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The Introduction of Jesus Christ

John 1

a The Word Becomes Flesh (1:1-18)

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

—John 1:14

The first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John are commonly known as the Prologue. The Prologue is foundational to the doctrine of Christ, for it addresses the issues of Jesus' deity and humanity, His preexistence and incarnation, and His glorification by God and rejection by humanity. Because of the poetic quality of the Prologue, some believe it was used as an ancient Christian hymn.

Matthew and Luke began their accounts of Jesus' life with His birth and genealogy. Mark began with the ministry of John the Baptist, who paved the way for the Messiah. In contrast, John's first words echo the first words of Genesis. He takes us back to eternity past with the phrase "In the beginning was the Word"

(vs. 1a). John clearly identified the "Word" (or in Greek, *logos*) as Jesus in verse 14.

Since the Word existed "in the beginning," the Word could not be a created being. In Greek thought the Logos was the self-existent mind of God. As the mind of God, the Logos is God expressed in thought. Though John did not use the term "Word" again, the idea of Jesus as the Word of God is woven throughout the Gospel. Understanding the Greek and Jewish views of the Logos is key to understanding the nature of Christ as described by John.

The Word was God and with God at the same time (vs. 1b). Though distinct personalities, God the Father and God the Son share the same divine nature.

The one we call Jesus was with His Father in the beginning. Through Jesus, God brought all things into existence (vss. 2, 3; see Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). Christ's provision of life—physical and spiritual—is another major theme in John's Gospel. John used the word "life" thirty-six times and often coupled it with the word "eternal." John's primary reason for writing his Gospel

was to encourage his readers to believe and thereby receive eternal life in Jesus' name (see John 20:31).

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I received the eternal life Jesus offers?*

John tied life in Christ in with the metaphor of light (1:4). John often contrasted the darkness of sinful humanity with the light of Christ—not only in his Gospel but also in his first letter (see I John 1:5; 2:8). Jesus dispels the darkness and reveals God's truths by the light of His Word (John 1:5). For this reason, darkness is hostile to the light.

The man who introduced the Word of God to the world was John the Baptist. God had commissioned John to prepare people's hearts for the coming of the Messiah. (In this Gospel the name John always refers to John the Baptist.) For the apostle

John, it was imperative to establish numerous witnesses to testify that Jesus was the Christ. John the Baptist was the first of many to testify of Christ's authenticity. Because of his powerful preaching, some had mistakenly identified John as the Christ. John was not the light, but had been called by God to attest to it (vss. 6-9). He made it clear that Jesus' greatness far surpassed any appearance of power on John's part (vs. 15).

Though the world came into being through Christ, it remained ignorant of His identity. Even many of the Jews, God's chosen people, had rejected Him as the Messiah during His earthly ministry. Nevertheless, others welcomed Jesus into their hearts and they became children of God. Entrance into the family of God was

The Mystery of the Logos

In 560 B.C. Heraclitus, an Ephesian philosopher, taught that everything was constantly changing. Despite this continuous state of flux, there was a design and order in the universe under the control of the Logos, which is Greek for the "Word." Heraclitus held that the Logos not only governed events and patterns in the world, but also enabled humans to know right from wrong and to recognize truth. In Greek thought the Logos created and sustained the universe.

In the first century A.D. Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, borrowed this Greek term and identified the Logos with God's creative powers. Philo said that the Logos was God's mind stamped upon His creation and the vehicle by which we can know God. Interestingly, the phrase "Word of God" is found 394 times in the Old Testament and, in many of these instances, is given personal creative attributes.

John used the concept of Logos to communicate the nature of Christ to those familiar with the term. In essence he said to his Gentile and Jewish readers, "For centuries you have attributed creative and divine powers to the Logos. In fact, the Logos is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and now He has become a human being just like you."

not dependent upon one's ancestors—it was a spiritual event initiated and accomplished by the will of God (vss. 10-13).

John 1:14 is a simple and concise account of what occurred at the Incarnation. The preexistent Word of God took human nature and lived among those whom He had created. The phrase translated “made his dwelling” means “to pitch a tent” or “to live temporarily.” Jesus left His heavenly dwelling and took up residence on earth, volunteering to live within the limitations of natural human experience. The term “dwelling” would probably be associated by Jewish readers with the tabernacle, upon which the glory of God had rested.

The apostle John could personally attest to the glory of the one who came from heaven. He was probably alluding to the Transfiguration, which he personally witnessed. This glory was the glory of the “One and Only,” or the unique Son of God. In verse 18, this phrase is expanded to say, “God the One and Only,” an unapologetic declaration of Jesus’ deity.

