

The Life of Christ

Lesson 1: The Word Made Flesh: The Incarnation -- John 1:1-18

Every other Gospel begins with a manger, a genealogy, or a voice in the wilderness. John begins before the world had a single morning. "In the beginning was the Word," he writes, and you can almost feel him reaching past the stars, past the first day of creation, past time itself, to a place where there was only God. Before there was light to see by, before there was an ear to hear, the Word already was. John wants you to know who this Jesus is before he ever tells you a thing Jesus did.

And then he says something that should stop us in our tracks. The Word was not only with God; the Word was God. Here is no junior partner, no glorified angel, no good man who climbed his way up to heaven. Here is God Himself, the One through whom everything that exists came to be. Take away the Word and there is no creation, no light, no life, nothing. The same voice that will one day say, "Lazarus, come out," is the voice that first said, "Let there be light."

That is what makes the next sentence almost too much to bear. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The One who flung the galaxies into place was wrapped in cloth and laid in a feeding trough. The hands that measured out the oceans grew tired carrying a carpenter's tools. God did not send a memo or a messenger. God came. He moved into the neighborhood, learned a local accent, felt hunger and grief and the weight of human tears. This is the staggering claim at the center of our faith, and John states it as plainly as a man can.

So this lesson is not really about a doctrine to be filed away. It is about a Person who came near. Perhaps you have spent years thinking of Jesus as a great teacher, a kind example, a figure from a stained-glass window who lived a long time ago and far away. John invites you to look again. The light that no darkness can put out is shining on your face right now. The question is not whether He is who He says He is. The question is what you will do when the eternal Word looks at you and says, "I came for you."

Group Discussion: When people in our culture talk about Jesus, they often describe Him as a wise teacher or a good moral example, but stop short of calling Him God. Why do you think that version of Jesus is so popular, and what does John 1 say that makes it impossible to settle for it?

Personal Reflection: Be honest with yourself: in the way you actually pray, worship, and make decisions, do you treat Jesus as the eternal God who made you, or more like a helpful advisor you consult when convenient? Where would your daily life look different if the truth of John 1:1 fully landed on you this week?

Read John 1:1-18

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 and 2, John says the Word “was with God” and “was God,” and that this was true “in the beginning.” What do these phrases teach us about who Jesus is in relation to the Father and in relation to time, and why would John open his Gospel here rather than with Jesus’ birth?
2. John refuses to let us keep Jesus at a comfortable distance. Where in your own thinking have you been tempted to shrink Jesus down to a great man, a teacher, or an example, and what would change if you truly believed you were dealing with the God who made you?
3. Verse 3 says that “all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” What does it mean that Jesus is the Creator and not a created being, and how does that truth guard us against the idea that He is merely the first and finest of God’s creatures?
4. Verses 4 and 5 speak of light shining in the darkness. Where is there darkness in your life right now, a fear, a habit, a sorrow, that you have quietly assumed will always have the last word? What would it mean to let the light of Christ shine into that exact place?
5. In verses 10 through 13, John says that those who received Him and believed in His name were given “the right to become children of God,” born “not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” What does this teach about how a person actually enters God’s family, and what does it rule out?

6. Verse 12 turns on the word “received.” It is possible to admire Jesus, study Jesus, even talk about Jesus, and still never receive Him. What is the difference, and what would receiving Him look like in a way that reshapes how you live, not just what you believe?
7. Verse 14 says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Why is it essential to our salvation that Jesus was both fully God and truly human, and what comfort and what call does the incarnation press upon us?
8. John says that in Christ we have seen “grace and truth” together, full and undivided. Where do you tend to drift, toward a grace that excuses everything, or a truth that crushes without mercy? How does looking at Jesus reorder the way you treat yourself and the people around you?
9. Verse 18 declares, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” How does this verse present the full deity of Christ, the eternal Son who alone reveals the Father, and why does it leave no room for treating Jesus as merely a great prophet or a created being?
10. Look back across the whole prologue, the Word who was God, who made all things, who became flesh, who is full of grace and truth, and who makes the Father known. Name one specific way you sense the living Christ inviting you to know Him more truly and follow Him more closely as a result of this lesson.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 1:15–20, where Paul calls Christ the image of the invisible God and the One in whom all things hold together; Philippians 2:5–11, where the eternal Son humbles Himself to take on human flesh and is then exalted as Lord; Hebrews 1:1–4, where the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of His nature; Isaiah 9:6–7, the prophecy of a child who is called Mighty God; 1 John 1:1–4, where John testifies that he heard, saw, and touched the Word of life.