

God the Son Incarnate

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Date: 21 December 2025

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

John 1, I'm going to begin reading verse 14 through 18, which is going to be the focus of our time this morning. John 1, 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.

And from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth come to us through Jesus Christ.

[1 : 14] No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the Father's side. He has made Him known.

This is the Word of the Lord. Please be seated. Well, there's no season sensed quite like Christmas.

It begins to feel a lot like Christmas before it arrives. The weather turns and jackets come out unless you're in Tennessee and you never have that tender Tennessee Christmas.

Because it's 70 degrees every year. You know, it's something you not just feel, it's something you hear. You start to hear carols and bells and songs galore from commercial to Walmart to gas station.

Everybody is singing at Christmas. It's something you see. You see the lights and the wreaths and the candles. You try to up your game on your house so that folks can see your decoration.

[2 : 22] It's something you smell. You begin to smell Christmas. Christmas has an aroma. A Frasier firs and chestnuts roasting. It's something you even taste.

Smoked ham and eggnog. Sugar cookies. And more sugar cookies. No wonder a new commercial from the luxury car Lexus says, The greatest measure of the season is how it makes you feel.

Now that's a bunch of garbage. But there is no season that tethers to our senses quite like Christmas. But the wonder of Christmas is not in the feelings it brings.

Though it brings many feelings tied to memories in the past and nostalgia and all these things. The wonder is the mystery at the center. The son of God was made man.

Fred Sanders talking about Christmas and about Advent. He says, What is so special about Advent is the sheer scale of the mystery to which we turn our attention.

[3 : 31] The incarnation. It begins. It brings with it a host of closely connected doctrines about the son of God. His pre-existence. Before anything else was made.

He existed. His identity within the Trinity. His eternal generation from the Father. As we talked about several weeks ago. His hypostatic union. And his virginal conception.

We find ourselves at Christmas in the deepest mysteries. The deepest miracles and wonders of the Christian faith arrive at Christmas.

Yeah, sometimes we can go through the Advent season adoring the Savior with a blurry sense of all. With a blurry sense of all and at this mystery of the incarnation.

I think we can read the stories of Matthew and Luke. We can defend the historicity of Jesus Christ without really considering the person. We can talk about what Christmas begins.

[4 : 36] Christmas arrives. And then it begins the first of so many acts about what Christ does. Without giving much attention to who Christ is. But the gospel of John will not allow us to leave Advent with a blurry sense of all.

After all, at the heart of Christianity is not the cross. Or forgiveness. Or acceptance. Or any of these things. At the heart of Christianity is a person.

God the Son incarnate. This is our series called The Theology of Christmas. It's the deepest of mysteries. These verses of John's Gospel.

The prologue that we're concluding this morning. Teach us deep theological truths. Uncovered at the birth of Christ. The Son of God took to himself a fully human nature.

Made like us in every respect. Yet without sin. But they're not written mainly to inform us. Or merely to teach us deep theological truths. They're meant to delight us with the utterly unthinkable goodness of God on display.

[5 : 45] In Jesus Christ. My prayer is that the word would have its intended effect this morning. Moving us far beyond a blurry sense of awe. To a staggered delight in what God has given.

That's why John has written these verses. He could have written you about so many things. Could have written me about so many things. As he tells us in John 20. But he wrote these things that we might believe.

That Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That we would not be blur-eyed as we leave Advent.

But instead transfixed with the gift God has given. In a word where we're going is bow in awe and reverence. The Son of God was made man to unveil to all men the glory and grace of God.

Bow in awe and reverence. The Son of God was made man to unveil to all men the glory and grace of God.

[6 : 49] Well, that's where we're going. First point. The glory in the highest. The glory in the highest. If you remember in Luke's Gospel.

The first people that hear about Christmas. Are the shepherds. The angels go to them. A heavenly host fills the sky. And they say glory to God in the highest.

That's why every Christmas we sing a little bit of Latin. Gloria in excelsis Deo. What does that mean? That's just glory to God in the highest. That's what the angels are saying.

