



John 1:1-18

“WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?”

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“Following Christ at City Center!”

I. JOHN 1:1-18 (RSV)

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 anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'") And from his fulness have we 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 Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

II. SCRIPTURE SHEET AND SERMON

JOHN 1:1-18 "WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?"

Narrative Order Is Not The Temporal Sequence

BIBLICAL

STORY: A. vv.1-2 THE WORD WITH GOD "IN THE BEGINNING" (Genesis 1:1 LXX). [Wisdom Myth]

1 In the beginning Begins In Eternity, Not Birth Stories
 ETERNITY was **THE WORD** (Gk. *logos*), (Pre-existence: Where he comes from) [Prov.8:22-31]
 and the Word was with **GOD**, (Distinction: *with God*) 17:5, Lit. *pros*, towards
 and the Word was God. (Identity: *was God*) //Phil. 2:6-11, Col. 1:15-20, 1 Tim.3:16

2 This (i.e. Word) was The Word Is/Does What God Is/Does
in the beginning with God.* (Pre-existence: Not exhaust God) Spirit In 1:33, [Proverbs 8:30] [Wis. Sol. 7:25-26]

B. vv.3-10 THE WORD AND ALL CREATION: LIGHT. The Word Is God's Self-Expression
Word = Instrument Of Creation, Life

1) vv.3-5 All Things Through Him Were Made: Life And Light (General Revelation Present).

3 + All things **through him were made**, (Creation) [Prov. 8:30, 3:10]
 CREATION - and without him was not anything made that was made.// (Comprehension)
 4 In him was *life*, (Source) Jn. 5:36,6:35,11:25,14:6
 and the *life* was the **light** of men (all people), (Universal) [Proverbs 8:35]
 5 and the *light* shines in the *darkness*, (Activity) [Wis. of Sol. 7:29-30]
 EVIL/FALL and the *darkness* has not overcome it.// (Victory Over Evil)
Jumps Over Much History

2) vv.6-8 John's Testimony To The Word/Light's Primacy.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John./ (Special Revelation)
 7 He came for a witness (testimony), (Evangelism, Model)
 PROPHETS in order to bear witness to the light, (Conversion/Repentance)
 in order that all might believe through him. (Focus: Role Of Preacher)
 8 He was not the light, but came in order to bear witness to the light. Correct John's Status

1') vv.9-10 World Made Through Him: The Light Rejected (General Revelation Rejected).

9 The true **light**, which illumines every man was coming (continually) into the world.
 10 He was in the world, and **the world was made through him**, but the world knew him not.* [Wis. Sol. 6:13, 16] (Ignorance) [I Enoch 42:2]
 COMMUNICATION

C. v.11 THE WORD AND HIS OWN: NOT RECEIVED (TRAGEDY).

11 Unto his own he came, Aorist Tense, Once In Past History
 REJECTION and his own people received him not. (Jewish Rejection)
Drama Of God

C' vv.12-13 THE WORD AND HIS OWN: RECEIVED (COMEDY). Benefits

12 But to all who received him, (Faith/Trust) [Wis. of Sol. 7:27]
 BENEFITS he gave power (authority) to become children of God, (Adoption, Restoration)
 to those believing in his name, (Conversion, New Birth)
 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* Assumes Like Is Known By Like
 NEW BIRTH

B' vv.14-16 THE WORD AND THE BELIEVING CHURCH: GRACE AND TRUTH. Incarnation Is A Permanent Union

1) v.14 The Word Brings Grace And Truth (Revelation Received By Community: Us, We).

14 And the Word (*logos*) *became* flesh and dwelt (tent) among us; full of **grace and truth**; Permanent Union
 INCARNATION And **we** have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, [Baruch 3:37, Wis. of Sol.7:22,25] (vs. Docetism, Gnosticism)
 NEW COMMUNITY

2) v.15 John's Testimony To The Word's Pre-Existence And Primacy.

15 John bears witness to him and cries out, Witness To Pre-existence, Validates v.14
 "This is he of whom I said, First Public Witness
 EVANGELIST 'He who comes after ranks before me, because before me he was (existed).'" Eternal & Temporal
(Preaching Jesus)

1') vv.16-17 The Word Brings Grace And Truth (Old and New Covenant Communities).

