

Today's message is the start of our Christmas series - Savior. We will look at the various Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth. God had each of these gospel writers share from their unique perspectives the truth of Jesus.

Last week, I showed you the most basic formula for story. Every story begins somewhere. The four gospel writers chose to start their story of Jesus' life and ministry in a way that supported their goal.

- Matthew begins with a genealogy, because he wrote to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish expectation and prophecy. He highlights Jesus' royal birth with the Magi and Herod's anger. John the Baptist does not make an entrance until Jesus is about to begin his ministry.
- Mark does not mention Jesus' birth at all and jumps in with John the Baptist announcing Jesus' ministry. We will begin an in-depth look at Mark in January.
- Luke notes his investigation with the eyewitnesses. Then, he weaves in John the Baptist's birth along with the most detailed account of Jesus' birth. Luke wrote so that they would have confidence in what they had been taught.

Today we examine John's biography of Jesus; his account how of Jesus' life began. Let's look at **John's Savior**



- John really does not mention Jesus' birth like Matthew or Luke, but he does give us a powerful and poetic picture of a preexistent Son of God coming to earth from the unseen heavenlies.<sup>1</sup> John wrote so that his readers would believe in Jesus and have eternal life.

Let's start with a quick over review of John's Gospel.

## 1. John's Savior.

---

<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: The Coming of the Light* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), p. 21.

John – the simplest and most profound<sup>2</sup> Simple enough that a child can understand it and deep enough that elephants can swim in it.

- Accessible yet deep. Bread of life (Jn 10:11), and True Vine (Jn 15:1). And yet it is philosophical and mystical.
- The most evangelistic of the four. Belief in Jesus is John's priority, think of John 3:16.
- Most theologically rich. I am the resurrection and life (Jn 14).
- The most popular & researched Gospel overall.

Speaking very broadly here: the earliest eyewitnesses had a hard time believing Jesus was human.

- They had heard about or seen his miracles and knew he was God, but they could not understand how he was human.
- Thus, you have Matthew and Luke's accounts of his very human birth in Bethlehem.

It is believed that John lived the longest and may have died of old age.

- John wrote after the Christians were expelled from the Jewish Synagogues (Jn 9:22), so there was greater freedom to talk about Jesus' divinity.
- John was clear about his purpose for writing: 'But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (Jn 20:31 NIV).' – John's purpose statement
- Only God can save, therefore, the Word became flesh.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus makes no claim to divinity. John's view of Jesus is that he is God's unique and special Son. For example, here is an episode where Jesus says, "'Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"<sup>59</sup> At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds (Jn 8:58-59 NIV).' In two ways Jesus is saying he is Divine:

- Jesus was there before Abraham.
- The 'I AM' statement. Remember the question Moses asked God in the burning bush: 'What is your name?' and God replied, 'I AM WHO I AM (Ex 3:14 NIV).'

---

<sup>2</sup> Edward Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus: A Guide to the Four Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), pp. 12-13.

John sees the human side of Jesus, too, but he is consumed to show his readers the divine, preexistent, and glorified Jesus.

His Gospel begins with ...

## 2. The Word (Logos), Jn 1:1-3.

'In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (Jn 1:1-3 NIV).'

The Word here is Logos; it means word, like spoken word.

Two groups of John's readers understood Logos well.

### 1. For the Jews.

- For Jews, the Logos was associated with the creative power of God speaking the world into existence. It is like God's 'self-disclosure' in creation account: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ... <sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Ge 1:1, 3 NIV)."' – Hebrew understanding of Logos
- The Jewish understanding of Logos is something concrete and not theoretical. It would be closer to 'what we would call an event or a deed.'<sup>3</sup> When God speaks something is done instantly, there is an action. Isaiah wrote that 'My word that goes out from my mouth ... will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Is 55:11 NIV).'

### 2. For the Greeks.

- For Greeks, they would have thought of the 6 c. B.C. philosopher, Heraclitus. He taught that even though the world seems in chaos, 'it is ordered ... that there must be a divine "word" that controls it.'<sup>4</sup> Logos is the controlling principle of all matter, of all existence.
- The Greek philosopher Plato, built upon Heraclitus' idea: 'It may be that some day there will come from God a Word, a Logos, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain.' – Plato, Greek understanding of Logos

---

<sup>3</sup> Boice, *John*, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Boice, *John*, p. 34.

John has found a way to draw both the Greeks and the Jews into thinking about Jesus. Specifically, the Logos, God himself, the controlling principle of everything, has come into creation.

- The Creator has entered creation.
- The Author of life has entered his own story.

Imagine that I am trapped inside an invisible box right now, say 10' cubed. In time, I could determine the shape and boundaries of this invisible box. I could bounce a ball off the invisible walls and know my cage. I would understand the invisible box from the effects of it not letting me out, or something I have thrown at it out.

- In the same way, we know God by the effects around us. We don't see the wind, but we see the leaves blowing. These effects form a portrait of our invisible God – answered prayer, divine circumstances, etc.
- John is setting the stage to say the invisible has now become visible: 'The Logos became flesh and made his dwelling among us (v. 14).'
- Only God can save, therefore, the Word became flesh.

No, it is not the quaint story of baby Jesus being born in Bethlehem, angels singing, and king Herod raging, but it is the same story: God has come into His creation to bring salvation. He has revealed Himself to us.

The poetic-like prose continues ...

