

We are used to going to the Gospels of Luke and Matthew for our Christmas story, but this year, since we are in the Gospel of John, we are going to take our message from John. John wrote at a later date than Luke and Matthew and did so from an eternal perspective. Instead of the angel announcing to Mary the birth, and the shepherds scene with the choir of angels, and even Matthew's account of the wise men, John takes a whole different angle. He looks through the window of heaven in the power of the Spirit and sees what was happening from a spiritual perspective.

His gospel begins with Jesus as the eternal word of God, the Creator of all things. (John 1:1-3) John doesn't get very far in his story before he writes on a Christmas theme. ⁴ *In him was life, and that life was the light of men.* ⁵ *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.* This is the message of the disciple that felt he was so close to Jesus that he referred to himself as "the one Jesus loved." (John 21:20) His message focuses over and over on this theme of light and darkness. John came to see Jesus coming into the world as light shining in the darkness. It wasn't that John just made up the imagery; it came from the Spirit through the Old Testament prophets. (Isaiah 9:2) When Jesus grew up, He declared that He was the light of the world. (John 8:12)

John used words the same way Jesus used them. Jesus gave more depth and life to terms that we take for granted. Actually, He is using language as He created it to be used. He was the One that designed the physical things, including language, to represent spiritual truth. (Romans 1:20) So when John tells us that in Jesus was life, he's not just telling us Jesus was alive, but that all life came from Jesus. (John 14:6) If we go another level deeper, we see John is telling us that eternal life is in Jesus. (1John 5:11) Another way to say that is that knowing God comes through knowing Jesus, for to know God is to have life. (John 8:19)

There was this little baby, born in the most unique manner, in a lowly barn with all the smells that come with it. Yet, in Him is life! I have to say that with reverence and awe. The donkeys, sheep, oxen and Mary and Joseph, you and me all alive because He is. He created our ancestors millennia before. (Colossians 1:16) And if Mary and Joseph and you and I are to escape eternal judgment upon our sinful nature, we must receive eternal life from that little baby. It was surely beyond their comprehension at the time. It's hard for us to grasp even now. You are sitting here this morning because, "in Him was life."

The passage goes on to tell us that that life is the light of men. The life in the incarnation would live out a life that was a manifestation of God's heart. That visible witness enlightens our world. (John 9:5) Sin had covered mankind in a shroud of darkness, but now this blazing light of God in the body of Jesus would

Commented [notes1]: 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 He was with God in the beginning.
3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.
John 1:1-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?")
John 21:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.
Isaiah 9:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
John 8:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.
Romans 1:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
John 14:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
1 John 5:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 19 Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied, "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."
John 8:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.
Col 1:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
John 9:5 (NIV)

show us life as it was meant to be lived. Every word and action of Jesus was illuminating the darkness of our world, revealing how we should live, exposing the enemy of our soul and unveiling lies that we believed for so long.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not understood it. How misunderstood was the life of that baby that grew into a man! Here was God stepping into our sinful world, offering us hope, life, and light. Yet, He was maligned, persecuted and eventually killed. The darkness has still not understood it. I think if we could really comprehend the life of Jesus, we would be so overwhelmed at His stepping into this world that we could not stop worshipping Him for His gracious goodness to us.

The next verse with a Christmas theme is in verse 11. ¹¹ *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* Jesus came to the Jewish people, His own chosen people. (Isaiah 43:21) They had so many promises that He would come. They knew the town in which He would be born. (Micah 5:2) They were a bit confused about what His life would mean to them because they read of both suffering and glory. They couldn't have known that this first visit would be the suffering portion and the next coming the glory portion. It was a mystery. They interpreted the Scriptures from a self-serving perspective as we are often inclined to do. Only a few who were sensitive to the Holy Spirit understood, and they were not the religious elite. They were just sincere believers who sought God with all their heart. The elderly Anna and Simeon, a few shepherds, and some foreigners were the only ones that welcomed Him into this world.