16 Because out of his fullness **we** have all received, and grace upon grace. (New Covenant)
 17 For the law through Moses was given, **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ.* First use of his name!
See Jesus = See God!
 TORAH

A' v.18 THE SON WITH GOD & MADE KNOWN IN SALVATION HISTORY. [Wisdom of Solomon 8:4]

18 No one has ever seen **GOD**, 5:37, 6:46, The One Who Made You Is The One Who Saves You! Only God Can Reveal God!
 THEOLOGY **THE ONLY GOD**, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.* Known As Never Before, P66

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

*“No one has ever seen God,
the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he had made him known.”*

Jesus as our clearest window into the life of God.

J O H N 1 : 1 8

There are many Jesus' out there in the pop culture of American spirituality. Here in the south *Sweet Jesus* is a favorite: the one who *walks with me and talks with me and plays hopscotch on the lawn*. *Revival Jesus* is a close second: walk forward, get your ticket for heaven, then live like you please because you are home free! How convenient! How utterly unlike the call to be a follower on a lifelong pilgrimage with a band of brothers and sisters. As I list some of the Jesus' on current display, you may squirm a bit.

There's first Republican Jesus, against tax increases and activist judges, for family values and owning firearms.

There's Democrat Jesus, against Wall Street and Wal-Mart, for reducing our carbon footprint and printing money.

There's Therapist Jesus, one who helps us cope with life's problems, heals our past, tells us how valuable we are and not to be so hard on ourselves.

There's Starbucks Jesus, who drinks fair trade coffee, loves spiritual conversations, drives a hybrid, and goes to film festivals in urban areas.

There's Open-minded Jesus, who loves everyone all the time no matter what (except for people who are not as open-minded as you).

There's Touchdown Jesus, who helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians and determines the outcomes of Super Bowls.

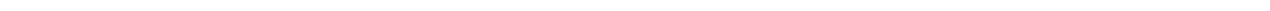
There's Martyr Jesus, a good man who died a cruel death so we can feel sorry for him.

There's Gentle Jesus, who was meek and mild, with high cheek bones, flowing hair, and walks around barefoot, wearing a sash (looking very European and not at all Semitic and Jewish in his portrait which hangs in our chapel!).

There's Hippie Jesus, who wears Birkenstock sandals, teaches everyone to give peace a chance, imagines a world without religion, and sings "all you need is love."

There's Prosperity Jesus, who encourages us to reach our full potential, reach for the stars, and buy a boat to cruise around Lake Greenwood while planning the next vacation.

There's Spirituality Jesus, who hates religion, churches, pastors, priests, and doctrine,



and would rather have people out in nature, finding *the god within* and listening to ambiguously spiritual music.

There's Platitude Jesus, good for Christmas specials, greeting cards, and bad sermons, inspiring people to believe in themselves.

There's Revolutionary Jesus, who teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and blame things on *the system*.

There's Guru Jesus, a wise, inspirational teacher who believes in you and helps you find your center as you chant your mantra and balance your energies with green tea and yoga.

There's Boyfriend Jesus, who wraps his arms around us as we sing about his intoxicating love in our secret place through sappy praise music full of teenage theology.¹

Finally, there's Good Example Jesus, who shows you how to help people, change the planet, and become a better you.² And if you know of other caricatures, I'd love to add them to the list. I had no idea Jesus was so flexible and moldable, did you?

Then- off in a ignored corner- there's the Jesus of Scripture and the church's faith, the Word of the Living God who assumed human flesh to get close enough to wreck and remake our world on a new foundation. The reason we have these distortions that so neatly match our politics and lifestyles is because we want something easier than God offers. We want a designer, customized faith as hip as the latest styles rather than straight-up version of Christianity with all its offenses. But Jesus will not be so easily tamed. He calls us to follow him, not for him to follow us towards the good life defined on our terms.

People have strange ideas about the Lord, and when they bring me one, what do I do? We open the Gospels and read the Creeds. I ask, "How does this match up with what you've been told?" And when they say, "But I thought...." or "I once heard on TV...", I say, "You've been lied to and believed it. Would you like a better way?" We sit in silence while it sinks in and they sputter a bit. They look dumfounded, often disappointed. A dream has died.