What God has done. John means he deserves the highest praise. The highest exaltation and worship for what he is doing.

But John takes us into the heart of the glory. And tells us why God deserves the highest praise. He says, look in verse 14. Very matter of factly.

[7 : 45] And the word became flesh. Now John is returning to what he discussed. At the opening of this chapter in verse 1. If you remember we studied how John takes us back to the beginning of the world.

And retells the story of creation to help us understand. It was not merely God the Father who made all these things. But alongside him was God the Son.

Whom he calls the Word right here. Alongside God is the Son of God who is fully God in every way. Eternal, independent, self-existent, and full of life.

John tells us immediately after that. In him was life. And the life was the light of men. All things were made through him. All things were made with him.

All things are from him. And then John says in this verse, rather startlingly, that Word became flesh.

[8 : 46] John is telling us that the Word became a human being. But look at how he tells us. He could have used the word man. The Word became man.

But he doesn't. He could have used the word body. But he doesn't. He says the Word became flesh.

An almost vulgar word. Paul often uses this word, as you know, in different letters that he's written to refer to our sinful nature.

Make no provision for the flesh. Do not gratify the flesh. The desires of the flesh wage war. Referring to our sinful nature that we're born with.

The ingrained corruption that traces through every human heart. But that's not what John is talking about. Flesh is used to refer to all human life in distinction from God.

[9 : 49] God is eternal. And humans are temporary. God is infinite in knowledge and power. Humans are limited in knowledge and power.

God is independent. Humans are reliant on food and sleep and drink. Human life is finite, fragile, and temporary.

And that's what Jesus became. In other words, Jesus became a real deal baby boy. But what does it mean that the Word became flesh?

It doesn't mean that the Son of God changed into a man. I think sometimes we often think that perhaps this is like the famous novel where the man wakes up and finds out he's turned into an insect.

As if the Son of God was changed into a man. That's not what these things, as if Jesus ceased to be the eternal God. It doesn't mean either that the Son of God appeared as a man.

[10 : 54] You know, sometimes we think he took the form of a man. Like the Marvel character Mystique who can mimic physical features and voice and inflection and all these things.

To appear, to do a good imitation. That's not what happened. It doesn't even mean that the Son of God assumed the form of a man. As if the humanity of Jesus Christ were like a jacket that he wore through this life.

Assuming the form of a man. Nor does it mean that he's partially man. I think sometimes we can think that way. As if we sing, veiled in flesh, the Godhead sees.

Sometimes we can think that the divinity of Jesus is this nucleus on the inside. And the outside, his body, is just the human part of him. But that's not what it means when it says that Jesus became man.

What it means is that the Word became flesh. When it says that, the Son of God took up a fully human nature. A human body, but also a human soul.

[12 : 02] Human emotions. Human frailty. Capable of hunger and thirst. Suffering and death. Colossians 2 said, In him the whole fullness of God dwells bodily.

I think one of the best definitions comes from the Westminster Catechism. It says, The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how it defines it.

Who being the eternal Son of God, which he was for all time, eternal Son of God, became man and so was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.

Theologians refer to that, as Fred Sanders mentioned a moment ago, as the hypostatic union. This idea that the natures of Christ were united together, indivisibly, fully God, truly man, truly man, in one person forever.

This is where we're meant to be, lost in wonder. As God, he never began. As man, he began to be. As God, he had no mother.

[13:21] As man, he had no father. As God, unlike any other man who's ever been born, he chose to be man in the fullness of time.

As man, he was conceived in Mary's womb. As God, he was spirit, having no body. As man, he has a head, shoulders, knees, and toes.

As God, he has no needs, but as man, fully man, he needs food and drink, sleep and shelter. It's meant to be and it is completely mind-blowing.

Sinclair Ferguson helps us when he says, if your intellect has not been staggered by the reality of the incarnation, you don't know what the incarnation means. It doesn't mean Jesus was a little baby.