With Jesus’ coming also came the inexhaustible grace of God the Father, who provides for us blessing after blessing (vs. 16). As did the writer of Hebrews, John contrasted Moses and Jesus (vs. 17; see Heb. 3). The law, which no one could keep perfectly, came through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus, allowing access to God apart from the law. Though no one has ever seen God, Jesus is able to make God

known to us because of His intimate relationship with His Father (John 1:18). The verb translated “has made him known” is the same word from which we get *exegetis*, which means “to explain” or “to interpret.” What could not be previously explained about God is now made clear in Christ. If a friend ever tells us that he or she does not understand something about God, the best thing we can do is point our friend to Jesus.

b John the Baptist Prepares the Way (1:19-28)

John replied . . . , “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’ ”

—John 1:23

The apostle John began the narrative portion of his Gospel by describing the public ministry of John the Baptist. John’s preaching attracted large crowds and the interest of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Though John’s father, Zechariah, was a priest (see Luke 1:5), John did not act as if he came from a priestly family. He wasn’t a scribe, a Sadducee, a Pharisee, or a Levite—but the Jewish people flocked to the Jordan River near Bethany to hear his teachings and to be baptized by him (John 1:28). No wonder the Jewish rulers sent priests, Levites, and Pharisees to question him (vss. 19, 24).

Among the delegation sent from Jerusalem were priests and Levites who asked him who he was. Certainly these leaders knew that John belonged to a priestly family. So why would they ask him to identify himself? They wanted to know if John thought he was the Christ, which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah,” or “the Anointed One.” Without any hesitation John denied that he was the Christ (vs. 20).

They asked John whether he was Elijah, the great Old Testament prophet whom the prophet Malachi had prophesied would return to proclaim the advent of the Messiah (see Mal. 4:5). Since John possessed a fiery personality similar to the Old Testament description of Elijah (see I Kings 17—19), many Jews hoped that he was the old prophet come back to life. But once more John rejected their suggestion (John 1:21a).

Jesus did state that John the Baptist “is the Elijah who was to come” (Matt. 11:14). John denied he was the Old Testament prophet either because he knew that he was not the actual person Elijah or because he was unaware that he had fulfilled the role described by Malachi. Jesus, on the other hand, clearly understood the significance of John’s ministry.

Still dissatisfied with John’s answers, his questioners asked whether he was “the Prophet” (John 1:21b), which probably alluded to Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own

brothers. You must listen to him.” It would have been a great honor for John to be this great expected prophet, but again he answered no.

The delegation was at a loss as to what to write in their report. What were they going to say to their superiors in Jerusalem? They demanded that the baptizer identify himself (John 1:22).

In response John quoted the prophecy of Isaiah (see Isa. 40:3), indicating that he was the voice bidding people to prepare the way for the coming Lord. This call was similar to the way citizens in the ancient world were told to smooth roads for a king who was about to visit (John 1:23).

Ask Yourself . . . *How could I prepare the hearts of my friends to consider the claims of Christ?*

The Pharisees demanded to know why John thought he had the right to baptize if he were not the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet. The Pharisees asked this question because they were strict observers and interpreters of the Mosaic law. They were perplexed as to why John was baptizing Jews. This ritual was usually reserved for Gentile converts to the Jewish faith. The Pharisees believed that the Jews, as God’s chosen people, didn’t need to be cleansed, but John knew better (vss. 24, 25).

John did not answer their question directly. Instead, he pointed them to the coming Messiah once again. John said he baptized only with water, implying that the Messiah would perform a greater bap-

tism. Second, he told them that they were still unaware of the presence of the Messiah among them (vs. 26).

John said he was not worthy to untie the thongs of the Messiah's sandals (vs. 27). Those who heard John's comment understood exactly what he meant. During that time Jewish disciples compensated their teachers by performing menial tasks for them. One thing they did not have to do, however, was loosen the sandal thongs of their teachers. Such an act was considered too humiliating and only a slave was required to do such a thing. John not only demonstrated his humility but also indicated the exalted stature of the one who came after him.

As an expression of his respect for Jesus, John the Baptist said that he was not worthy to untie the thongs of the Messiah's sandals (John 1:27). Sandals were usually made with leather and held on the feet by thongs tied around the toes and ankles. These are some of the types of sandals worn in New Testament times.



C Jesus Is the Lamb of God (1:29-34)

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" —John 1:29

The day after the delegation from Jerusalem had interrogated John, Jesus approached him. By this time John had already baptized Jesus and the devil had tempted Him in the wilderness. Fulfilling his role as the one who heralds the Messiah, John announced that Jesus is "the Lamb of God," who came to redeem people from their sins (vs. 29).

"The Lamb of God" indicates the sacrificial nature of Jesus' earthly ministry. This phrase is an allusion to Isaiah 53:7, which says that the Messiah would be led like a lamb to slaughter (see also Jer. 11:19). Certainly references to the sacrifice of a lamb to cleanse God's people of their sins often occur in the Old Testament. John may have been thinking of the Passover lamb,

whose feast was soon to be observed (John 2:13; see Exod. 12:11-13).