A Word About John

In the church's gallery are four portraits of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke *and John*.³ With

¹ T. Bergler, "When Are We Going to Grow Up? The Juvenilization of American Christianity," www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/june/when-are-we-going-to-grow-up.

² Purloined and edited without apology from Kevin DeYoung, "Who Do You Say That I Am?" from his DeYoung, Restless, and Reformed blog (posted 6-10-09).

³ For a theological refection on the ordering of the canon, see Albert Outler, *Christology*, edited by Thomas Oden (Anderson, IN: Bristol House Ltd., 1996), Chapter 1, "The Primitive Matrix," 23-45.

some variation the first three see Jesus through a single lenses, but John is different enough to place him in a separate category. His lens has a special coating. John dared reach back past the baptism- where Mark started, back past the stories of virginal conception- where Matthew and Luke started, back into the eternity that was before time, back into the mystery of who God is in himself. It was a bold move, sustained by the conviction that in Jesus we have to do with the Ultimate, the ground of all that is or will be. Absolute truth, undiminished light, incorruptible life, pure love, all poured into and out of a mysterious Jewish traveling teacher and miracle worker, Jesus of Nazareth, to whom the church added all sorts of honorific titles in Greek: *Logos*- the mysterious pre-existent Word, *Christos*- the Christ or Messiah, *Monogenes*- the only begotten Son. And once John said it with such power and beauty, nothing more was needed. Verse 14, “And the Word became flesh and set up tent among us; full of grace and truth...” Then verse 18, “No one has ever seen God, the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” Jesus is our window into God because in him- in the Son- God assumed flesh and moved into the neighborhood to give us a glimpse of the divine life. Gail O’Day has written of the incarnation, of the moment when God the Son assumed flesh in Mary’s womb:

“The incarnation means that human beings can see, hear, and know God in ways never before possible... in the incarnation human beings are given intimate, palpable, corporeal (i.e. bodily) access to the cosmic reality of God.”⁴

Good news! In Jesus God has invaded our mess. You can know the one who’s been reaching out long before you were aware of it. Turn and face the light that’s shining on your back. The church is not country club, not civic club, not the last place for the preservation of morals and manners and old music; we are the community that puts human beings in contact with the Living God through Jesus Christ. We do not depend on the world for our legitimacy. We are an alternative to the world and not its religious assistant to be sent to and fro on errands. All else is secondary to our radical religious identity. The church has something important to say, verse 16: “Because out of his fullness **we** have **all** received, and grace upon grace.” We guard and transmit a vast treasure of divine revelation. We have some things to say no other group has access to, and that is both privilege and burden.

Speculative Theology (vv.1-5)

Once you’ve said the name *God* and the place *world*, how do you relate the two. How can we speak of God in a way true to God’s holy transcendence, God’s otherness, and also to God’s closeness, God’s immanence? One strategy was for Jewish thinkers to modify their strict monotheism with speculation about God’s *Wisdom* or God’s *Word* or God’s *Spirit*

⁴ *The New Interpreter’s Bible: John* (Nashville: TN: Abington, 1995), 524.

which were roughly equivalents.⁵ God relates to the creation not directly but through the mediation of Wisdom, Word, and Spirit. When we talk on the phone, you're dealing with me, but not directly; the encounter is mediated through words. Just as my word is an expression of my person, yet not identical, so with God's Word or *logos*. There is dynamic relationship already within God. It is with great care that John reached back past space and time to write, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God (distinction), and the Word *was* God (identity). This was in the beginning with God." "Let me tell you," says John, "about something Genesis did not cover. You know God spoke all things into existence. Let me now tell you about that personal Word which showed up in Jesus."

But the eternal face-to-face relationship of God and the Word was not content to remain alone, so creation bursts forth in verse 3, and it all comes through this *Logos*, this Word, this right hand of God reaching out to spin the galaxies from nothing and the man and woman from moist clay. Twice John says it, first the positive, "All things through him were made;" then the negative, "and without him was not anything made that was made." Creation is not apart from Christ; all creation, from the smallest subatomic particle discovered in a particle accelerator out to the edge of farthest space, bear his thumb print as engineer and artist without rival. When we deal with creation we are dealing with the handiwork of Jesus Christ, and he cares about his stuff! To treat it cavalierly is to treat him that way. There is nothing in creation over which he does not announce- including you, "This is mine!" Our fascination with creation and with one another as male and female is a tribute to His creative genius. Herbert Gabheart has written:

"To artists, He is the altogether Lovely.
To architects the Chief Cornerstone.
To physicians, He is the Great Physician.
To preachers the Word of God.
To philosophers, he is the Wisdom of God.
To the dying the Resurrection and the Life.
To geologists, he is the Rock of Ages.
To professors the Master Teacher.
To prodigals, he is the Forgiving Father.
To lost sheep the Good Shepherd.
To thirsty souls, he is the Water of Life.
To the hungry, the Bread of Life.

