

Christmas Is...

What is Christmas?

Christmas is a celebration of when 'the Word became flesh'.

We call this 'the Incarnation.'

From the Latin 'in' 'flesh' (carnis)

The Christian gospel's staggering claim is that God the Son took on human flesh.

The baby Jesus who was born of Mary was God in a human body.

He was fully God and fully man.

John 1:1-18

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

⁶There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but he came to testify about the Light. ⁹There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John 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.'"

¹⁶For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

¹⁷For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

John's gospel doesn't give a Christmas narrative as do Matthew and Luke's. Instead he addresses the identity of the baby born in a Bethlehem.

Who was the Baby Jesus?

¹In the beginning was the Word,

I. The Word of God

This section begins with "In the beginning...",

pointing to the first verse in *Genesis*, (which means, "*beginnings*").

Anyone would expect the next word to be 'God,'

but John adds 'The Word' instead – (logos in the original),

To the Jew this would immediately bring to mind that when God spoke all creation came into being,

"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." (Gen. 1:3).

The Word in the beginning would bring the Jewish reader to the idea of God's means of creation: His spoken word.

As John added,

³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being

Sinclair Ferguson writes,

John is transporting us back through time and bringing us to a point before creation, before time (if we can use such language). He brings us to a 'time before time' and makes a staggering claim about Jesus – whom he had known so well: He was there as the Word in the beginning. He was the Word through which God spoke the cosmos into being. When Genesis recorded, 'And God said ... and it was so', it meant that this Word acted."¹

The verb, "was" is used to describe "the Word."

Was – (Gk. Eta/nu – 'hain') – [*imperfect tense*– past continuous]

John pressed on showing that The Word 'always was' in the beginning –

- (from the *ages to the Ages*-Gk. '*eis ton archai*') –

--establishing the eternity of the Logos.

¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Child in the Manger*, (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), p. 26.

II. The Word with God

Next he speaks of the intimacy between the Word and God.

and the Word was with God,

With –Gk. - *pros* (not *en*)– facing, face to face, with God

John adds,

¹⁸No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father

The Logos saw God, *was with Him*, was face to face, with Him and intimate, was “eye to eye” - in the bosom of – close proximity, touching, leaning into.

Clearly this is a relationship of intimacy.

III. The Word was God

...and the Word was God.

– Lit. ‘*God always was the Word*’.

Total identity with God established!

In the beginning the Creator of all things was with God and was God.

Jesus, the Word displayed both the attributes and unique activities of God.

John the Baptist spoke of Him,

¹⁵John 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.’”

Pre-existence – John was Jesus’ cousin born six months earlier than Jesus, yet existed before Him

The Person we know as Jesus of Nazareth existed before He was born.

He also had Life within Himself

The gospel writer then described the Word,

⁴In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

The Creator of light was the Light, who would enlighten men's dark hearts.

John also testified of the Word as the Light.

John ...came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but he came to testify about the Light. ⁹There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

Jesus said of Himself,

“I am the Light of the world;
he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness,
but will have the Light of life.” (John 8:12).

“I am the way and the truth and the life;
no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6)

The Word (Logos) *always was eternal*

Always was with God in close relationship - oneness

And always was God – One in essence, yet distinct in Person

This same Word who was the eternal, Creator, and source of life and light, was born to the virgin Mary in a stable in Bethlehem.

IV. The Word with Men

¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The ultimate truth about Christmas is that the baby Jesus was God in flesh. John who wrote this gospel wanted to emphasize Christ's deity as a man. The child in the manger was the incarnation of God.

Paul wrote of how Jesus voluntarily suspended the full application of His divine attributes. He didn't give up being God, but He willingly gave up the independent use of the privileges and powers that were His as God.

Paul writes of Jesus Christ,

“...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

(Phil. 2:5-8).

MacArthur writes,

“Lots of people who would otherwise gladly embrace Jesus as Messiah don't want Him to be God. They will welcome Him as a son of David, but not as the Son of God. They don't mind celebrating the birth of a baby, but they don't want to hear about the Lord of lords. They sing of His nativity but brazenly reject His authority. They adore Him as an infant but will not pay homage to Him as the God-man. They can tolerate the trappings of Christmas – a manger, shepherds, wise men, and Joseph and Mary – but they cannot bear the advent of God in human flesh. Consequently the world ignores the core of all Christmas truth. And instead of honoring Jesus at Christmas, they are actually mocking Him.”²

When John wrote of the Word being God and the eternal creator he was on good ground until the Word came in contact with flesh.

To the Greek the Logos was their highest view of God. He was their ultimate reality; God existed in purity and complete separation from anything material. Platonic views of God dominated their thinking, in that God would be spiritual and never come into contact with evil and temporary material.

When Paul was speaking before the Areopagus council as soon as he mentioned the *resurrection*, the Greeks rejected his arguments because to them the body was a prison; and death meant freedom.

“Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead,
some begin to sneer...” (Acts 17:32)

Challenging this perspective, John adds, “the Word became flesh...” (v. 14)

² John F. MacArthur, Jr. *The Miracle of Christmas*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 84.

C. S. Lewis contributes to our thoughts by his own personal struggle in his essay entitled, "What are we to make of Jesus Christ". He goes on to say, " ...there is no parallel to this in other world religions:

"...If you had gone to Buddha and asked him 'Are you the Son of Brahma?' he would have said '*My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.*' If you had gone to Socrates and asked 'Are you Zeus?' he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked 'Are you Allah?' he would first have rent his clothes, and then cut your head off. And, if you had asked Confucius, 'Are you heaven?', I think he would probably have replied, '*Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.*'"

Lewis' point:

It makes no sense to accept Jesus as a '*great moral teacher, but not as God*' in the way many people rather unthinkably do ("*I don't believe all the stuff about Jesus being Savior and God, but I do think he was a great moral teacher and wonderful example*'). If he were not who and what he claimed to be he was very far from being a great moral teacher. He was either a deceiver or he was deceived. We ought not to ignore the fact that he was executed for blasphemy.

There are only three possibilities we can conclude concerning the identity of Jesus Christ, whom John said 'was with God and was God.'

1. He was what he claimed to be, or
2. He was a liar, or
3. He was seriously deluded and not fully responsible for what He said.³

[Response: Receive Him (John 1:12)]

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift was giv'n!
 So God imparts to human hearts, the blessings of His heaven.
 No ear may hear His coming; but in this world of sin,
 Where meek souls will receive Him, still ... The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend on us, we pray;
 Cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us today.
 We hear the Christmas angels; the great glad tidings tell;
 O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

³ Ferguson, Pp. 29-30.