It means the eternal, infinite, divine one, worshiped by cherubim and seraphim, the creator of all things, the sustainer of all things, infinite in his being, wisdom, power, majesty, and glory, who in a word could dissolve the world that had sinned against him, was willing to come into the world, and assume our flesh in order to become our savior.

[14:40] It is overwhelming. But why would the Son of God do it? John immediately fills in that answer, begins to answer that question when he says, the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Now this word dwelt is brimming with Old Testament significance. It's the same word used for tent. When the people were going through the wilderness and they had a tent in the middle for the Lord, they called it the tabernacle.

So the Lord was with his people in the middle tent. It's pretty sweet to have the Lord with you. And so also it's kind of the same type of word used for temple, this idea that God dwells with his people.

And if you remember, don't you remember how the glory cloud hovered over the tabernacle when the Lord was in the house? Don't you remember when Solomon and his ministers were ministering in the temple and the cloud filled the temple such that they could no longer minister because the Lord had come down.

And it is the presence of God that sets apart the people of God from all the people of the world. So what does it mean that the Lord tabernacled and dwelt among us?

[15:52] Now the message says the word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood. And that's somewhat right.

I think what it's trying to capture is that the Lord is drawn near to his people and Jesus Christ, unlike he's ever drawn near before. There were signs and symbols that pointed to his presence with his people before, but now he has come in the flesh, God and man in one person to be with his people.

But it's not completely right. Our hope is not that the Lord moved into the neighborhood so that we could see his Christmas lights or something like that.

Be one of our homeboys. The point is that the Lord Jesus came to be a new temple. That's what's going on here.

John tells us in 2.20 that Jesus is the temple. Going to replace the temple. He has come to do away with all the tabernacles and all the temples, all the temporary things.

[17:02] He's come to do away with all the altars. He is the temple. He is the priest. And he is the sacrifice for all times. He is fully God and truly man.

And he becomes the place in which the people of God meet with, we meet with God forever and ever and ever. Jesus is that temple.

That's why he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Remember the woman at the well when Jesus says, they're today coming real soon when people won't worship on that mountain or that other mountain.

But they will worship the Lord in spirit and in truth through Jesus Christ. one preacher recounts an imaginary conversation between an early Christian and their neighbor in Rome in a day when there's temples all over the place.

We have churches on every corner here, but in the Roman world there were temples to all these different gods and goddesses. The neighbor might have said to a Christian, I hear you're religious.

[18:10] Christ, still a word we use in our culture. Great, religion is a good thing. Where is your temple? Your holy place? Where do you bow down and face every day?

We don't have a temple, replies the Christian. Jesus is our temple. No temple, but where do your priests do their work? Where do they do their ritual?

Christian responds, we don't have priests to mediate the presence of God. Jesus is our priest, right? There is one mediator between God and man, 1 Timothy 2, the man, Christ Jesus.

So the neighbor says, no priest, but where do you offer your sacrifices to acquire favor with God? He says, we don't need a sacrifice.

Jesus is our sacrifice. The neighbor says, what kind of religion is this? To which we would respond, it's no religion at all.

[19:18] It's a Christian faith. Not another bag of rules. A bunch of sacrifices. It's celebrating this reality that he's come to dwell with us, to commune with us and draw us near.

So the glory in the highest, point two, the glory we really want. The glory we really want. There's glory in the highest.

But there's a glory that all men and women chase. You know, the glory of human history, or the story of human history is the story of people chasing glory. We see that immediately in the Old Testament.

You see in the Tower of Babel, famously trying to make a name for ourselves. Our whole culture is caught up in making a name for ourselves. But the glory we want cannot be attained.

It must be given. As John continues to explain what God has done, in the Incarnation, he says, verse 14, second half of the verse, he says, and we have seen his glory.

[20:27] Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. He says, we have seen it. Not a reference to us, but a reference to John and the original eyewitnesses that walked with Jesus, that talked with him, that heard his stories.

But these words also are filled with Old Testament significance. To fully understand them, we must go back. The background revolves around Moses. If you remember, Moses was called to set the people free, to lead them out of Egypt.