⁵ See Charles Talbert, *Reading John* (New York: Crossroads, 1992), especially pp. 265-284, "Appendix: Descending-Ascending Redeemer Figures In Mediterranean Antiquity" for a thorough discussion of these issues. John used current mythology and cosmology to shape his understanding of Jesus. His was thus an "incarnational" strategy.

To philanthropists, he is God’s unspeakable Gift.”⁶

So who is Jesus the Son to you? To me he is *Lord of Surprises* and *The One Who Never Throws Me Away*. He is the deepest longing of my truest heart and the one who drafted me into his service when I had nothing but confusion to offer, and there is nothing wrong with me that more of Jesus won’t cure. He is God’s comprehensive medicine cabinet.

Note how in verses 4 and 5 John plays verbally with two building blocks of creation: *life* and *light*. He forms them into a word chain where one links with the next down to a confrontation with the darkness of evil, “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” From life to death and from light to darkness. It’s a collision of two kingdoms: the invading kingdom of God and the squatter’s kingdom of the Evil One. John does not tell us where the darkness of sin, evil, and death came from. He presumes it as a fact this side of Eden’s paradise. And though it is here with awful effects, it cannot engulf or frustrate that light of God’s grace that continuously illumines the whole creation. Where the light shines, darkness scatters, and Jesus has come to challenge the way the world is run.

For years Gardner Taylor was prince of the pulpit at Brooklyn’s Concord Baptist Church. It was a Sunday night service in Baton Rouge during the Depression. In the middle of the message the electricity flickered, then went out. Encased in darkness the young Rev. Taylor stood motionless, not knowing what to do. Finally, an old deacon yelled out from the congregation, “Preach on, preacher, we can still see Jesus in the dark!”⁷

John was confident in God’s *life-and-light-filled-Word* moving out in creation, moving out in history, reaching towards every man and woman with the illumination of prevenient grace, calling them from shadows of superstition and false religion into the light of Jesus and a pilgrimage back towards God. Nothing can stop the light. Not even a cruel cross and a dark grave. And it is our job as church to stand in a dark world and shout, “We can still see Jesus in the dark.” In the darkness of addiction, in the darkness of divorce, in the darkness of ignorance, in the darkness of racism, in the darkness of mental illness, in the darkness of human cruelty and natural disasters, in the darkness of disease and pain and death, the church cries out, “We can still see Jesus in the dark.” Verse 5 is a victory shout, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” That is confidence. Darkness is real, but it cannot win. In Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, God the Father conquered it. Our job now is to implement the victory at ground level.

⁶ Calvin Miller, *The Book of Jesus* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 43.

⁷ E. Gilbreath, “The Pulpit King,” *Christianity Today*, December 11, 1995, 27.

Witness, Resistance, And New Birth (vv.6-13)

A boy had a dog he loved, and since he was learning about the moon and stars at school, he set up a class for his canine companion. Just after dark they went out. The boy squatted down and pointed up, “Spot, that’s the moon, and just to the left, that’s the Big Dipper.” The dog looked at the boy’s finger and turned his head in puzzlement.

What is it about us that so often wants to focus on the messenger rather than the message, the finger rather than the moon? There may have been those that did not like the way John the Baptist combed his hair; his clothing and diet were strange; his messages not always comforting. He was more prophet than pastor, more firebrand than friend. John the Baptizer was controversial, not part of the Jerusalem establishment.

