

Word Became Flesh

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Preacher: Chris Thornton

[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading comes from John chapter 1. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible. Starting in verse 1, we read, 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 as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but He came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him.

[1 : 1 9] He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were not 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. And we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John bore witness about Him and cried out, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.

For from His fullness we have 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 God who is at the Father's side. He has made Him known.

[2 : 3 6] This is the Word of God. Great. Thank you, Angeline, for reading that. Welcome, everyone, again.

My name is Chris, if you don't know me. We're starting our series in Advent. And so I don't know how you're feeling about Christmas coming up. But actually, I am super excited about this season.

I think more than any time, actually, probably in my life, I've just really sensed that God wants to do something as we celebrate Advent, which is about the coming of Jesus and preparing our hearts.

So let me just pray for us as we begin. Father, I thank you that you're not the kind of God that we think you are.

I thank you that you're a God who far surpasses all of our expectations. You're a God who is far more gracious, far more loving than our expectations.

[3 : 3 3] I thank you that you're a God who is not limited, a God who is not impotent, a God who is not distant, but a God who knows us, sees us, and comes down to be with us.

Lord, I pray this morning your Spirit would just speak to us. I pray that you would open our hearts, that your Word would penetrate into our souls. Lord, I pray that you would change us. I pray that you'd help us to fall more in love with you.

Lord, I pray that the Word would not go in one ear and out the other, but it would stay and it would sink deeper and deeper into our souls, that our lives would be changed by you. Lord, we just pray for Kevin, who is now hopefully in South Africa.

Lord, we thank you for just him being able to get out for the flight. Lord, we just pray your blessing upon them as a family. Give them great rest and refreshment during this season. And Lord, thank you that you are a good and a gracious king.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Great. So yes, as Kevin hinted last week, he managed to get on a flight this week with his family. So do be praying for them as they're going to be away for the next couple of months or so.

[4 : 46] I want to show you a video before we start. So, all right. That video just does me every time.

It's awesome, right? When you see our world, just even that, and they haven't shown you everything, you see that our world and our universe is so intricately, incredibly, awesomely designed.

And do you know what that video shows? You and I are not the center of the world. You and I are not the center of the world.

And science has shown us that our universe and our earth are so finely tuned, so aligned for human life, that it's little wonder that throughout all cultures and all history, everyone, apart from the most hardened atheists, have looked at the work of this creation and said, there must be a God or gods or a higher power.

There must be something that has brought all of this into existence. Something has created it and something is sustaining this. And yet, here's the thing.

[5 : 58] Have you ever seen God? Like, he doesn't have a TV channel. He doesn't post on Instagram. He doesn't knock on your door and ask you out for coffee.

And so what we have in our world, we live in this space where we have this awesome knowledge through creation that there is a glorious mind behind all of this.

And then we're trying to figure out who this is and what this is. And so religions and philosophy and even our own experiences, what we do is we try and fill in the blanks of what we think this being is like.

We create a mental image of God. Maybe he's harsh and demanding because your parents were like that. Maybe he's kind and warm and a bit of a pushover because you don't want a God who interferes too much in your life.

Maybe he's distant and uninterested because that's your experience of church or religion. Well, this Advent season, we're looking at something called the incarnation of Jesus.

[7 : 07] And can, carne, carnation is what comes from chili con carne. That means the meat or flesh. Literally, we're looking at the infleshing of God, that God became human.

Because the extraordinary, mind-blowing claim of the Bible, the extraordinary, mind-blowing claim of Christmas, is you don't have to fill in the blanks any longer.

It's that God has made himself known and that God has shown what he is like in the incarnation of Jesus. And so that's what we're going to be looking at over the next few weeks as we lead up to Christmas.

But if you are someone who's been in church a while, if you've grown up kind of doing Christmas and the church kind of things, I suspect you probably, like I have in the past, have lost the wonder of what I've just said.

I suspect that we have missed just how incredible that what Christmas is celebrating really is. And so I want to take the next 25, 30 minutes just to encourage us to wonder again at the incarnation.

[8 : 23] And we're going to look briefly at this passage. There's so much in here. We could spend like a year on this, but we're going to skim through it in three headings. He is who? We did what?

And he did that? Okay? You can do the inflection at the end of the question mark. So he is who? This passage in John, if you've got your bulletin with you, I encourage you to have that.

He starts with, in the beginning. Anyone heard that before? If you've read the Bible, you should have. It comes on page one of the Bible, Genesis 1.