The Lord calls him up on the mountain and gives him the Ten Commandments. He dwells with the Lord, sees him face to face. All the people are told to stay away from the mountain lest they die.

And they got tired of waiting. So the people made a golden calf and began worshipping the golden calf. Captured the folly of idolatry, but they began saying, you delivered us out of Egypt.

We worship you. And Moses comes down and says, what in the world are you doing? And breaks the tablets of the Ten Commandments.

[21 : 37] I remember a friend, or the guy that led me to the Lord. He was kind of like an antiquer. And he had the Ten Commandments in his yard.

You know, it sounds kind of funny, but it was in his mountain house. He had the Ten Commandments there and they were broken. I was like, why do you have broken Ten Commandments? Well, this is the reason. Straight from Exodus, I was just beginning to read my Bible.

Never read that story before. Well, Moses begins to plead with the Lord. And the Lord says, I'm done with these people. These guys are so fickle, I don't want anything to do with them.

And Moses pleads with him and intercedes with the Lord and the Lord relents and says, okay, I'll stay with these people. I'll go with them. And Moses is stunned.

He's up on the mountain. I'd commend to you Exodus 33 and 34. Read it today. It's incredible. The greatest revelations of God in the Old Testament.

[22 : 35] Moses is stunned. He says to the Lord, show me your glory. He says, if you can forgive people like this, show me what you're like. I want to see you. I want to see you face to face. I want to know what you're like.

The Lord says, I will not show you my glory, but I'll show you my goodness. You cannot see my face, but I will tell you what I'm like. Exodus 34, 6, which we have for you.

The Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, that's the divine name, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

This promise is breathtaking. One author has called it the DNA of the Bible and the DNA of God's character.

What is the Lord? What is He all about? It's right there. These five clauses, merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

[23 : 39] This idea of steadfast love runs to the Bible. The idea is not merely warm feelings that motivate us when we think about God, but this idea of steadfast love, the ferocious love of a father, His commitment to His promise, His commitment to do whatever He has to do to commit Himself to His promise, this amazing desire to do unimaginable good to His people.

And then He says faithfulness, this idea of steadfast love and faithful love. It's loyal love. It's sticking it out. It's all the way to the end. All throughout the Old Testament it announces the Lord is steadfast love and faithfulness.

Psalm 25, all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness. That's a great psalm and verse to pray and cast your cares to the Lord. This is who He is.

Now back to John. The connection to Moses as you probably saw is clear in this text.

Moses is the background in many ways. Look at verse 17, for the law was given through Moses. Right? The Ten Commandments. Moses prayed, show me your glory.

[25 : 05] Verse 14, we have seen His glory. John's wanting us to think about a parallel between what God did on that mountain and what God has done in Jesus Christ.

but it's most explicit in verse 14 where it says, full of grace and truth. Full of grace and truth.

It's repeated in verse 17. The law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. These words are John's translations of steadfast love and faithfulness.

This is John's way of saying that the steadfast love and faithfulness of God is supremely revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Now, this is incredible.

What John is saying is that Moses prayed to see the glory of the God and the God came down and dwelt next to him and then passed before him. John is saying the very same glory that Moses saw is what we have seen when we saw Jesus Christ.

[26 : 14] I find it striking that in the Gospel of John miracles are not called miracles. They're called signs. Why? Because of the unveiling of this glory.

Yes, veiled in flesh, God and man. We see his humanity in so many different scenes but there are these moments where the glory just breaks out. and these miracles evidencing that this is the Lord.

But there's more. If you notice all the references to grace in these verses, look at verse 14, full of grace and truth. 16, from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

The law was given through Moses, grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. Notice this move from glory to grace, glory to grace.

Now glory, I think, is one of those Christian words we use so much that all the meaning has been shaken out. We don't really know what this word means anymore but glory, in so many ways, is the greatness of God going public.

[27 : 28] The greatness of God being on display. The heavens declare the glory of God because God goes public in the things that he's made. His invisible attributes, his divine power are evident in all that he has made.