Twice in the majesty of John’s Prologue, in verses 6 through 8 and again in verse 15, John the Baptist interrupts the flow. He is- in a sense- the model Christian preacher. John is a faithful witness sent by God. The message is *through him* but not *about him*, and that is sometimes a fine line to walk. If the preacher never tells personal stories, the people complain he is abstract and impersonal; if he tells too many, he is an egoist bent on self-promotion. The messenger is important, but not as important as the message. Messengers come and go; the message stays the same: Jesus Christ, the life and light of the world. Three hundred years after John’s death there were still groups scattered around the Mediterranean that venerated him as the great prophet and Messiah.⁸ They mistook the man for the message; like the boy’s puppy they looked at the finger rather than the moon. But the author of the Fourth Gospel is clear, verse 8: “John *was not* the light, but came in order to bear witness to the light.” Messengers are important; we’re also expendable. Chew one up; God will call and send another. Like it or not, God prefers preaching to any other form of communication. Face-to-face over an open Bible. There is no substitute, and a church that has the Bible opened to it week after week after week cannot go far wrong.

If you’ve ever doubted the resistant and blinding power of sin, spend time with verses 9 and 10. They are tragic for what they tell us about unconverted human nature and how alienated we are from God. “The true light, which illumines everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, *and the world knew him not.*” God shows up in the person in Jesus. People yawn, then get mad. To stand in the midst of this awesome creation and say that there is no God is to confess my blindness. To hear the story of Jesus and to dismiss it is to diagnose myself as lost. Darkness is more than

⁸ The third century Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* I, 54: “Some even of the disciples of John, who seemed to be great ones, separated themselves from the people, and proclaimed their own master as the Christ” (Ante-Nicene Fathers 8.92).

the absence of light; it is active resistance and rebellion against the light. Spiritual darkness is the active presence of evil trying to snuff out the light. Some of you have lived there. It happened to John Newton the slave trader, “I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.” Only God can open the ears of the soul and the eyes of the heart. Only God can awaken a dead spirit. And- miracle of miracles- he often does it through preaching, through called men and women who point to Jesus Christ as the human face of God. Some scholars have said that if we simply cut out the two passages about John as intrusions, we have a wonderful theological poem about Jesus. I do not agree. John the Baptist belongs here. His prose points to Jesus’ poetry. The cause of Christ in the world advances through witnesses like John who shine a light on the one who is the light, just as we are doing this morning.

At the center of this magnificent opening paragraph is a bold contrast, a continental divide of the soul. Our Wesleyan understanding is not that our wills are free of themselves; they are not; they are thoroughly corrupted and twisted by sin. We cannot choose the right on our own. But we are not without help. God’s prevenient grace comes to us and to all ahead of conscious awareness to restore a measure of freedom and responsiveness. God graciously puts our wills on a kind of artificial life support so that we can either cooperate with his great work of saving us, or else resist to our diminishment.⁹ When we respond to God’s grace by trust, it carries us along until we come to the point of surrender where God sets up residence within the soul through the Spirit. This is the new birth, a spiritual entry into a new world. We entered life through our mother’s wombs; we enter the new world through the agency of God alone. Hear the contrast John placed at the strategic center:

“Unto his own he came, and his own people received him not.//

But to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God, to those believing in his name, who were born, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but (were born) of God.”

⁹ These thoughts are a summary of our U.M. Doctrinal Standards, especially “**Article VII: Of Original or Birth Sin:** Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.” “**Article VIII: Of Free Will,** The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will” (*Book of Discipline 2008*, 61).

John 1:1-18 11

And to make sure the analogy of new birth is not misunderstood, John excludes certain options. This birth is: “not of blood” (it has nothing to do with the female reproductive cycle); it is not of “the will of the flesh” (it springs not from human sexual desire); and it is not “of the will of man” (the male genetic contribution).¹⁰ It cannot be explained from human capacities. It is not from your parents; it is “of God.” It is God’s work in the soul, and no human technology can bring it about.

I can preach the Word, administer the sacraments, pray with people, but only God can bring about the miracle of new birth. We cannot make it happen, but we can say No to it, and that is a decision God promises to respect, through he reaches out to us every moment up to our deaths. That light will shine until a person walks into the darkness a final time and closes the door of eternity behind them, saying a final “No thank you,” to God’s love in Christ. Hell is never an accident or oversight but always a stubborn choice.

