

**Introduction**

John seems to be preoccupied with the question “Who is Jesus?” After all, he begins John 1:1 with the identity of the Word in relation to God, then in relation to creation, and then in relation to man, then in relation to John the Baptist. He informs us that the Word shares all the attributes of deity with God the Father; that the Word is the creator; that the Word is life and light for men; and that the Word was not John the Baptist.

Now even though there is no man greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11), John the Baptist was not the Word. Rather, he was the first of several witnesses called by the apostle John to testify of the identity of the Word. Not only did the Word, Jesus, himself testify to his own identity, but in John 5:31-39 we see the entire list of five witnesses: Jesus, John the Baptist, the miraculous works that Jesus does, God the Father, and the Scriptures. The testimony of all these witnesses agree that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world.

So, the identity of the Word permeates the book. In fact, 20:31 tells us that John’s purpose was to bring people to belief that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. You might remember back to Matt. 16:13-16 when the “identity question” arose that Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” It is as if John takes up his pen to give his own extended answer to the very same question. He arrives at precisely the same answer in 20:31!

Actually, there are a number of essential beliefs about Jesus that must be held by one if he or she can lay claim to the title “Christian.” Apart from these beliefs, you *cannot* be a Christian:

1. You must believe in the resurrection (Rom. 10:9-10).
2. You must confess Jesus Christ as the Lord (Rom. 10:9-10, 1 Cor. 12:3).
3. You must hold to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11), including all of the items on this list.
4. You must believe in the substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4).
5. You must believe that Jesus is Christ and the Son of God (John 20:31).
6. You must believe in the incarnation (1 John 4:2, described in John 1:14).

Getting back to where we began, with the identity of Jesus, it is unfortunate that though He is Light and Life, and though John and many others witnessed of Him, He was not understood, he was not recognized, and he was not received (John 1:5, 10, 11). But a small number of people did and still do receive him, believe in him, and become children of God, as a result of God’s work in them (1:12-13).

Starting in verse 14, John turns to the relationship of the Word to the Old Testament system or Mosaic dispensation. He is marking a major shift in God’s dealing with mankind here. You will remember that the Jews held Moses in very high regard; the Law was paramount to them; God’s revelation of the Law on Mt. Sinai was a watershed event in their history. But now one greater than Moses has appeared; the Law has been surpassed, and God has revealed not just Law but Himself through Jesus Christ. Let’s see how this came about.

**1. The Word Became Flesh**

This refers to the incarnation, or “en-flesh-ment,” where the second person of the Trinity permanently took upon himself human nature. This includes physical flesh and the all elements of human nature, sin alone excepted.

Note that the Lord is still incarnated and forever will be. He is the only member of the Trinity that is this way. That body “prepared” (Heb. 10:5) is eternal.

He did not become a person, as it were, for he already was a person—the second person of the Godhead. He did not suddenly become two people existing in one body. He took human nature. We believe that at the virgin birth, which effected the incarnation, the Holy Spirit worked a miracle such that the person of the Son of God was joined to an impersonal (not another person) human nature and became the God-man, without losing any deity and without losing any humanity. He *added* flesh. He did not exchange anything. He is still as much deity as before the incarnation.

The incarnation marks the end of Christophanies in the Bible. John 14:9 says that one who sees Jesus has seen the Father. The ultimate revelation of God to man is in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:2-3). The appearance of Jesus to Paul on the Damascus road was not a Christophany as in the OT—rather it was an appearance of the risen, glorified, incarnated Jesus.

The incarnation is necessary for redemption to be accomplished, because a perfect substitute had to pay for sin, but only a human could die. So redemption required a human to die who also was God so that the offering was perfect and of infinite-value in its atonement for sin. It also presupposes the trinity for one of the persons of the Godhead to take on humanity while the others did not.

By the incarnation we know that God values physical life (he took it on himself!). We also know that sin is not inherent in human existence: it is an intrusion or unnatural part of human existence.

Jesus became flesh, but did God look at us and then design Jesus’ body in like fashion? I think rather it was the other way around: Adam and Even were designed in the likeness of God, including the body prepared for Christ. The first couple truly had perfect bodies, formed according to the pattern of the One who would come.

