



# **Encountering the Word of Life**

**1 John 1:1-4**

## INTRODUCTION

At the very heart of the Gospel is the concept of the incarnation; that God became a man. This is a revolutionary concept. The idea that God would actually become a man was unheard of in the ancient world. The gods might masquerade as a human being, but never would they actually become one.

If we go back to the prophecies about the coming Messiah in Isaiah 7:14, he is referred to Immanuel; God with us. ***Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.***

When the angel informed Mary that she would be with child, He highlighted the child's connection with God. ***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) And when the angel announced to Joseph that the baby Mary was carrying was the Messiah, Matthew linked it back to Isaiah. ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us."*** (Matthew 1:23)

Within the first century of the Church, a dangerous heresy arose, called Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that only the spirit is good and that all matter is evil. The implications of this heresy had a profoundly negative effect on early believers. Gnostics taught that the human body was evil and therefore you could do with your body whatever you wanted. Some followed the path of asceticism; treating the body harshly. Others followed the path of indulgence; the body is of no spiritual importance. Salvation was then seen as escaping the body through special knowledge. (Side note: We see this today in Buddhist teaching.)

In addition, they denied that Jesus Christ was a genuine human being. They saw Him in one of two ways. He was seen as

only an illusion. Today we would say that he was a hologram. This approach is called Docetism. He was also seen as taking over the body of the human Jesus at his baptism and then leaving the human Jesus just before his crucifixion. This view is called Cerinthianism.

The Apostle John wrote his Gospel and his letters specifically to counter this heretical view of Jesus. He wanted to clearly demonstrate the truth that Jesus was fully human, even as he was fully God. The Gospel of John gives us the most personal and intimate look at Jesus. John shows Jesus being tired, thirsty, hungry, upset, compassionate, and very real!

Although we give mental assent to the truth of Jesus' humanity, it is still hard for us to grasp. Our pictures of Jesus all make Him out to be other worldly. It is hard for us to imagine Jesus getting dirty, feeling exhausted, or struggling with indigestion from a bad piece of fish. Yet in His humanity, Jesus faced all of the normal stresses and strains of life. He was like us in every way, except without sin.

The incarnation is bedrock to our faith. If Jesus was not a man, then He did not fully identify with us, and we cannot fully identify with Him.

Hebrews 2:16-18

***For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.***

## Study 1: 1 John 1:1-4

John begins his first letter to believers with the bedrock truth of the incarnation.

1. John's opening line is "That which was from the beginning."

- a. What is being implied by this statement?
- b. How does this statement link back to the Old Testament?
- c. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you read this statement?

2. John's next line makes Jesus very tangible.

- a. How does John affirm the reality of Jesus?
- b. What does this say about John's relationship with Jesus?
- c. How does John refer to Jesus? What is the significance of this?

3. John continues his argument in verse 2.

- a. What truth does John declare?
- b. What evidence does John give to back up his statement?
- c. How does John further define what he is talking about?

4. John's focus changes slightly in verse 3.

- a. What is his stated intent?
- b. How does John describe his relationship with Jesus?

5. Why is John writing this letter?

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. How do you normally respond when someone tells you something that seems fantastic or unreal?
2. What kind of evidence do you look for to confirm the story someone tells to you?
3. Which truth do you have a harder time grasping: that Jesus was fully God or that Jesus was fully man? Why?
4. What difference does it make to you that John had a very tangible relationship with Jesus?
5. What is your concept of eternal life? How does it relate to what John wrote? Consider John 17:1-5.

## Study 2: John 1:1-5,14

John began his gospel in a similar way to how he began his first letter.

1. How does John link his Gospel with the creation story in Genesis 1?

2. John refers to Jesus as the Word (logos). The Greeks used the word Logos to refer to the rational principle that governs all things. The Jews used Logos to refer to the creative power of God.

- a. Why do you think John chose to use the word Logos for Jesus?
- b. What is the main thing that John is trying to establish?

3. John says that Jesus is both the source of life and light.

- a. In what ways is Jesus the source of life?

- b. What does it mean for Jesus to be the light of men?

4. John sets up a conflict in verse 5.

- a. What is the conflict?

- b. Why is this important at the very beginning of the Gospel?

- c. How does this relate to the reason for which Jesus came into the world?

5. How does John link the Logos with Jesus in verse 14? Why is this essential for the Gospel?

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. Take some time to examine Genesis 1 along side of John 1:1-2.
  - a. How are these two passages linked?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How does John 1:1-2 establish the pre-existence of Jesus?
  
2. If we think of “Word” as the source of all reason and the very creative power of God, how does that influence how you think about Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why is it important for John to establish Jesus as the source of all things, material and immaterial? Look at Colossians 1:15-17.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What does it mean for you that Jesus is the source of all physical life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What does it mean for you that Jesus is the source of all spiritual life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Why is it essential that we understand that Jesus was fully God and fully man at the same time?

## Study 3: Philippians 2:5-11

This passage, recorded in Philippians, was probably an early Christian hymn or creed. Although Paul's intent is to call believers to live up to their identity in Christ, this hymn gives us some important insights into the incarnation.

1. What fact is established right away in verse 6?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What does it mean that Jesus did not consider His essence as something to be grasped?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Verse 7 lays out three important aspects of the incarnation. What three things did Jesus intentionally do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Verse 8 really speaks of Jesus' early ministry.
  - a. How did people who knew Jesus view Him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What kind of an attitude did Jesus demonstrate?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. To whom was Jesus being obedient?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What is the outcome of Jesus' incarnation?

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. Spend some time reflecting upon the enormity of what Jesus did for us.
2. From a human perspective, if we were writing the story of Jesus, how would we most likely portray Him?
3. How does the way that Jesus came into the world contrast with the expectations of those looking for a savior?
4. How do verses 9-11 bring us back full circle to John 1:1-2?
5. How can our fully embracing the reality of the incarnation influence the way we live our lives?

## Study 4: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

The book of Hebrews was specifically written to Jewish believers. It is filled with references to the old sacrificial system and the priesthood. The author presents Jesus as the fulfillment of all that was foreshadowed in the Old Covenant.

1. Verse 4-5 describes Jesus as our high priest.

- a. What was the role of the high priest in the Old Testament?
- b. Why should we have confidence in Jesus as our high priest?
- c. How has Jesus identified with us?

2. In 5:1-3, the author explains the role of the high priest.

- a. Where did the high priest come from? Why was that important?
- b. What was the job of the high priest?
- c. What qualified the high priest to stand up for the people?
- d. What did the high priest have to do before he could represent the people?

3. 5:4-10 brings Jesus into the picture.

- a. Who has the ultimate authority to call a high priest?
- b. How does this relate to Jesus as our high priest?
- c. How did Jesus' role as high priest play out?

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What is your mental image of a priest? What has influenced that image?

2. What is the significance to you that Jesus has faced every temptation, just like we do, but without sin?

3. How can seeing Jesus as our high priest influence our relationship with God?

4. What was the problem with the old sacrificial system?

5. In what ways do we tend to fall back into the old system?

6. How has Jesus freed us from the old system? Look at Romans 8:1-4.

7. Why was it essential that Jesus become a real part of the created world?