In a play the French dramatist Jean Anouihl describes heaven as he sees it. The faithful are gathered with their tickets. Assured of admission, they wait impatiently for the gates to open. On the fringe of the crowd is a small, bedraggled group who have no tickets.

A rumor begins to circulate among the chosen, “Did you hear that he’s going to let *them* in too? Well, I don’t believe it!... After all we did...”

Unbelief gives way to resentment which boils into anger. Suddenly they begin to shout in protest and to blaspheme God. At that moment they are all damned. They were given a last-minute opportunity to recognize the Lord- and failed.¹¹

See the tragedy? Verse 11: “Unto his own he came, and his own people received him not.” God’s own people largely missed their visitation. There is tragedy at the center; there is also comedy, and if it was set to music, there would be a change from a minor to a major key with verse 12: “But to all who received him...” When Billy Graham asks people, “Have you received Christ? Do you trust and believe in him?” he is using the language of John’s Prologue.¹² History is full of the testimonies of people whose lives have been transformed by the indwelling Christ.¹³ Mine is one of them.

¹⁰ L. William Countryman, *The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International Press, 1994), 19.

¹¹ James Feehan, *Story Power* (San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1994), 28.

¹² For a critique, J.D. Greear, “Should We Stop Inviting Jesus Into Our Hearts?” www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/julyweb-only/greear-ask-jesus-into-your-heart.

¹³ See Hugh Kerr and John Mulder, *Famous Conversions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994) for a historical anthology. For a biblical theology, see Peter Toon, *Born*

There is no one model for this encounter; they are as varied as the people. Patterns emerge, but there are no cookie-cutters. The God who created us as unique does not ignore his handiwork when he saves us. So I ask people, “Do you know Jesus Christ, or do you only know *about him*?” My job as pastor is finally to get down to the tough questions. I can do small talk: I ask about children; I talk about sports and the weather and whatever is necessary. It’s often very enjoyable. But finally it comes down to this: “How is it with your soul? Are the lights on, or are you still living in the shadows?”

She is now buried nearly fifteen years. I hope Princess Diana knew Jesus Christ. I hope amidst all the privilege and pain of royalty there was a faithful bishop in the Church of England who was not impressed with the glitter but saw past it to a soul in need of a Savior. Let the world have its idols, let it worship its heroes and stars, let it glorify Elvis and Diana and whoever, but never let the church forget that no life is of more value than any other. *All* bear God’s imprint; Christ died and rose for *all*; *all* must answer the question, “How is it with your soul?” *All* are only a heartbeat away from giving a final answer.

The Confession Of The Church (vv.14-18)

I like what Cyril of Jerusalem, one of the early church fathers, said, “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother.”¹⁴ And it is our mother who speaks in verse 14. Here the story changes from third person description to first person plural, from *him* and *he* to *we* and *us*. Who else but the church can confess verse 14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt *among us*, full of grace and truth. And *we* have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” It is in the church that the Bible and the faith are preserved; the church is the earthen container of a great treasure; it is the church that bears the good news of a God who came and set up personal residence in our neighborhood so that we could get a good look at deity. God desires a people, not just saved individuals.

In order to protect and preserve its experience of faith, the church uses careful language to describe the coming of God in the man Jesus.¹⁵ The *logos* or *Son* was pre-existent, not Jesus- who only came into being in Mary’s womb. The second person of the Trinity became incarnate in Jesus, and this union endures to this day in the resurrected flesh

Again: A Biblical Study of Regeneration (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987).

¹⁴ I.D.E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Patristic Quotations* (Oklahoma City, OK: Hearthstone Publishing, 1996), 48.

¹⁵ For a masterful presentation of the church’s consensual teaching on the incarnation, see Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), chapter 4, “The Incarnation,” 93-132.

of the Lord. The union of the two natures, divine and human, was permanent, two natures in one person without confusion. It is not that the divinity was put aside but that humanity was assumed. Jesus was like us in every way except sin, as frail as any of us. He no doubt got toothaches and had bad breath, had diarrhea and went through the fever of childhood diseases. Some of his teeth may have been missing. He went through awkward indignities of puberty and came to terms with his sensual energies as a man. Jesus shows us what a full human being is about. But since he was not infected with our disease of sin, and since in him God and humanity are joined, he is our living bridge back to God. Only God can reveal God, and Jesus is that. Only a human being could communicate with us in heart language, and Jesus did that. He is the one through whom the glory shines for those with eyes to see. His is the fullness of life from which the church continues to drink.