We sing glory to God in the highest with the angels. Why? Because God has gone public. The Son of God has gone public in the birth of Jesus Christ.

But these verses help us to see that glory is not often, or the greatness of glory is not often what we think, you know. I think we often think the glory of God is most on display in how he's unlike us, how he's, what is about how he's unlike us, but how his character is unlike us.

We think your thoughts are not my thoughts. Your ways are not my ways. Obviously, that's Isaiah 55. We think your power is not my power.

Your presence, you're everywhere present with the fullness of your being and I am so finite and fragile. But the utter greatness of the glory of God is not in any of those things.

[28 : 37] It's not in his higher thoughts or understanding or power. It's in his grace. The utter greatness of the glory of God is on display in his grace towards sinners.

All throughout the Old Testament, God has been making known the glory of his grace and the promise to Abraham, this moon worshiper that God calls him to worship him and delivers from Egypt when he says, let my people worship me and the promise to Moses the return to exile, but nowhere is it more breathtaking than in Jesus Christ.

Look in verse 16, from his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace. Now, what does that mean? John unpacks it immediately after. I think that's what it means. Grace was given in the law of Moses.

The law is good. The law is helpful. The law is upright, directs me in what to do, a blueprint of what God is light and godliness is like. But grace has also come in a greater way in Jesus Christ.

The latter glory is greater than the former glory. And so, the glory of God is on display in the grace of God given freely to sinners in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 55] Yeah, I began this point talking about the story of human history is this chase for glory. Everybody's chasing glory.

The story of our lives in so many ways is a chase for glory. We want to be liked. We want to be affirmed. We want to be noticed. We want to be respected.

You know, in many ways, life feels like a treadmill, not because the things are just hard. They are hard at times. Life feels like a treadmill because we're always trying to perform.

Always trying to do enough for the affirmation and affection we want. Even if we do not care, the treadmill moves on because we still keep track of the slights and snubs of others.

Perhaps even more than that, life feels like a courtroom where every conversation is loaded with the opportunity to render judgment.

[30 : 59] Every endeavor and attainment and conversation becomes distracted and distorted by this desire and it's this hope that wrecks lives and wrecks businesses, divorces marriages, splits families and makes barren the church.

Why? Because glory can't be attained. It's all ladders to nowhere. In this world, they're propped up all over the place and they'll never reach what you long for.

Glory is given. I think that's what's going on in these verses. The glory of God is full of grace because the reconciliation you long for, the significance you long for, the approval you want, the acceptance you crave can only be found in the grace of God and Jesus Christ.

When Moses asked for glory, God said, I'll show you my goodness. We ask for glory. God gives us his grace. On the one hand, what God is doing in Jesus Christ, it reveals the character of God but it also draws sinners to himself.

It's the light that draws us to him. Thirdly, the glory we see. The glory we see. John continues and describes how the glory of the Son is known and we see it.

[32 : 25] We see this glory. Look at verse 18. No one has seen God. Literally, it begins, God, no one has seen. God told Moses, if you remember, you cannot see my face and live.

We have the inability to see God for two reasons. One is because God is spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. We can't see spiritual things.

That's why Jesus says in John 3, the spirit blows where it wills. You don't see it but you do see the fruit of it and so we can't see God because he's spirit.

We also can't see God because of sin but Jesus has made him known. Jesus has removed our physical inability and removed our spiritual inability.

Verse 18 functions kind of like a bow wrapping together this whole section referencing back to verse 1 talking about the word that was God and face to face with God.

[33 : 27] Now he says no one has seen God, the only God who's at the Father's side letting us know that the word he was talking about at the beginning was indeed the Son of God and so he wraps it all together to say the one and only true Son of God fully one with the Father lived forever at the Father's side is the one who has come to make the Father known.

John uses a word that we don't typically use for making something known as if to say Jesus makes everything known about God. Everything you need to know about God.

He tells the whole story. He tells all the facts about God. All that we need to know and it begins in a manger.