It's the start of the account of God's creation of the heavens and the earth and what we saw in that video. And what you see is, at that point, God created this world.

It was dark. It was formless. It was chaotic. And then God speaks a word. He says, Be light. And out of nothing, light happens. He speaks and says sky.

[9 : 22] He speaks and says sea, planets, fish, birds, humans, and it occurs. And it's there. You see, God's word takes the chaos and the disorder and the emptiness and he transforms it into order and beauty and life.

And throughout scripture, God's word is always doing this. His word is always bringing salvation, bringing deliverance, bringing hope, bringing peace, bringing life to people.

It's what God's word does. And John says, In the beginning was the word. And every Jew listening would go, Yeah, that's God's powerful, life-giving, creative word.

And then it gets a little weird. He then says, And then the word was with God. Hmm. He's saying that a word is actually not just spoken, actually there's something that this word is a person in some way.

And then he says that the word was God. And now everyone's going, Man, what on earth is going on here? John's just dropped this bombshell into every Jewish person and every Greek person.

[10 : 42] He would have blown all of their categories, no matter what philosophy they came from, because what John is saying in this statement, he's saying that the source of life, of breath, of gravity, of DNA, of you and of me is not some lonely single deity sitting on a cloud hoping that he can find the one somehow to love.

He's saying that before and from eternity, before one subatomic particle was made, God was already a community.

And Jesus, he goes on to say, is the word from eternity past to eternity future. And he carries on this kind of picture which is so confusing for many people.

He goes and says, it's not just this image of Jesus being the word which brings life to everyone, he's also part of a family. And he says, later on, he says, Jesus is the only son from the father.

And then verse 18, he says, no one has ever seen God but the only God who is at the father's side, literally lying on his chest, has made him known.

[11 : 58] You see, it's this incredibly intimate image. image. It's the image like a father with his son or two lovers just in a continual embrace of tenderness and affection.

And Muslims, if they would hear this, they would shudder at this thought because they think if Jesus is God's son, that implies that God somehow had sex. But that's not at all what the idea of this is.

It's the idea that a son is like father, like son. He carries the same divine DNA as his father. Jesus is God as the father is God.

And yet he's not the father. He's a separate person. There's this community element. It's what we call the trinity. And later on in the book he'll bring in the Holy Spirit to this.

And I don't get what all of that involves because if you look at that universe, do you think you can understand the mind behind all of that? And yet this God who is three in one in this mystery is saying that there is this intimate love and affection that we just get a shadow of when we see deep love between a family member or between a husband and a wife.

[13 : 20] love. You see, the love that the father has for the son and the son has for the father is incredible. Jesus says, I always do what pleases my father.

And then he says, the father loves me and shows me all he does. It's like this just kind of this love in that they have in this community. You see, the thing, and I'm just going very briefly here, but the thing is, what he's saying in this is God is not sterile and reserved.

God is not British. God is an eternal triune community of blazing passionate love at his core.

And so, just as children are meant to be the overflow of the love of a father and mother and those children are meant to be drawn in to experience that love in the family. So, you and me are the overflow and all of creation is the overflow of this divine love and the design is that actually we get drawn in to experience this love to sit at the table where they're having fellowship.

That's the image. That's why he says we have the right to become children of God. It's an incredible picture. And then he carries on saying that Jesus is not just this part of the triune, God.

[14 : 44] He says, all things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and that life is the light of man. You see, what he's saying is that all of everything God creates, everything God reveals, all of his work that he does is always shown through Jesus.

It's always manifested through him. The eternal God of all creation of this universe who's unlimited, infinite, outside of time, space, and history does everything.

Everything that you've seen his word doing in all of the Old Testament, all through the Bible, behind all of that, Jesus is the means by which he accomplishes that. Hebrews says this, the sun is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Take a breath right now. Okay, some of you need some practice. Okay, take another breath. You just received two gifts.

Like, try going for the rest of this service and hold your breath. Okay? And maybe till lunchtime. Can any of you do it? Why not?

[16 : 16] Because you are sustained. Because your very existence at the most fundamental level is utterly dependent on something outside of yourself.

And John's claim is that your creation and your very life and every breath you breathe right now is utterly dependent on Jesus as the word who is sustaining you to keep you alive.

You see, when my brother took his last breath, it was like somebody unplugged the life support machine. It was this awesome experience. And Jesus holds the plug of your life today.

