

INCARNATION: GOD MADE FLESH IN JESUS CHRIST

Schedule and Topics

Dates	Subjects
11/8/20 and 11/22/20	What is incarnation – an Introduction
11/29/20	The Epistles, Baptismal Creeds (50-110 CE), Evolution in the Creeds (40-450 CE)
12/6/20	Gospel of St. Mark (68-73 CE)
12/13/20	Gospel of St. Matthew (80-90 CE +/- 10 years)
12/20/20	Gospel of St. Luke (85 CE +/- 10 years)
1/3/20	Gospel of St. John (80-110 CE)
	Incarnation Theology (400 CE-2000 CE)
	21st Century Incarnational Theology

INCARNATION CLASS #7 OUTLINE: GOSPEL OF JOHN (80-110 CE)

Mark: 8:29 “He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?”

What is an Epistle?

“The Epistles are letters written to specific church communities to address issues in the early Christian movement. They were added to the Gospels because they show how the early church struggled to document the central truths of the Christian experience, the main truths of Christian beliefs and the chief principles of Christian conduct. Christian doctrine grew out of a direct living experience – and the early writings attempt to reach across language and cultural barriers to explain the essence of the shared Christian experience.”¹

What is a Creed?

“Creeds are statements of our basic beliefs about God.”² “The Apostles Creed is an ancient Creed of Baptism... the Nicene Creed is the creed of the universal church used in the Eucharist, (and the) Athanasius Creed is an ancient document proclaiming the nature of Incarnation and the Trinity.”³

What is a Gospel?

Euaggelion, Greek for Good News, is the word we translate into Gospel. A Gospel is a highly selective arrangement of Jesus material, stories, sayings, reflections, made by an evangelist in order to promote and strengthen faith that brings people closer to God. It is not a history or a biography.

3 Phases of Gospel Formation: the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth (27-30CE); the Apostolic teaching/preaching about Jesus (30-60CE); the written Gospels (70-100 CE).⁴

OPENING PRAYER

Proper 28⁵

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:

Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever
hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have
given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

¹ Alan Richardson, “Creeds in the Making” Notes

² Episcopal Book of Common Prayer pp.851

³ Episcopal Book of Common Prayer pp.852

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the New Testament

⁵ Episcopal Book of Common Prayer pp.236

INCARNATION

"Incarnation should be the primary and compelling message of Christianity. Through the Christ (en Christo), the seeming gap between God and everything else has been overcome "from the beginning" (Ephesians 1:4, 9). [1] Incarnation refers to the synthesis of matter and spirit. Without some form of incarnation, God remains essentially separate from us and from all of creation. Without incarnation, it is not an enchanted universe, but somehow an empty one." Source: Richard Rohr, Incarnation, Thursday, January 25, 2017 (Feast of St. Paul)

The doctrine of the incarnation is the center of Christianity.⁶

1. The doctrine of the incarnation is what primarily separates Christianity from the other great monotheistic religions of the West.
2. Christianity has tremendous similarities with both Judaism and Islam.
 - a. With Judaism Christianity shares the Hebrew Scriptures and all that they contain. Indeed, it has primarily been through Christianity that the Jewish Bible became known throughout the world.
 - b. With Islam we share many of the biblical stories (which are retold in the Qur'an) and even share a reverence for Jesus who in Islam is a great prophet.
3. But both religions categorically reject the Christian notion that Jesus is the unique incarnation of God. The Qur'an explicitly declares, "Praise to God who has never begotten a son; who has no partner in His Kingdom" (17:111).
4. The affirmation of the incarnation is the core of traditional Christian theology, as we can see from such pillars of orthodoxy as
 - a. The Nicene Creed (325 C.E.)
 - b. The Chalcedonian definition (451 C.E.).

OVERVIEW⁷

Gospel of St. John⁸:

Date:	80-110 CE
Author by tradition:	John, son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve Disciples.
Author detectible from text:	One who regards himself in the tradition of the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (13:23). If one posits a redactor (editor), he too may have been in the same tradition. Probably there was a school of Johannine writing disciples.
Locale:	Ephesus or possibly Syria.
Unity and Integrity:	Plausibly the body of the Gospel was completed by one writer and a redactor made later additions and edits (Chapter 21 and possibly 1:1-18). No text of the Gospel has been preserved without these additions. The story of the woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11) is an insertion missing in many early manuscripts.
Structure:	1:1-8 Prologue

⁶ Sinclair, Scott Gambrill, "John's Gospel and the Truth of the Incarnation [Course Lecture Notes]" (2016). <https://scholar.dominican.edu/religion-course-materials/4>