Continues throughout his life. It's this incredible story. Augustine captures it in his famous way of writing in his paradoxes. He says the maker of man became man that he ruler of the stars might be nourished at the breast.

That he the bread might be hungry. That he the fountain might thirst. That he the light might sleep. That he the way might be wearied by the journey.

[34 : 47] That he the truth might be accused by false witnesses. That he the judge of the living and the dead might be brought to trial by a mortal judge. That he justice might be condemned by the unjust.

That he discipline might be scourged with whips. That he the grape might be crowned with thorns. That he the fountain might be suspended upon a cross.

That courage might be weakened. That security might be wounded. That life might die. That is grace.

That's the steadfast love and the faithfulness of God on display. C.S. Lewis in his book The Four Loves says to love at all is to be vulnerable.

Love your children and you're going to ache. I don't know who said it but you're only as happy they say as your happiest child. That means if two of the three are happy but one is in the dumps you're in the dumps.

[35 : 57] You know never get spent whether that's true or should be true. It is a truism but this idea you're going to ache when they ache. You're going to weep when they weep.

You're going to carry their burdens. You're going to rejoice when they rejoice. You're vulnerable. Love a friend and you carry their cares with you. The decisions they make have ramifications for your life.

They burden you. They trouble you. Sometimes you come into a season like this and you feel so vulnerable because of all the relationships that are weighing you down with a mixture of emotions.

And so to to love sinful creatures the Son of God embraced all vulnerability. the scriptures say he's made like us in every respect.

He was tempted in the ways we are. He hungered and thirst he wept but to preserve the covenant he could not simply sympathize with us he had to suffer.

[37 : 10] It's precisely the incarnation that makes the cross so inexplicable. Surely the cross did not catch Jesus by surprise.

When he covenanted with sinners he knew that covenant would mean he would bear all the penalty for the breaking of the covenant.

And so the word the Son of God God of God light of light very God of very God was silenced with our accusation judged for our sins condemned for our failures crucified for our punishment truly crushed beyond recognition for our iniquities.

That's the grace of God. I find it striking in the gospel of John John never uses the word grace again after these verses but he uses the word love dozens of times.

Why? Because the only thing that would motivate grace like this is love. Now at this point we might assume that everyone can see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ right?

[38 : 32] He came this is the eternal Son of God he came revealed himself surely all can see him and yet when Jesus turns water into wine only the disciples turn in faith not all who hear can truly hear and turn to him only those with faith can see him can hear his voice we too are eyewitnesses we haven't seen with our physical eyes but we have seen through the eyes of faith Jesus says blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed Peter said though you have not seen him you love him though you do not see him now you will believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and full of glory and so we see now through the eyes of faith and through the ears faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ but the vision that awaits the people of

God is the vision that Moses prayed for and these disciples saw the vision of seeing Christ face to face it's meant to drive us onward and onward in the Christian life in this hope we're purified John says in 1 John 3 and the wonder of the theology of Christmas is that when we see him he'll look like us and when we see him we'll see his scars I'll never forget becoming a Christian and realizing this reality that the son of God became something he was not he didn't stop being what he was he became something he was not and becoming man he's going to remain that way forever and the scars of my condemnation will remain with him forever as well just like he showed

Thomas who missed the meeting the previous week he said why don't you put your fingers into my wounds I don't know what it's going to be like but I want to trace my finger on those wounds those wounds as John Wesley said rich wounds yet visible above because of all the grace that has flowed to me in Jesus Christ in all the sight sounds and smells of Christmas I pray our hearts are captivated by the glory at the center there is glory in the highest God has done the unthinkable it's the glory we want it's the glory we see by faith bow in awe and reverence son of God was made man to unveil to all men the glory and the grace of God

Father in heaven we cast ourselves on to you we ask for grace and health our desires to be more and more captivated by Jesus Christ and all that he's done for us this season all the frenetic pace Lord that you'd open our hearts to this staggering wonder of what you've done for us in Christ we pray in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com