He's the eternal creator, your sustainer, your very life. In him is life. That's who he is.

But secondly, we did what? John goes on. He says this in verse 10 and 11. He says, he was in the world and the world was made through him.

[17 : 29] But the world did not know him. He came to his own but his own did not receive him. You know, former Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper and Henrico will like a Dutch reference.

He said this. This is very profound. He said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ who is sovereign over all does not cry mine.

Your life, your breath, your money, your entire being belongs to him. And so Christmas is celebrating the owner of everything we are and everything we have.

You look out of the window, it's his. He's got it, you know, when I was a kid, you know, my mum used to write my name on all my things. If you were to look under everything you would actually find God written on it.

But the owner of all that came to his own at Christmas time. And what did we do? Well, it's like my wife coming home from work and what you expect is as you open the door my two-year-old runs up and welcomes her.

[18 : 46] But we didn't do that. Do you remember when Mary and Joseph they were going to Bethlehem? They got a great welcome, didn't they?

No, it says there was no room for them in the inn. They were shut out. Jesus came to his own. This is his world. He sustains us. It's not ours. We're dependent on him yet we slammed the door.

We did not receive him. We left him out in the cold. Why? Because we want to be the center of the world and not him. We want to own ourselves not him.

You see, the innkeeper shut Jesus out because he was too busy trying to make his business profitable. Writer David Foster Wallace says, everything in my own immediate experience supports my belief that I am the absolute center of the universe, the realest, most vivid and important person in existence.

I think he's being more honest than most of us are because many of us, what we're trying to do in our lives, even right now, we're busy trying to make ourselves the center of our world. It's our plans, our hopes, our careers, our education.

[20 : 02] We don't want anything, especially Jesus, to interrupt us because he can mess up your life a little bit. but doesn't that video that we showed before show us we are not the center of the world?

In fact, if you think you are, then you have shrunk down your life to be the most narrow-minded person in existence because you have taken the vastness of awesomeness, which is the whole of our universe, which is God himself, and you've diminished it down into the little blip that is you and me.

And that's when, you know, even all of our prayers can center on me. And so the crazy thing about Christmas is that we shut the creator of everything out thinking that was a good idea and Jesus would have every right to blow open the door, nuke the innkeeper and say, let me reclaim my property.

I think that's actually, if we were in that position, that's how I treat him. He's who? He's the glorious triune God who comes down to us.

We did what? We shut him out. Third thing, he did that. And here's where I want to just park a little while. Because at Christmas time, and in this passage, John wants us to step back a little bit to see what's actually going on.

[21 : 51] Because he says one of the most extraordinary sentences that has ever been written in all philosophy, in all of history. history. You know, there is nothing like this sentence in Islam, in Buddhism, in Hinduism, in Judaism, in materialism, in atheism, in any ism you want to say.

He says this, he says, the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we've seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.

this is incredible. I don't have words to explain this, but this is just, as I've been thinking about this, this has just blown my mind.

Do you see what he's saying? He's saying God isn't just out there kind of shouting some instructions at us. God didn't just come down as a hologram. He didn't just come down as some kind of superhero in a great cape.

This God came down to us and became human. That should stun you. If it doesn't stun you, you don't understand it.

[23 : 05] John says no one has ever seen God, but he's made him known. You see, what he's referring to, he's referring back to the book of Exodus.

Because for the Jews, God was so holy, you would not even say his name. You couldn't stand in his presence. Moses, before the burning bush, had to shield his eyes, take off his sandals, because he was so holy.

In Exodus 33, Moses says, please show me your glory. He doesn't know what he's asking. Because God says, yeah, I'll make all my goodness pass in front of you, but you cannot see my face because man cannot see me and live, he says.

And then he kind of hides him in this little cave, and Moses kind of just sees this streak of lightning that kind of goes past, just the kind of tail end of the glory, and he just hears, he doesn't see, he just hears God proclaim his name, the Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

But he can't see him, because he's so holy, he's so awesome. You can't look at the sun, right, just without getting blinded.

[24 : 22] God created that thing. But this unseen, utterly holy God has made himself known in a little baby called Jesus.

I mean, just think about it. The God who is outside of time, omnipresent, all-knowing, doesn't need to sleep, doesn't need coffee in the morning, doesn't wish he'd achieved some more, doesn't wish he was better looking or more talented because he is the epitome of all unprecedented glory.