Furthermore, the apostle John's concept of the sacrificial lamb in the Book of Revelation includes not only inno-

cence, obedience, and atonement but also triumph. During the period between the Old and New Testament, the symbol of the lamb stood for the conquering champion of God to the Jews. Perhaps John the Baptist had all these ideas in mind when he called Jesus the Lamb of God.

Earlier John the Baptist had said that one greater than him would come after him; John now identified Jesus as that man. When John said that he had not known him, he probably did not mean that he was not acquainted with Jesus, for Jesus was his cousin (see Luke 1:36). John probably had not realized that Jesus was the Son of God until he baptized Him. Nevertheless, John's ministry was significant, for it pointed the Jews to Jesus as their promised Messiah (John 1:30, 31).

Ask Yourself . . . *Do I understand the full implications of Christ's claim to be the Son of God?*

At Jesus' baptism John saw the Holy Spirit appear as a dove coming down from heaven and settling on Jesus (vs. 32). The dove was neither hunted nor eaten by the Jews, because it was a symbol of reconciliation with God (see Gen. 8:8, 10) and became an emblem of peace. The dove also represented tender affection (see Song of Sol. 1:15; 2:14). The sign of this dove was God's special revelation to John that would help him conclusively identify the Son of God (John 1:33).

John testified publicly to the people and privately to his disciples that Jesus was the chosen one of

God (vs. 34). With John's blessing some of his followers eventually became disciples of Jesus.

d **The First Disciples Follow Jesus (1:35-42)**

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. —John 1:41, 42

For most of us, once we have enjoyed a prominent position in the eyes of others, it is difficult to step back and allow another to take center stage—even when the other is far more qualified than ourselves. John the Baptist, however, did not hesitate to do this in regard to Jesus. He not only did this publicly, but also with his disciples. When two of these disciples heard John call Jesus the Lamb of God, they left John to follow Jesus (vss. 35-37).

The identity of only one of the two disciples is given—Andrew (vs. 40). Though the text is silent on the identity of the second disciple, tradition has it that this man was the apostle John. This would have made him an eyewitness to this episode, which is not included in the other Gospels.

Evidently Andrew and the other disciple were too timid to approach Jesus directly. Consequently, Jesus did what was characteristic of Him

and His Father—He took the initiative and asked them what they wanted (vs. 38a). Apparently He wanted to know their motives for following him.

Ask Yourself . . . *If Jesus asked me, “What do you want?” how would I reply?*

In response to Jesus’ question, they called Him “Rabbi” (vs. 38b), a term of respect accorded Jewish teachers. “Rabbi” is a Hebrew word that literally means “My great one” or simply “Master.” Instead of answering Jesus’ inquiry, the disciples asked Him where He was staying, perhaps as a polite way of seek-

ing an extended conversation with Him. Jesus welcomed them by saying, in essence, “Come and see!” (vs. 39). So they did.

Andrew felt compelled to tell his brother, Simon Peter, that he had found the Messiah. Andrew probably did not comprehend the full meaning of the title “Messiah,” or “Christ.” Like most Jews at that time, he probably had a yearning expectation of some type of national deliverer, and Jesus seemed to be that person (vss. 40, 41).

After Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, the Lord gazed at Simon intently and told him that he would be called “Cephas,” which is the

Dividing the Day

John said it was about the tenth hour of the day when Jesus invited Andrew and the other disciple to come see where He was staying (John 1:39). The Jews measured their days from sunset to sunrise and divided night and day into twelve hours. This would make the tenth hour about 4:00 P.M. on the modern time scale.

Here are the major divisions of the Jewish day.

Jewish Time	Modern Equivalent
Sunset	6:00 P.M.
First watch ends	10:00 P.M.
Midnight	12:00 A.M.
Second watch ends	2:00 A.M.
Sunrise—third watch ends	6:00 A.M.
First hour of prayer	9:00 A.M.
Noon	12:00 P.M.

Aramaic word for “rock.” (“Peter” is the translation for “rock” in Greek.) In accordance with ancient Jewish culture, Peter’s new name would one day epitomize his character. Unlike most people who knew Peter as simply a fisherman, Jesus knew what Peter would become. Despite Peter’s volatile and impulsive personality, Jesus knew that He would shape His new friend into the great leader of His church.

As He did with Peter, Jesus not only sees us for what we are when we come to Him, but He knows what we will become by the power of His Spirit.

John 1:43-51 in Brief

The next two men to join Jesus as His disciples were Philip and Nathanael. When Philip first told Nathanael about Jesus, Nathanael scoffed at the idea that Jesus could be the Messiah, since He was from Nazareth. Jesus, however, revealed His supernatural powers to Nathanael, which convinced the skeptic that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Jesus promised to show him even greater wonders; one day Nathanael would see the Son of Man glorified in heaven.