We had no choice to be born; God the Son freely chose to come among us for our salvation. It's the greatest event in all history, and yet it was hidden by the humility of God in a nowhere village in an occupied land. It was a rescue mission; he dropped in silently behind the lines, there to wait patiently until the time came for the glory to shine. The law through Moses was a great gift of guidance and warning, but how much greater when God comes in person? God the Son became what we are in the man Jesus, so that we, by God's grace, might become what he is, not an angel, but a full and free human being. Irenaeus wrote, "The glory of God is man (and woman) full alive."

Conclusion

A little girl was absorbed with paper and pencil, oblivious to all else around her. Her mother watched with interest, then asked, "What are *we* drawing today?"

"*We* are drawing God," she replied without so much as lifting her head.

"But you can't draw God, darling. No one knows what God looks like."

Her daughter shot back, "They will when I finish this drawing,"

What could the mother say?¹⁶

I admire her spunk, but the picture has already been drawn, once for all. Verse 18: "No one has ever seen God, the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, *he has made him known*," not with a drawing, but with a full life.

You want to know God? Check out Jesus. The outlet for that is called *church*, that rough bunch of saints and scoundrels off Cambridge who gather each Sunday round a Bible and a table. They say he meets them there. This stuff heals people. It is medicine from above. I encourage you to take God's medicine. Drink deeply from Jesus Christ.

Phil Thrailkill, Main Street UMC, July 29, 2012

¹⁶ Adapted from Feehan, *Story Power*, 25.

III. STUDY QUESTIONS

1:1-2

1. Why such care in the formulation of vv.1-2. How do they echo Genesis 1:1?
2. Think about the ways your words both express and interpret your inner life. How does this Word/Logos, function for God?
3. How is the Word/Logos both identical with and distinct from God?

1:3-10

4. How do vv.3-5 cover the issues of creation, humanity, and fall (Gen. 1-3)?
5. Why have John the Baptist intrude so quickly in vv.6-8? Why is v.8 emphasized?
6. How are vv.9-10 a teaching on both prevenient grace and the effects of original sin?

1:11, 12-13

7. John summarizes the widespread rejection of Jesus in v.11. What do you make of this? Why are so many of us so resistant to God's grace?
8. Discuss vv.12-13 as a description of Christian conversion. Why is this God's work?

1:14-17

9. How are these verses a confession of the church?
10. Why is a second prose testimony to John the Baptist placed in v.15?
11. How are vv.16-17 a testimony to the superiority of the revelation that is in Jesus?

1:18

12. The Scripture sheet includes the textual variant "the only God." How does this change the reading of the text from the standard reading "the only Son?"
 13. What does it mean to say that Jesus is God at ground level?
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IV. WHAT NOW? POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS

1. Go through a day saying to yourself, “It all belongs to Jesus Christ?” Then notice what you see or appreciate that you earlier missed? Do people look different?
2. Start in the morning and keep a list of the signs of darkness and evil in our world?. Read your list aloud at the end of the day. What are your emotions?
3. Take a concordance and locate all the passages about John the Baptist. Read them all in on sitting and write a paragraph that answers the questions, Who was John? Why did Jesus hold him in such high regard? Do we need a new John in our day?
4. Write a list of the reasons people reject Jesus and his people? Which are you sympathetic with? Which seem to you foolish?
5. After reading v.14, sing your favorite Christmas carol?
6. Read v.16 and think of all the good things you now have as a Christ-follower.
7. Share what you have learned with at least one other person this week. Be a witness!

V. A PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray:

**Eternal and ever-living God, our heavenly Father,
living in the unity of love with the Son and the Holy Spirit,
and upholding the whole creation by your word of power:
You have entered our world in the flesh of Jesus Christ.
You have come to lay claim to every soul
and to offer each and all a new way of living.
Lead us into the light and away from the darkness.
Help us live abundantly as your free sons and daughters.
Cause this church to flourish in the powers of your amazing grace.
And may this be the day we see you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly.
Speak to us now as we stand before you in silence,
and may your Holy Spirit set our hearts and minds on fire
with love for Christ and one another. Amen.**