### **3. Light, Jn 1:4-5, 9.**

'In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it ... <sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world (Jn 1:4-5, 9a NIV).'

The more I study John's Gospel the more I am amazed at his depth and organization.

Again, there are similarities to the Genesis creation account. Before creation, it was dark and chaotic: 'Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep ... <sup>3</sup>And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Ge 1:2-3 NIV).' God's spoken word instantly creates light.

John does not say that darkness is sin because he wants to highlight that light has come into the world.

- Later, he will write, 'Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil (Jn 3:19 NIV).'
- For John, life and light are synonyms for salvation. Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (Jn 8:12 NIV).'
- John's point is that something in history has changed, switched on. There is no longer chaotic darkness, light has come into the world and 'the darkness has not overcome it.' There has been a decisive change in human circumstances – light has come because of God's spoken word.

At this time of the year, the days are short, the dark nights are long, and the cold outside chills us to the bone. We love to put Christmas lights on our homes, trees, and wreaths, not just because they are pretty and decorative, but because they bring light. Light brings understanding of our surroundings.

- Spiritual darkness is a word picture for ignorance and unbelief. While light is belief and understanding. John calls Jesus' birth 'true light ... coming into the world (v. 9)' that will take away sin, ignorance, and unbelief.
- Jesus said, 'I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believe in me should stay in darkness (Jn 12:46 NIV).'

Unlike my unseen box that can only be known by the effect of not letting me out, true light has come into the world to bring understanding, revelation, and salvation. You can touch it: 'That which ... we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched (1Jn 1:1 NIV).'

- Kings from the east worshipping the newborn Jesus: 'We saw his star ... and have come to worship him (Mt 2:2 NIV).'
- Angels rejoicing that, 'a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (Lk 2:11 NIV).'

There are no donkeys, mangers, angels, or virgin births, in John's opening. There is no Santa Clause, Grinch, or Buddy the Elf, but this is a Christmas story, too. It is a Christmas story that leads to belief in Jesus - because only God can save, and God has now come into the world to bring salvation!

In poetic fashion, we are to ask ourselves, 'who is this light?'

#### **4. Birth, Jn 1:11-13.**

'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God —<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (Jn 1:11-13 NIV).'

Those in darkness live in chaos, confusion, unbelief; these people did not receive the light, v. 11. But those who received him have seen a great light and become 'children of God,' v. 12. Not only is light a word picture of salvation, but so is birth.

A good mystery writer will anticipate the questions a reader might have and give clues early on. When the mystery is solved, the reader will go, 'Oh, I got it. I can see how the detective figured it out.'

- Here verses 12-13, John anticipates that great conversation with Nicodemus where Jesus says, 'Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit (Jn 3:6 NIV).'
- John uses birth or born 167 times in his writings. The most famous time is when Jesus says to Nicodemus, 'You must be born again (Jn 3:7 NIV).'

This is an incarnation story, but it is different from Matthew and Luke. John is not concerned with Mary giving birth to Jesus, but he is concerned with spiritual birth.

- Believing in Jesus is receiving him; it is being born again.
- Just as the light suddenly expels the darkness, so too, belief in Jesus as the Son of God suddenly brings new spiritual life. You are 'born of God.'

John has told us that the Logos was God and was with God at creation, that the light takes away the darkness, and that we can be born of God – now comes the big reveal.

## **5. God's Son, Jn 1:14-17.**

'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14 NIV).'

'We have seen his glory of the one and only Son ... full of grace and truth.' - is an important theological statement; I am a witness of this Son of God.

- Again, we generally know God only by his affects around us: an answered prayer, a moment of divine protection, a peaceful presence in the middle of the night. But now that the Logos has become flesh, we can really know God: touch him, hear him, be with him in a special way.
- Imagine, the Logos became flesh – the governing power entering Mary's womb. One of the early confessions and songs of the church went like this: 'Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature God... <sup>7</sup> made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Phil 2:5-7 NIV).'

- John was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God come into this world, are you?

The Logos becoming flesh is the climax of this opening poem, but every story has a finale as well: 'For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known (Jn 1:17-18 NIV).'

- 'Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.' After seventeen verses John finally names Jesus as the Christ, the logos, the light, the one who brings GRACE - new birth. Only God can save, therefore, the Word became flesh.
- John has given us his own unique account of the beginning of Jesus' story. Jesus is the one who '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 (Jn 21:25 NIV).'

## **Conclusion.**

Do you have a real relationship with your Creator?

There is a difference between knowing about someone and really knowing them, being in a relationship with them.

I could, for example, read all these books about my wife. I could learn her likes and dislikes, her height, color of her hair, where she came from. But all these 'facts' do not mean I really know her. Until I enter a living relationship with her, I do not know her.

The Law, the Writings, and the Prophets gave us a head knowledge of God and his salvation. But now God Himself has come and we can know Him, really know him relationally.<sup>5</sup>

Do you want to know God today?

---

<sup>5</sup> Through Jesus we have a horizontal relationship with God, not just a vertical one ... we have the common experience of limitation, suffering and human love ... we relate to God not only as our Creator and Lord, but also as our brother and friend', Scott Sinclair, 'John's Gospel and the Truth of the Incarnation' Lecture Notes, [John's Gospel and the Truth of the Incarnation \[Lecture Notes\] \(dominican.edu\)](http://www.dominican.edu), accessed 12/1/23

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16 NIV).'