he before that did not possess, a human nature ..." <sup>1</sup>

Christmas celebrates the Incarnation, and the Incarnation is a pivotal moment in God's plan to redeem his people for himself.

However, defining the Incarnation doesn't answer the question, "Have we blown Christmas out of proportion?" To answer that question, we must dig into the deeper question:

**Why does the Incarnation matter?**

That's what we're going to explore together between now and Christmas.

We know the events surrounding Christmas on surface: Who did what when?

This year we will dig beneath the surface and ask, "Why? Why does the Incarnation matter?"

The deeper we dig beneath the surface of events, the more we find.

Here's just a preview of what we will discover together:

- God has revealed to us his profound plan for our lives.
- God gives us a new start in life.
- God has been where we are, understands us, and is with us always.
- The Savior is sufficient to save us since we cannot save ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> R. L. Reymond, "Incarnation," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), page 555.

The doctrine of the Incarnation means that all of the above is wrapped up into one person, Jesus. As we take this journey, we are going to come away with a clearer picture of God, and a better understanding of our ourselves, and a richer appreciation of Christmas.

### **We begin with “the Word.”**

“The Word” features prominently in John chapter 1. You probably hear these verses read every Christmas. We read them together earlier.

We hear these passages so often that we forget how confusing they are. What is “the Word?” Of course, it’s Jesus. But why does the Bible call Jesus “the Word?” What does that term mean? What does “the Word” mean to us? Why is it so important?

## **THE WORD SHAPES CREATION**

### **John 1:1-3 tells us that the Word shapes creation:**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

### **Ancient Stoic philosophers explored the idea of “the Word” extensively.**

Like philosophers before them, the Stoics associate “the Word” with reason. They thought of the world as operating based on natural law. “The Word” is simply the way things work. We can get on board with the way things work and thrive, or we can fight the Word and suffer.

In a more personal sense, Stoics thought of “God” as being something more like pure mind or contemplation itself. They thought that “the Word” was “God’s” active presence that shaped passive matter in the universe.

John didn’t borrow what the Stoics wrote, but Stoic thought shapes what “the Word” means.

### **John 1:1-3 explains that “the Word” is intimately related to God.**

In these verses, “the Word” refers directly to Jesus.

The Word is “with God.” Jesus has a very close relationship with God. However, there is more to God than Jesus. God is also Father and Spirit.

Then, the Word “was God.” Jesus the Son is God just as much as the Father and the Holy Spirit.

### **In claiming that God created the world through “the Word,” John is explaining something the Old Testament already taught.**

The Word was there when God spoke creation into being in **Genesis 1:1-3**:

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 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. And God **said**, “Let there be light,” and there was light.*

God created using speech. That thought isn’t lost either.

**Psalms 33:6** and following explicitly state that God created by the “word of the Lord”:

*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.*

The fact that God created the world through the Word is well established in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Word shapes creation the way DNA shapes living beings.**

DNA is at the heart of the cells of living beings. DNA drives the reproduction of our cells and the creation of the proteins that make our bodies work.

You might say that DNA contains the instructions for building a living being.

The Word of God shapes creation the way DNA shapes living beings.

The Word of God drove creation in the beginning, the Word of God sustains creation, and the Word of God regulates the way creation works.

The Word of God shapes creation.

## **THE WORD REVEALS GOD TO US**

**John 1:14** tells us that the Word reveals God to us:

*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.*

### **The Word spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament.**

Sometimes in the Old Testament, the Word of the Lord is God telling someone to do something as in

#### **Jeremiah 18:1-2:**

*The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words."*

Jeremiah followed God's instructions. Then in **Jeremiah 18:5-6**, the Word of the Lord gave a message from God to his people:

*Then the word of the Lord came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the Lord.*

The Word of the Lord accomplishes its purpose as we are reminded in **Isaiah 55:10-11:**

*"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."*

### **Many scholars believe that God reveals himself to us in the Old Testament through the Word.**

At times in the Old Testament, God appears to us in surprisingly human ways.

In **Genesis 3:8**, we read about the Lord walking in the garden with Adam & Eve:

*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...*

In **Genesis 15:1**, the word of the Lord appeared to the patriarch Abraham in a vision:

*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."*

In **Genesis 32:24**, the patriarch Jacob wrestled with someone he understood to be God:

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<sup>2</sup> See Hebrews 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:16-17 for additional confirmation.

*And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.*

Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord who is Spirit and not visible appeared in bodily form to his people. I just cited a few examples.

Many of these appearances are linked with the Word of the Lord. Was it Jesus all along?

John 1:14's use of the phrase "dwelt" certainly suggests so.

### **The word we translate as "dwelt" more fully means to take up residence or to put up a tent.**

"Dwelt" reminds us that when God's people were set free from slavery in Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. They lived in tents then, and God was right there in the middle of them. There was even a special tent in the camp where God's glory rested.

The Word becoming flesh is the Son of God taking on our flesh as his residence to come to where we are to camp with us.

Then John says that "... we have seen his glory." John means himself, the other disciples, and now us. We've seen the glory of Jesus, but in seeing the glory of Jesus, we've seen God the Son, the beloved and unique Son of God the Father.

### **The Word reveals God to us the way we saw people in person after the pandemic.**

Even with all the hints we got about God in the Old Testament, we still didn't see him clearly.

It's like the way we saw many of our loved ones during the worst parts of the pandemic. Many of us used video conferencing software to connect more than we could with voice alone.

We nearly swamped Zoom early on. Still, it wasn't the same.

When we saw our loved ones for the first time when it was safe, when we hugged them, when we sat down together, and when we enjoyed a meal together, it was an entirely different thing.

We see God in the Old Testament, but it's a little bit like looking at a loved one on Zoom.

The way Jesus makes God real to us is like hugging someone we haven't seen for 15 months.

