



Lesson 35 / February 11, 2018

## THE INCARNATION

John 1:1-18

### Key Verse

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:1-2, 14

### Question 69: What is Jesus' incarnation?

Short Answer: *By his incarnation, Jesus took on human flesh.*

Full Answer: *In the incarnation, Jesus took on human flesh, being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the virgin Mary, and born of her in real human flesh, yet without sin.*

### Question 70: What does the incarnation teach us about Jesus' nature?

Short Answer: *Jesus is both fully God and fully man.*

Full Answer: *Jesus is both fully God and fully man, for he eternally existed as very God, and he became very man by his incarnation, so that the two whole natures, divine and human, were joined distinctly and inseparably within his one person.*

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of John calling Jesus “the Word”?
2. How do we know John is referring to Jesus as the Word? (Hint: John 1:17)
3. Read Genesis 1:1-5. How does John connect Jesus to Genesis 1?
4. What do we mean by the “preexistence” of Jesus? Why is this important?
5. Why was the incarnation necessary (1:14)?
6. Explain, to the best of your ability, how Jesus can be both fully human and fully divine.
7. How has Jesus revealed the Father to us (1:18)?
8. What are the blessings that Jesus brings to us in John 1?
9. What does it mean to receive Jesus and believe in his name (1:11-13)?

## Summary

Do you have a nickname – a “special” name given to you by your friends and family? It may be a shortened version of your normal name, so that Robert becomes Bob, or Katelyn becomes Katie. If we are named after an ancestor, we may be called Junior. Our spouse might call us by a pet name such as Baby, Honey, or Sweet-ums. Other times, our nicknames might describe our personality, including names like Flash, Brains, Princess, Diva, or Chief.

The fourth and final gospel in the New Testament is the gospel of John. John’s gospel is a lot different than the previous three gospels in that John does not begin by telling the stories of Jesus’ birth and early life; instead, John begins with theological statements about the nature of who Jesus is and why he has come. We have to tighten our thinking caps when we read John’s first chapter, because John tackles head-on the most baffling mysteries of Jesus’ nature.

John begins by giving to Jesus the descriptive nickname the Word, and then John tells us that the Word preexisted with God – and even is God! – and took on human flesh in his incarnation.

When John calls Jesus the Word, he uses a nickname loaded with layers of meaning. When John says, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1), he reminds us of the opening statement of the entire Bible in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” And how did God do his work of creation in Genesis 1? By speaking words. And now John tells us that all things were created through *the Word* who was also there in the beginning (John 1:3). Further, in John’s own day, his readers likely would have known that Greek philosophers commonly used this term, “word” (*logos* in Greek), to describe the rational order behind the universe that organizes and holds everything together. If we put these layers together, then John’s nickname implies that through Jesus all things were created and in Jesus all creation holds together.

That the Word was so deeply involved in creation further implies that Jesus preexisted all of creation. In the beginning, the Word was already present in the same way God himself was already present in Genesis 1:1. The Word existed before the beginning began, for he is eternal, even as God is eternal (lesson 1). Therefore, the Word himself is an uncreated being; there was

never a time when the Word did not already exist. Jesus did not come into existence by his human birth, but he had already existed before John the Baptist (1:30), before Abraham (8:58), and even before creation itself (1:1-3).

Does that confuse you? Good – it should! But it gets even harder, for John also says that the Word was with God and is God (1:1). But how can the Word both *be* God and be *with* God, if there is only one true and living God (lesson 12)? John suggests that the Word by his very nature is fully God, yet God must be more than the Word, if the Word can be *with* God. This reminds us of the Trinity (lesson 28), where God has one substance but three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Word is the Son, who is fully God and yet only one of the three persons of God.

Now, as our heads spin with these incomprehensible mysteries, John announces perhaps the greatest marvel of them all, the incarnation. “The word became flesh,” John says in 1:14, a statement we summarize as “incarnation” (from the Latin *incarno*, meaning “to make into flesh”). In the birth of Jesus, the eternal Word took on human flesh and became fully human in nature while remaining fully divine. It is only by a marvelous and mysterious miracle that both natures, human and divine, co-exist fully within the one being of Jesus.

Why can’t John’s gospel be a little bit easier on our brains? Precisely because John is trying to describe in a nutshell all of the glorious mysteries of the nature and identity of Jesus, and what a nutshell it is: that the preexistent divine Word has become incarnate in human flesh. And he has done this, John says, in order to make God known to us (1:18). In his incarnation, Jesus reveals to us not only God’s glory, but also life, truth, and grace upon grace (John 1:4, 14, 16), and therefore he is a light of hope shining in our dark world (1:4-9).

Such profound and wonderful truths demand a response from us. These are not the kinds of mysteries we can happily ignore, as if they have no direct implications for our own lives. Instead, John says in 1:11-13 that many people rejected Jesus even in his own day, but as for those who received him and believed in his name, God gave to them new life as children of God. The same decision confronts us still today: will we reject Jesus, or will we believe in him in accordance with his nickname, as the divine and incarnate Word?