He is the ultimate in every category and he's already satisfied in himself with his love relationship that's going on. But this very God chooses to wear nappies and poo himself, chooses to get acne and go through puberty, chooses our tiredness and our fragility, our limits, in complete dependence on his father.

Do you know that? I think we have a big problem with this. You know the song Away in a Manger? Do you know there's a line in that which says, the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.

That is the biggest load of crap ever. Sorry if I'm allowed to say that. I mean, why do we say that? It's like kind of, we think Jesus is kind of zen, just kind of, you know, and Mary and Joseph, it's like, hey, he's a self-parenting, you know.

[25 : 56] No. You see, we often think, we say things like, you know, yeah, but that was Jesus, right? You know, Jesus loved people, Jesus forgave people, yeah, but that was Jesus, right?

Don't we? Because what we're saying is, we think Jesus is a bit like a tuna and wasabi sushi. You know, the wasabi always overpowers the tuna, right? And so the divine always overpowers the human.

Really, he's just kind of a little bit of a shell, you know. He's not truly human. Colin's going, what on earth analogy. But we think that, hey, he isn't really like us.

But this passage is saying, no, he gets you entirely. He's 100% human, 100% God, not a 50-50, not a kind of cocktail. He's none of those things. He's 100% and yet he lays aside his power and experiences our full humanity so that he might open our doors to his love.

That's insane. But it gets crazier than that. Because verse 14, the message translation says this, the word became flesh and blood and moved into our neighborhood.

[27 : 21] I love that. The word became flesh and blood and moved into our neighborhood. Do you know, he didn't choose to move in to live on the peak in a palace.

He came to a feeding trough in utter poverty in a backwater of nowhere. and not just physically in poverty, he came to a spiritual slum.

Do you know, me and my family, we moved from Shengwan to Shamshai Pol almost exactly a year ago. And I read this passage a year ago just as we moved in and I looked over to see the tongfong, the subdivided flats that were there and these kind of tiny little cramped apartments.

And this just took on a whole new meaning. And then actually afterwards I went down to the park and I was reading my Bible, it's a beautiful park, I was reading my Bible and then somebody came down to sit next to me and started snorting cocaine.

And then just on the side four people walked up, laid on the floor, took out needles and started injecting themselves. And I'm going, I've got to get out of here. And then you hear about people like Jackie Pullinger if you know Jackie Pullinger leaves the comfort of Britain to minister to those in the walled city in Kowloon which was known as a den of thieves, triads and drug addicts.

[28 : 50] Or German Moravian missionaries, some of you may not know this but in the 1700s a group of these guys tried to sell themselves into slavery to be able to reach the slaves even in the horror of the conditions of slavery.

Because they wanted the gospel to get to them that badly. All of those things pale into comparison with what this phrase says, the word, the creator of everything became flesh and moved into our neighborhood.

It's our door shut, finger pointing, self-exalting, self-reliant, self-justifying, dirty, broken slum of our lives. and he didn't airbnb out of town for a night or two and then just parachute in occasionally.

The word says he dwelt among us. I love that. It's literally he pitched a tent among us. And it's referring to the Old Testament tabernacle where the presence of the holy awesome God came to meet with his unholy people.

The presence of God himself comes down into the slum. And what that should show you is this.

[30 : 11] God is not standoffish and kind of, oh. God doesn't hold his nose at us. Do you know I walked in a slum in India once and everywhere there was human excrement.

And there was a cesspit on the side and I was kind of like this. God does not go, oh, at us. Isn't that incredible? You see, God knows your mess.

He knows your shame. He knows that you have slammed the door in his face a thousand times, whether you're a Christian or not. And maybe even this morning you did the same. Treating your life as your own and not his.

But he doesn't move away from us. He moves towards us. He's not the distant, disinterested, slightly harsh, maybe wondering about us a little bit kind of God that many of us actually you think he really is.

Because he is the God who wants to reshape your entire mental picture of him. So see, he's the God who longs to draw close to us and he will go to the heavens to do it and he will go to the slum to do it too.

[31 : 27] So that you and I might be drawn into a relationship and experience the love that he has. Jesus reveals what God is truly like.

No one's ever seen God, but only God, the only God who is at the Father's side, left the glories of heaven to make him known.

You know, Don Carson says this, he says, do you want to know what the character of God is like? Study Jesus. Do you want to know what the holiness of God is like? Study Jesus. Do you want to know what the wrath of God is like?