Jesus shows us who God really is in ways we can understand. The Word reveals God to us.

## **THE WORD DEMONSTRATES THE LAW**

### **John 1:16-18 tells us that the Word demonstrates the Law:**

*For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

Let's go back to the Old Testament to break down what John is saying.

### **Let's start with Wisdom. Wisdom applies the Law to real life and is strangely personal.**

Wisdom in the Old Testament offers specific guidance on specific, real-life situations. For instance, Proverbs 7:22-23 applies the Law to clarify that adultery is like a trap:

*All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.*

Wisdom is real-life application of the Law.

Wisdom in the Old Testament is applying and obeying the Law. **Proverbs 1:7** makes this clear:

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

The person who lives in keeping with the Law is wise and will likely prosper. The person who breaks the Law is foolish and will likely suffer. **Proverbs 3:13-16** makes this clear:

*Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding,  
for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.  
She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.  
Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.*

The lesson is clear. Wisdom is valuable; therefore, get wisdom at all costs. What's interesting is that Wisdom here is a person. Did you notice that?

Wisdom applies the Law to real life and is strangely personal.

### **The Law in its own way seeks to make the Word of God specific; and the Law is also strangely personal.**

In **Deuteronomy 4:13-14**, Moses tells us that the Law is simply trying to write down God's ways which can never be fully written down:

*And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules...*

In **Psalms 119:105**, the Law and the Word together give light to the world:

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

In **Isaiah 2:3**, the Law is the Word that radiates from Jerusalem in the future God is planning:

*... and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

### **Now we're ready to see why John presents the Word as the new and better Moses.**

In Exodus chapter 20, the Lord distilled his Law into Ten Commandments and gave them to his servant, Moses, to give to his people.

Then the Lord gave further regulations to explain and expand on those Ten Commandments.

God wrote down the critical parts of what he said on tablets of stone.

When the Lord spoke to Moses, he did so in the mist, in the smoke, and in the thunder. Moses couldn't see God face to face which grieved Moses.

The Word of God is the new and better Moses because he is the Son of God who has seen God the Father face to face and knows him fully.

The Word of God is the new and better Moses because he brings the new and better Law!

The Word of God brings the Law in all its fulness.

The Word of God makes God's Law and ways real in ways Moses and tablets of stone never could. Why? There is a life that God wants us to lead, and Jesus shows us how.

### **The Word demonstrates the Law.**

In some ways, the Word of God is like a YouTube video on the ways of God.

I bought a lawn tractor when we moved into our house because our yard would take two hours to push mow, and I don't like mowing that much. Now I can mow my yard in half an hour.

The only problem is that my lawn tractor requires maintenance. Lots of maintenance.

And it's all stuff I've heard of before but don't know how to do.

Like, how do I change the oil filter on my lawn tractor? I don't even know WHERE the oil filter is!

I've read the owner's manual. But since "owner's manual" is written in an unknown tongue to me, the owner's manual tells me very little.

So, I turn to YouTube videos.

YouTube videos SHOW me how to do what the owner's manual TELLS me how to do.

And showing is much more helpful to me than telling.

Jesus is very much like that. The Old Testament TELLS us about the lifestyle God wants us to live. Jesus SHOWS us what that lifestyle looks like. In the flesh. In detail.

The Word demonstrates the Law.

## NOW WE KNOW WHAT GOD EXPECTS

### **Now we have a model to follow.**

For centuries, we were looking for a model to follow.

When Abraham began following God faithfully, he had no model and no concrete instructions.

In some ways, the Ten Commandments are a model for what it is to follow God faithfully.

And in some ways, the balance of the Law sought to explain those Ten Commandments.

But the balance of the Old Testament reminds us vividly that we did not understand how to live the lifestyle God expected us to live. Even when God's people tried!

After the Old Testament was closed, the Rabbis sought to put rules and regulations around the Law that helped to apply the principles of the Law to specific situations.

But as Jesus interacted with the Rabbis in the New Testament, we see clearly that they got as much wrong as they got right.

Bottom line? We didn't have a model to follow. We didn't have an example.

Now, in Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, we have a model.

### **Still, we will not keep the Word of God perfectly.**

Even when we know what to do and even when we have the Holy Spirit helping us, we won't always get the godly lifestyle right.

Trying hard to live the godly lifestyle, we see in Jesus is never going to save us.

### **Therefore, we still need grace in addition to truth.**

The Incarnation is a critically important moment in salvation history.

However, it is only one moment in a much grander plan.

God's Story from Creation to Conclusion reminds us of that fact.

The Incarnation comes in the middle!

Chapter 1, Creation reminds us where it all started: God created us because he loves us.

Chapter 2, Brokenness inserts the problem: We sinned against God and broke everything. We tried everything to make it right, but nothing worked. Thankfully, God had a plan.

Chapter 3, Jesus starts with the Incarnation: Jesus is the perfect person for God's plan for precisely the reason we are discussing today. He is the Word of God made flesh. But that's just the pivot point in salvation history. Jesus lived a perfect life and paid the perfect price for our sin on the cross. Then he rose again from the dead.

Jesus came to show us the truth of how to live godly lives, but that's just a new beginning.

In Jesus there is also grace. Grace opens the way to repentance and to our accepting forgiveness. Grace opens the way for us to be adopted as sons and daughters of God. Grace opens the way to new life, and grace opens the way to eternal life.

The Incarnation is just a pivot point in salvation history, but it is a critical pivot point.

**Now we know what God expects.**

Now we know who God is because Jesus—the Word of God made flesh—has shown us.

Now we know what God wants from us because Jesus—the Word of God made flesh—lived that life perfectly and showed us what it looks like.

That's what it means that the Word became flesh.

**That's what Jesus' incarnation means to us.**