Did you ever notice that there is no mention of Mary's family at the birth? Why wouldn't they be there to help with the birth? Did they have trouble accepting that Jesus birth was miraculous? *His own did not receive Him.*

When His ministry began, He was truly misunderstood. When He spoke in parables, it went over most of their heads. (Luke 8:10) When He spoke plainly, they thought He was blaspheming. (John 8:58-59) How could a man make so many incredible claims about Himself? *His own did not receive Him.*

But of all the Christmas passages in John, chapter 1 verse 14 is the clearest. ¹⁴ *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.* There in that manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths was the Word of God. It really is a difficult thing to comprehend. It was by the word of God that the heavens were made. (Psalm 33:6) It was the word that brought everything into existence. It was the word that told Abraham to leave Ur and go to a land that he would be shown. (Genesis 12:1) It was the word that came through Moses to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go!" (Exodus 9:1) And it was the word that came to Moses in the form of the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:1-2) It was the word through the prophets that predicted the exile of the Jewish

Commented [notes11]: 21 the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. Isaiah 43:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Micah 5:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 10 He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand." Luke 8:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. John 8:58-59 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. Psalms 33:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. Gen 12:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me." Ex 9:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 1 And God spoke all these words: 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Ex 20:1-2 (NIV)

nation and their return. (Deuteronomy 30:4) And it was the word that declared that the day would come when the power of Satan would be broken and man would be restored to a relationship with God. (Genesis 3:15)

Commented [notes19]: Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.
Deut 30:4 (NIV)

Now the word of God that would fulfill the long awaited promises was lying in a manger. Incredible! The powerful word that breaks the rocks like a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29) and snaps in pieces the cedars of Lebanon was helpless in the arms of His mother. (Psalm 29:5) That's Christmas from another perspective. Life, Light, and the Word of God, as an innocent baby! Who could have conceived of such a plan but God? Of course it wasn't a risk for God because He could see how it would all turn out. He sees the future as if it were present. He could see the escape to Egypt to preserve the baby's life. (Matthew 2:13) He could see Him growing to a man and finishing His task. (Luke 2:52)

Commented [notes20]: 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
Gen 3:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 29 "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"
Jer 23:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
Psalms 29:5 (NIV)

The word became flesh. That describes our word "incarnation". The word was incarnated. A person of truth speaks what is in their heart. God's word is the heart of God. His words represent His character and attributes. When people saw Jesus, they were seeing a constant demonstration of the heart of God. There is one way for us to know God. It is to know Jesus. Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9), and "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." John 8:19b (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."
Matt 2:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
Luke 2:52 (NIV)

It's no wonder then that the author of Hebrews wrote that Jesus was the exact representation of God. (Hebrews 1:3) God cannot lie, so God's word represents Him perfectly. The incarnation of the Word then is exactly like God. There is no difference. This may give you a little insight into the Trinity if you meditate on it. That word made flesh perfectly represented God.

Commented [notes25]: 9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'
John 14:9 (NIV)

That Word-man lived among us. The literal translation is "tabernacled" among us, or we could say, "camped out in a tent" with us. The tent was His body. The word of God moved into a little tent of flesh in the womb of Mary.

Commented [notes26]: 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.
Heb 1:3 (NIV)

John went on to say that, *"We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* Glory is the manifest expression of the Word of God. It can mean the radiance that the disciples witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-3), but it can also mean any manifestation of the heart of God. John is really saying that as disciples, they witnessed the life of the Word made flesh. Everything He did and said was glorious.

Commented [notes27]: 2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.
3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.
Mark 9:2-3 (NIV)

"...the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father," In a way, this is reiterating what has already been said to emphasize the point. Jesus is unique. God has no other "only begotten Son", no other "One and Only". No one else has been sent into the world to show what God is like. When you think honestly about it, no other life has ever been anything like Jesus' life. Consider the claims

about His birth, His deity, His miracles, death and resurrection, and the fact that no one else comes close. The people around Jesus couldn't name a single sin in His life (John 8:46), but His words cut to their hearts. He is *"the One and Only, who came from the Father..."*

His life was full of grace and truth. He was gracious with sinners and blasted the religious elite. That little baby had two great virtues that represented God to the world, grace and truth. They almost seem contradictory, but they cannot represent God unless they are together. What is grace if it does not confront evil with truth? If you tell the drug addict they are loved by God just as they are, but don't tell them the need to be freed from their addiction, what good is the grace? How cold and brutal is truth if there is no offer of grace? If you send the criminal to jail telling him what he did was wrong, but offer no hope of restoration what good is that truth to him? In Jesus, grace and truth were inseparable. The sinner was offered grace, but told to sin no more. (John 8:11) The religious hypocrite was told of his hypocrisy, but invited to change his life. That little baby had the perfect balance of grace and truth. His words would always address both grace and truth. When you see that, you are seeing the glory of God. It is what our lives should manifest when we yield to the life of Christ in us. We will never be able to say that we are the Word made flesh, but we can be flesh in whom the Word dwells. May we always exhibit grace and truth!

But perhaps the best-known Christmas verse in John is 3:16:¹⁶ *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* Christmas is about the greatest gift ever given from the heart of the greatest love ever known. It tells us the motivation behind the Word being made flesh, the love of God. Luke told us of angels and shepherds, and Matthew told us of Magi and dreams, but John tells us what was behind it all, the love of God. (Titus 3:4-5a)

This is holy ground. When we speak of the love that sent Jesus to us, we are talking about grace and truth. We are talking about a love so pure and holy that it is very difficult for us to comprehend. I can't explain to you why God would create us with free will. And when we would use that free will to turn against Him, why would He still love us? I guess it is His choice. He has just chosen to love us. It is like true marital love. (Ephesians 5:31-32) It is simply a choice one follows even when it leads through difficult times. He committed Himself to loving us, though we have broken His heart time and time again.

Grace and love sent His One and Only Son into the world to deal with the truth of our condition and the judgment that righteousness demands. (Romans 6:23) Truth was that we deserved death. Grace sent Jesus to receive that justice in our place. That little baby in the manger was destined for the cross before His birth. (Revelation 13:8)

Commented [notes28]: 46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?
John 8:46 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."
John 8:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,
5 he saved us,
Titus 3:4-5a (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."
32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.
Eph 5:31-32 (NIV)

Commented [notes32]: 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes33]: 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.[
Rev 13:8 (NIV)

In my limited comprehension of these deep spiritual truths, I imagine the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity deciding on this course of action. The Father expresses His love for mankind. The Son fully feels the same. The Father cannot go as there must be a manifestation that people can see and understand. (Colossians 1:15) The Son knows He is the One that manifests the Father and so agrees to go. The Father's heart is in anguish over what the Son will endure. The Spirit knows His work is to help mankind understand this indescribable gift and do the unseen work. (John 14:26) Then Mary is suddenly, miraculously, with child, but not just a child, the One and Only Son, the gift of God to redeem the fallen world of man. (Luke 1:35)

The whole purpose of the gift is so that we would not perish. Death is what justice would demand. Instead, the word became flesh and took the just sentence, so that we could have everlasting life. (1John 4:9-10) Remember, the true meaning of the word "life" is more than a beating heart; it is an eternal relationship with God. All He asks is a believing acceptance of the gift of all gifts. That is what Christmas is all about.

There are other Christmas verses in John. Several times Jesus told us why He came down from heaven to that lowly manger. *38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.* John 6:38 (NIV) He went on to describe that as protecting those God has given Him and raising them in the last day. He said He is the bread that came down from heaven to give life to the world. (John 6:33) He also said that He came into the world to testify to the truth. (John 18:37)

Do you see how all these statements are consistent when you understand them correctly? In love for us, God sent His One and Only Son, the Word made flesh. He reveals God to us. He is light and life. He is the manifestation of grace and truth. He is the gift of God that we might not perish. He is life everlasting. He is the bread from heaven giving Himself to us for our spiritual nourishment. That is the will of God. That is the revelation of truth to a sin sick world.

John the Beloved, the one who saw himself as Jesus most loved disciple, gave us a look at Christmas from the perspective of heaven. It's the whole Gospel story in a feed trough. (Luke 2:12) It is mysterious. It is supernatural. It is the greatest gift of love the world will ever see, the Word of God in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. What will you do with the gift of all gifts?

Commented [notes34]: 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. Col 1:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes35]: 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes36]: 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Luke 1:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes37]: 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10 (NIV)

Commented [notes38]: 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." John 6:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes39]: 37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." John 18:37 (NIV)

Commented [notes40]: 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:12 (NIV)