**2. The Word Dwelt Among Us**

This phrase simply means that the Word lived among mankind generally, the Jews locally, and John and the apostles specifically. What a marvelous miracle that this could occur. It is the beginning of the fulfillment of repeated promises to Israel that God would dwell with His people (Ex. 29:45, Ps. 68:18, Ez. 37:21-28, Rev. 21:3).

The verb evokes the idea of living in a tent, the NT tabernacle. Again, this shows how the incarnation surpasses the OT system, because the old tabernacle, to the pre-Solomonic Jews, was where God resided on earth. Now, John affirms, God has become flesh!

Because Jesus lived among men, the incarnation shows us that our High Priest knows our temptations by personal experience (Heb. 4:15). He lived where you live, not in some ivory tower somewhere!

### 3. The Word's Glory Beheld

"We" here is John and the apostles. We today obviously have not seen the glory of Christ as John did in person with his own eyes. We believe but yet have not seen (John 20:29). John personally witnessed the glory of Christ.

What does it mean to behold glory? It means to view it, to take it in with one's eyes. The implication is that one is impressed with what is seen, to be amazed and marvel at it.

#### A. Glory that is Unique

The term "only begotten" is from the Greek monogenes. It means "of sole descent," the only child in a family, without siblings. As a result, our Savior is unique. We could say "uniquely begotten." There is no one like him. He shares all the attributes of God.

Others are called sons of God - Christians (Rom 8:14; Heb 2:10), angels (Job 30:7), the nation Israel (Hos 11:11), and the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14), but none in the sense given here for Jesus. For instance, check out Heb. 11:17 which refers to Isaac as Abraham's only begotten son, but obviously Abraham had Ishmael as well, and before Isaac! So the term is not just one of first-ness, but of uniqueness. This is not a matter of chronology (first begotten) but of descent. The emphasis is on the only part, not the begotten part! It refers to the unique relation of Christ to the Father. We are not sons like He is. We must avoid buddy-buddy stuff with the Lord where we bring him down to the level of merely a brother, or bring ourselves up to the level of a miniature-Christ. In a word, we need humility!

#### B. Glory Full of Grace and Truth

"Full of grace and truth" means that there is nothing lacking in Christ's display of glory. If there is any way that a person can be gracious and truthful, you will see it in Jesus. He actually reveals God's grace and truth perfectly.

He also brought with him a special measure of those qualities as part of the upcoming church age. His ministry, atonement, and provision is a marked manifestation of God's grace toward man. We see that grace (God's unmerited, unsought favor) is a special characteristic of this age. It is now clearly revealed how God deals with sin ultimately, unlike in the past when the Jews had only a shadow of the good things to come.

Truth is a mark of all of Jesus and His ministry (John 14:6). So it should be of us.

#### Conclusion

We get to see the glory of the incarnate Lord in the Scriptures. The more we read and meditate on the written Word, the more we will be conformed to the living Word, and be privileged to "see" his glory, that of the unique Son of God, full of all grace and truth.

MAP

Texts that Mention the Incarnation with Other Terms (see McCune, Systematic II)

Matthew 20:28 He came

John 6:51 He came down from heaven

John 3:13 He descended from heaven

John 3:17 He was sent

1 Timothy 1:15 He came into the world

1 John 3:5 He was manifested

Philippians 2:7 He emptied Himself

2 Corinthians 8:9 He became poor

Hebrews 2:9 He was made a little lower than the angels

Hebrews 10:5 A body was prepared for Him

Galatians 4:4 He was made of a woman

John 1:14 He was made flesh and blood

Romans 1:3 He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh

Romans 8:3 He was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh. (Jesus was a real man, and He appeared as a sinful man. He had the likeness of ordinary, sinful man but was not sinful. There was a similarity between His body and that of sinful man. Jesus did not come "in sinful flesh" but in its "likeness.")

Philippians 2:7a He took the form of a servant

Philippians 2:7c He was made in the likeness of men

Philippians 2:8 He was found in fashion as a man

Hebrews 2:17 He was made like unto His brethren

1 Corinthians 15:47 He is the second man, the Lord from heaven

1 Timothy 3:16 He was God manifest in the flesh

Hebrews 2:14 He partook of flesh and blood