Study Jesus. Do you want to know what the forgiveness of God is like? Study Jesus. Do you don't want to know what the glory of God is like? Study Jesus. Study Jesus all the way to that wretched cross, study Jesus.

What is he like? He's full of grace and truth. That doesn't kind of get to us that much but that's actually the Greek translation of that Exodus passage where God says, I am abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

[32 : 42] Jesus is showing you that this very morning wherever you are with him today, his heart for you is an overflowing, ocean filled, never ending, unshakable love that is willing to go to the depths for you.

to take you out of the gutter of trying to prove yourself, take you out of the slum of your own self reliance, take you out of the slum of your own self focused ambition and all the worries and all the fears and all those other things, he wants to lift you up out of that so that you experience his love.

The love of a trinitarian God who says wants to give us the right to be his children. So we might know that embrace, that eternal embrace.

And so this Christmas, this is what Jesus is wanting to do. He comes to his own, that's you and that's me today and he says will you receive me?

I'm knocking at the door, will you open and let the owner come in? In the Garden of Eden, you know, Eve ate the fruit because she doubted God's goodness.

[34 : 12] Did God really say? All of your sin, all of your worry, all of your fear, all of your striving to get life by yourself, all of your self-reliance, goodness, comes out of a false view of God because you don't think he is as good as he says he is.

You don't think he loves you as much as he says he does. All of your prayerlessness, all of whatever is distracting you and busying you and taking up your mind is shaped by your image of who you think God is.

And this Christmas, what God wants you to do is he wants you to meditate on the incarnation. He wants you to take this view of who he says he is and set it aside to all those things that you have filled in the blanks with and he wants to erase those blanks and he wants to give you a new image of himself so that you can go out of here freed from being the center of your own world, free to live an expansive life with him at the center.

other. And so let me just encourage you finally. How do you do that? You've actually got to take time to think about Jesus and to prepare for Jesus because he's knocking.

One of the things we're doing as a church is we're going through this devotional, Advent devotional. If you haven't started, I want to strongly encourage you to do that. I've just been reading through and it's just really encouraging me because it's all about Jesus.

[35 : 55] Take the time to really reflect on Jesus. You know, one of the things my wife has been doing every day, I didn't ask her to do it, she's just started doing this, she's been writing a scripture verse every day during Advent for me.

She gives it to me in an envelope. It's amazing. My wife's incredible. She gives it to me in an envelope and every morning I open up with a scripture reminding me of Jesus. It's awesome.

I'm going to type them all up so that I've got this list. Every day we're actually putting up a different Christmas decoration and then actually just relating it to Jesus with my family because we want Jesus to saturate everything because if Jesus is center of your life, all the other problems are going to get perspective because if he's the God of all creation and he's the one who loves you that much, then you can be free to enjoy him this Christmas and to have an expanded life.

Let's pray. Maybe just as the band comes up, just think about how you're actually responding to Jesus right at the moment.

what place does he really have in your life? Not the kind of superficial answer, not the kind of right, correct answer, but even just where in your thinking is he?

[37 : 24] What is your image of him? What are you worried about? What are you afraid of? What are you striving for? What are you striving for? What are you striving for? What are you striving for?

And are you able to let him be the one who you're striving for more than anything else? If you're not a Christian, God is speaking to you and saying, will you open the door of your heart to stop trying to be in control of your own life and let me be?

Maybe some of us just need to go, God, open my eyes to see the wonder of this again. Just respond to Jesus right now.

Wherever you're up to. Maybe we need to respond in just praise. Maybe we need to respond in repentance, saying, God, I know my life has just been, I've crowded you out, but I want my heart to be open for you.

Maybe there's an action of obedience that he's calling you to do, and you've just been going, yeah, but I prefer to do this. And Jesus is saying, trust me, I'm better than you think I am.

[38 : 59] Father, I just pray for us as a church. It's so easy for us to talk about Jesus all the time, but to lose the wonder of who you really are. God, would you rekindle that wonder?

Would you light a fire in our hearts, Lord, this Christmas? Would you show us that you are worth giving everything for? Would you give us such a filling of your love that it just overflows?

That as we go out into our workplaces, as we go into our families, as we go into difficult situations, as we go into things we have no idea how to handle, we go with a peace knowing that you're already in charge, that you're the center of the world, and you've got this.

And we just need to walk with you. Father, lift our eyes to see you again, we pray. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen.