

Proposition: In John 1:1-5, we're given two insights concerning the Christ of Christmas.

- I. We learn about His unique identity (1-2).
 - A. Jesus is the Logos (1).
 1. He was in the beginning.
 2. He was with God.
 3. He was God (and still is).
 - B. Jesus truly is in a class by Himself (2).
- II. We learn about His unique accomplishments (3-5).
 - A. Jesus is the Life-bringer (3).
 1. He created everything.
 2. Not one thing exists apart from Him.
 - B. Jesus is the Light-bearer (4-5).
 1. He revealed the way.
 2. He is the way.
 3. Not everyone sees the way.

Implications: In light of who He is and what He's done...

1. Is this the Jesus I know?
2. Have I truly believed in Him?

What's the most amazing event, in your opinion, that's ever occurred on planet earth? When a deluge of water covered the world in Noah's day--that's pretty amazing. When Moses led 2 million Israelites right through the parted walls of the Red Sea, and their sandals didn't get muddy--that's amazing. When Hezekiah witnessed the destruction of 180,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night--that's amazing.

But those events pale in significance compared with what happened on earth some two millennia ago. In the year 6 B.C., God became a man.¹

We're so familiar with the account of the incarnation that those words don't seem quite so amazing to most of us. After all, Christmas comes every year. Why do we celebrate it? "Oh, yea, it's Jesus' birthday." But wait. What really happened at Christmas? What happened is truly amazing. *God became a man.*

It's hard for us to fathom what that means. What is the significance of Christmas? We could go to several places in the Bible to answer that question. To discover the historical significance, we could examine Matthew's gospel or Luke's gospel. These two men tell us through the use of beautiful narrative *how* God became a man. In Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 we learn about the angel's visit to Mary, the trip by donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the crowded inn, the manger scene, the shepherd's visit, the angels' singing.

But there's another text that addresses the significance of the day that God became a man. It's John 1. John 1 looks at Christmas not so much from a historical vantage point as a *theological* one. Matthew and Luke tell us *how* God became a man. John tells us *why* and *what the significance is*.

So for the next three weeks, we want to explore the prologue to John's gospel, John 1:1-18. It's an incredible account. Commentator William Barclay suggests, "The first

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¹This date is proposed by the *NIV Study Bible*. The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* proposes 7 B.C.

chapter of the Fourth Gospel is one of the greatest adventures of religious thought ever achieved by the mind of man."

I do not mean to minimize the historical approach to Jesus' birth. My concern is this. There are thousands and thousands of people who will celebrate Christmas this year, who will sing "Away in a Manger," who know the facts of the birth narrative, yet who fail to fathom the significance of those facts. The apostle John can help us.

This morning we'll explore verses 1-5, next week verses 6-14, and in week three verses 15-18. Our goal is to answer this question, "What really happened when God became a man?" I am convinced that the answer to that question is life-changing.

Here we go. In John 1:1-5, we're given two insights concerning the Christ of Christmas.

I. We learn about His unique identity (1-2).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."

At one level, John's message is both clear and easy to understand. God became a man and lived among us (14). That's what happened at Christmas. But at a deeper level, John 1 raises all sorts of questions. Who's the *Word*? If it's Jesus, why doesn't John just say *Jesus*? And why all the figurative language, terms like light and darkness (4)?

A couple of years ago I had breakfast with a young man who was searching. I encouraged him to read the gospel of John in order to get to know who Jesus was and what Jesus had done. The next time I saw him I asked him if he'd done so. He said he tried, but couldn't make sense of what he was reading.

Perhaps you've felt the same way.

What's going on in John's gospel? Thankfully, John himself tells us in John 20:30-31. Notice verse 30, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book." That is, John's book is a biography of the life of Jesus, but it's not exhaustive. In fact, as John admits in the last verse of his book, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (21:25)."

John is selective. He's writing with a purpose in mind. He knew God had already given the world three biographical accounts of Jesus' life--Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John wrote his account more than sixty years after Jesus went back to heaven. He has a different audience in mind. He's trying to introduce a primarily non-Jewish audience to Christ. He's talking to a generation, like ours, that didn't know Jesus. They'd never seen nor heard Jesus like he had.

And what's his aim in this gospel? He explains in 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." This is an evangelistic book, a book intended to help non-Christians believe in Jesus the Christ, and by believing experience life through Him.

That's a pretty bold claim, isn't it? To suggest that a person, namely Jesus, is the key to life--you'd better back that up John. What qualifies Jesus? What makes Him so special that we should believe in Him? That's exactly what John takes twenty-one chapters to show us.

And where does He begin? At the beginning? No. If you want to know Jesus, you must go back further than the beginning! And when you do, as John did in 1:1-2, you discover two insights into Jesus' unique identity.

A. Jesus is the Logos (1). "In the beginning was the *Logos*." *Logos* is the Greek term translated "Word" in our English Bibles. We know from verse 14 that the *Logos* is Jesus, but why didn't John just say so, "In the beginning was Jesus"? Why does He call Him the *Logos*?

Please realize that though Christianity began amongst the Jews, it quickly spread beyond the Jews. As historian William Barclay suggests, "Within thirty years of Jesus' death it had traveled all over Asia Minor and Greece and had arrived in Rome. By A.D. 60 there must have been a hundred thousand Greeks in the church for every Jew who was a Christian."

What's more, please realize that many Jewish ideas were completely strange to the Greeks. For example, the Greeks had never heard of the Messiah. The Jews had, so in evangelizing Jews it was quite meaningful to announce, "The Messiah has come! It's Jesus!" To which the Greek would respond, "So?"

That category meant very little to the non-Jewish world. So what's the best way to present Jesus to pagan, non-Jewish people? How do you present Christianity in a way that makes sense to Greek-thinking people?

That was the challenge John faced around A.D. 85 or 90. He was living in a Greek city (Ephesus). How could he reach the Greeks? What could he tell them about Jesus that could open their eyes to His relevance?

Then it dawned on him. There was a term that would appeal to both Jews and Greeks, a term which summed up the unique identity of Jesus. Jesus is the *Logos*, the Word.

A word is a powerful thing. During W.W.II, when Britain was facing extinction under the constant barrage of the Nazi bombers, Winston Churchill gave hope to a nation. How? By speaking to his people over the radio. He knew the power of a word.

When John Knox preached in the days of the Reformation in Scotland, it was said that the voice of that one man put more courage into the hearts of his hearers than ten thousand trumpets braying in their ears. In Knox we see the power of a word (Barclay).

What's in a word? We communicate with words--we speak them and write them. Words are symbols that represent something else--when I say the letters A-P-P-L-E, in your mind's eye you see a shiny, round, probably red object, don't you? You don't eat the word, but the word is a symbol that represents and communicates something.

Jesus is the *Word*. But the English term "word" really doesn't do justice to the Greek *Logos*. In Greek thought the term *Logos* goes back to 560 B.C. and a philosopher named Heraclitus.² He taught that everything was changing from day to day. His famous illustration was that it's impossible to step twice into the same river. You step into a river, then step out. If you step back in, it's a different river, for the water flows on and has changed. To Heraclitus everything was like that, in a constant state of flux.

But if that's the case, why isn't the world in complete chaos? The answer of Heraclitus was that all this change and flux was not haphazard. It was controlled and

²See Barclay, pp. 34ff.

ordered and followed a pattern. What controlled the pattern was the *Logos*, the *word*, the *reason* of God. To Heraclitus, the *Logos* was the principle of order in the universe, the mind of God that controlled the world and every person in it.

As time passed, the Stoics picked up the concept, too. The Stoics asked questions like, "What keeps the stars in their courses? What makes the tides ebb and flow? What brings the seasons around at their appointed times?" And their answer was, the *Logos* of God. The *logos* is the power that puts sense into the world.

Then came another figure in the Greek world, Philo, a first century, Jewish philosopher. Philo used the term *logos* no fewer than 1,300 times in his writings. He said that the *logos* was the oldest thing in the world, the instrument through which God made the world. He said that the *logos* was the thought of God stamped on the universe, and that the *logos* was the intermediary between the world and God.

It's as if John came along and said to the Greeks of his day, "For centuries you've been thinking and writing about the *logos*, the power that made this world, and the power that controls this world, the power by which men come into contact with God. I'm here to tell you that the *logos* isn't an abstract power. It's a person. It's Jesus Christ! He's the *Logos*."³

You ask, "What's so unique about Jesus?" John mentions three truths about the *Logos* in verse 1.

1. *He was in the beginning.* "In the beginning was the Word." In the beginning. Sound familiar? Those are the first words of Genesis. John equates the event of Genesis 1:1 with the *Logos*. In the beginning [Greek word, *arche* from which we get "archeology"], when God created the world, the *Logos* was. This speaks of Jesus' eternity. There's no antecedent to Him. He predates time. Dear friend, please know that the *Logos* existed before the manger. He was in the beginning. A second truth...

2. *He was with God.* John states, "And the Word was with God." Notice the preposition--not *under* God, not *after* God, not *above* God, and not *behind* God, but "with" God [lit. *pros Theon*, "towards God"]. The word suggests that there has always been the closest possible connection between the *Logos* and God. There's a unique intimacy between the Father and Jesus. Commentator William Hendriksen translates the phrase, "And the Word was face to face with God."

This same John wrote another book which we call 1 John, and began it with similar words: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the *Logos* [Word] of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was *with the Father* and has appeared to us (1 John 1:1-2)."

³There's a rich Hebrew background to *Logos* too. What's more, the "word" theme runs throughout Scripture: Deut 8:3 "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every *word* that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Isaiah 55:11 "So is my *word* that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty." Rev. 19:13 "His name is the *Word* of God." Rev 22:13 says, "He is the alpha and omega [the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; What do you do with letter? Make a *word*]." Heb 1:1-3 "In time past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful *word*."

The Bible says that no one can see God and live (Ex. 33:20). But the Word did. He was *with* God. Truth #3...

3. *He was God (and still is)*. "And the *Logos* was God." Nothing higher can be said. All that can be said of God can be said of the Word.

Notice that John says, "The Word was God," not that "God was the Word." And realize that in the text there's no definite article before God. That indicates that the Word does not by himself make up the entire Godhead (Tasker). The Bible teaches that God exists as *three* persons, three persons equal in essence, but distinct in function.

We are speaking about what is known as the pre-existence of Christ. That's hard for us to fathom, but here's a very practical implication. It means that God was always like Jesus. Sometimes people tend to think that God was stern and wrathful (especially in OT times). And then Jesus came, and changed God's anger into love. Not so. God has always been like Jesus was when He walked the earth.

In verse 2 we discover a second insight into Jesus' unique identity.

B. Jesus truly is in a class by Himself (2). "He was with God in the beginning." You'll notice that verse 2 gives us no new information, but merely repeats truths #1 & #2 from verse 1. Why the repetition? For emphasis. Because it's so amazing. Because the subject of this biography is so unique, so one of a kind. It's as if John is saying, "Yes, you heard me correctly! The One I'm writing about is truly in a class all by Himself!"

May I ask you a question? If you profess to be a Christian, is this the Jesus in which you believe? If not, if you don't believe in the *Logos*, the one who was in the beginning, who was with God, who was and still is God, then you don't know the Jesus of the Bible.

It's sad, yet true. Many who observe Christmas give lip service to a very different Jesus. When the Mormon Tabernacle choir sings, "O Come, Let Us Adore Him," please realize they're not singing about this Jesus. When someone says, "O, I believe in Jesus, but I don't believe He's the only way to God," they haven't grasped who the *Logos* truly is.

Beloved, the only Jesus that can save you from your sins is the *Logos*, the One who's in a class all by Himself, the God-man. Truly, the Christ of Christmas possesses a unique identity. That's what qualifies Him to be your Savior and why He deserves your worship

II. We learn about His unique accomplishments (3-5).

Listen to the resume of the *Logos* in verses 3-5, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."

In his prologue, John introduces us to several key themes which will run throughout his book. Here we see two themes that pertain to Jesus' unique work. What has Jesus done that's unrivaled by any other being in the universe? John highlights two accomplishments...

A. Jesus is the Life-bringer (3). Listen to the KJV's reading, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." What's that saying about Jesus as the Life-bringer? Two things, one positive, one negative...

1. *He created everything*. Yes, Genesis 1:1 states that God created the universe, but John 1:3 clarifies that it was done literally *through* the *Logos*. That is, as Leon Morris clarifies, "The Father created, but He did it 'through' the Word." Both were at work.

Colossians 1:15-17 elaborates, "He [the Son, 14] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created...All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Let that sink in. As the Life-bringer, Jesus created all things. You are not here by random chance of evolutionary processes. This universe is the handiwork of a Master Craftsman, a Creator, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

May I offer a sober warning? This is why the creation/evolution issue is so critical. Satan knows that if he can destroy the foundation, the house will fall. He's perfectly willing to let you believe in a wimpish, humanitarian Jesus. But if he can get you hoodwinked by the lie that this universe is here by chance and not divine design, then he's got you believing in an imitation Jesus. According to verse 3, the true Jesus created everything. But John gets even more specific at the end of the verse and tells us...

2. *Not one thing exists apart from Him.* Do you realize how great Jesus is? There's not one thing that exists that He didn't make. Even Satan was a created angel, as were the demons who rebelled and were expelled from heaven.

Oh beloved, you can trust Jesus, and here's why. He's the all powerful Life-giver. Nothing exists apart from Him. Nothing surprises Him--it simply couldn't happen. Even the Cross was no surprise to Him.

Do you remember what Jesus told Pilate during His trial? In response to Pilate's barb, "Don't you realize I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?", Jesus replied in John 19:11, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."

The more I learn about Jesus the more amazed I am by the Cross, aren't you? The One who died for us is the One who gave us life, the Creator, the Most powerful Being in the universe! That means to reject Jesus is to commit the greatest act of treason imaginable. He's the Life-giver. Indeed, He's *your* life-giver. What else?

B. Jesus is the Light-bearer (4-5). If John's giving us Jesus' resume of accomplishments, and verse 3 speaks of His work in creation, verses 4-5 seem to sum up His work in redemption: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it [or, "the darkness comprehended it not," as in the KJV]."

Jesus is the Life-giver, but those to whom He gave life lost their way in darkness. So the Life-giver became the Light-bearer. And here's what He did, three things.

1. *He revealed the way.* According to verse 4, life is in Him. In John's gospel the word "life" occurs more than 35 times and its verbal form another 15 times. What qualifies Jesus to help a world under the sentence of death? This fact. Life is in Him. He created life the first time, and He alone can restore that which is dead back to life.

How does He do it? Verse 4 says that the life became the "light of men." In John 8:12 Jesus announced, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." And in John 9:5 He reiterates, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Are you tired of living in the dark? Does life not make sense to you? Then look to the Light-bearer. Jesus revealed the way. That's not all...

2. *He is the way.* It's not just what He *did*, but what He *does*. Notice John's use of the present tense in verse 5, "The light *shines* in the darkness." Yes, Jesus came to be the Light that would show people lost in the darkness the way to go to get back to God.

But He does more. He not only shows us the way, He *is* the way. Remember His words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6)."

Indeed, as John says, the light *is shining* in the darkness. Present tense. It's happening right now. Two weeks ago, Johnny saw the Light. A couple of months ago Irene saw the Light. Do you remember the day the Light shone in your life?

Light and darkness are opposites, but they are not opposites of equal power, are they? Light is stronger than darkness. One little candle can dispel a roomful of darkness.

But why doesn't everybody come out of the dark? Verse 5 tells us, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." The fact is...

3. *Not everyone sees the way.* The final verb in verse 5 is difficult to translate (*katalambanein*). It can be used of extinguishing a fire. That's what the world tries to do with the Light, doesn't it? Extinguish it, get rid of it, but still the Light shines. The word can also mean "to apprehend," which can be taken in two ways; one, the darkness hasn't been able to apprehend the light (like we'd say the law wasn't able to apprehend the criminal; Schofield takes it in this sense "the darkness *overcame* it not"); or, it can indicate that the darkness can't apprehend the truth in the sense of "understanding" it (as the NIV suggests).

It's true. The Light shines in the darkness, but not everyone sees the way. Jesus said in John 3:19, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." Apart from the gracious working of the Spirit of God, no man can see the Light.

Yes, it's the greatest event the world has ever seen. God became a man. The Christ of Christmas is unique because of identity and accomplishments. Let's get personal...

Implications: In light of who He is and what He's done...

Would you ask yourself two questions?

1. *Is this the Jesus I know?* My heart is gripped by the haunting thought that many who will celebrate Christmas this year, many who will even profess to know Christ, indeed, know a Jesus different from the One we've seen this morning in John 1. Perhaps it's true of you.

Is this the Jesus you know--the eternal *Logos*, the Life-bringer and Light-bearer, the Lord of the universe? Do you know *Him*?

You say, "I'm not sure. How can I tell?" One way is to look at your life--be honest. Is there evidence that Jesus is the Lord of *your life*? 1 John 2:3 says, "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands." Do you delight to obey Jesus commands? Husbands, have you been loving your wives as Jesus commanded? Young people, have you been obeying your parents as Jesus commanded? If Jesus is truly your Lord, you will. In everything you do, you'll want to please Him. If you truly know Him.

Be honest. If this the Jesus I know? A second question...

2. *Have I truly believed in Him?* Verse 11 says, "He came to His own but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." Have you truly believed in Jesus? If you have, reaffirm your belief in Him today, as the *Logos*, the Lord of the universe and Lord of your life. If you haven't, I invite you to do so today.