⁷ Source: Raymond E. Brown, Introduction to the New Testament

⁸ Summary by JWJ

1:19-12:50 Part One: Book of Signs
13:1-20:31 Part Two: Book of Glory
21:1-25 Epilogue

- Sources: There are 2000 years of academic and theological debate over the Gospel of St. John's historicity and relationship to the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke).
- One current theory is that Mark and John may have shared pre-Gospel traditions, oral or written, and the final writer had not seen Luke's Gospel, but was familiar with the Lucan traditions.
- Johannine Influences: John is often described as a Hellenistic Gospel containing abstract ideas like light and truth; dualistic division of humanity into light and darkness, truth and falsehood; its concept of the Word (Logos). Experts also see a close relationship between John and the Jewish Platonist philosopher Philo.
- Johannine Community The Gospel and Epistles of John reflects its community. It reflects a Jesus characterized by debates with authorities and adversarial situations.
- The community in Ephesus after the fall of the Temple may have incorporated members from Jerusalem, with John the Baptist followers and Samaritan Christians. The Jews carried the Davidic tradition with them and the Samaritans the Mosaic tradition which may have caused a persistent high Christology to emerge. This caused conflicts with the Jewish authorities in synagogues and the other Christian groups.
- Incarnation John 1:1-18
John 3:16
Jesus' "I Am" statements:
"I am He" (John 4:26)
"I am the bread of life." (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51)
"I am the light of the world." (John 8:12)
"Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)
"I am the gate of the sheep." (John 10:7,9, 30-31)
"I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)
"I am the good shepherd." (John 10:11, 14)
"I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)
"I am the true vine." (John 15:1, 5)

READING: JOHN 1:1-18 PROLOGUE⁹

The Word Became Flesh

1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being

4 in him was life,[a] and the life was the light of all people.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.[b]

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

11 He came to what was his own,[c] and his own people did not accept him.

12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,

13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,[d] full of grace and truth.

15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,[e] who is close to the Father's heart,[f] who has made him known.

Footnotes

John 1:4 Or 3 through him. And without him not one thing came into being that has come into being. 4 In him was life

John 1:9 Or He was the true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world

John 1:11 Or to his own home

John 1:14 Or the Father's only Son

John 1:18 Other ancient authorities read It is an only Son, God, or It is the only Son

John 1:18 Gk bosom

⁹ All Readings are "New Revised Standard Version" (NRSV) Translations
Foundations of Faith: Incarnation

1:1-18 PROLOGUE NOTES

Prologue 1:1-18¹⁰

Hymn that encapsulates John's view of Jesus Christ:

A divine being (God's Word 1:1, 14)

Who is also the light (1:5,9)

And God's only Son (1:14, 18)

Who comes into the world and becomes flesh

Rejected by his own

He empowers all who accept him to become God's children

So they share in God's fullness

Commentary

Christology

- Logos exists with God before time, before creation, and then becomes flesh and is made human
- Jesus is God incarnate

Prologue Incarnation Notes¹¹

Central theme of the Gospel: the divine savior has come into the world, has been rejected by many, but has given eternal life to those who accepted him.

1:1 Logos/Word in Greek thought is the divine principle of Reason that gives order to the universe and links the human mind with God.

Jewish traditions about Wisdom lie behind this image. Philo identified divine Wisdom and the Word, With God ... was God.

1:2 A major part of John's message is that Jesus brought divine life into the world. Here life is associated with creation, but it also means eternal life, the life of the resurrection beyond death that is given to all who believe in Jesus.

1:14 The Word became flesh means the divine took on all of the limitations of humanity including mortality.

1:18 The primary function of Jesus is that of revealer – he makes God known on the cross and through resurrection.

Tom Wright Notes¹²

1:1-18 "In the beginning was the Word" harkens back to Genesis – and John wants us to know this story about God acting in a new way in the world. Jesus is the climax to the Book of Genesis. The creation of humans in God's image – the Word made flesh.

Wisdom teachers had grappled with the question "How can the one true God be both different from the world and active in the world? How can God be both remote, holy, and detached, and also intimately present?"

Jewish thought placed God in the Temple or enshrined in the Torah.

¹⁰ Raymond E. Brown, Introduction to the New Testament

¹¹ Harper Collins Study Bible Notes

¹² John for Everyone, Part 1-2, Tom Wright Notes

Emphasizing the Word also reflected pagan Greek influence. Akin to Plato's Reason.

1:1, 2, 18 stress that the Word was and is God

1:14 states that the Word became flesh, human, one of us, i.e. Jesus

Theme of the Gospel: if you want to know who the true God is, look long and hard at Jesus.

Jesus = The Word = God

Word whom through all things were made – contains light and life – struggled with darkness before creation and after

The Word is bringing into existence a new creation – let there be light.

When God sends the Word into the world, the people pretend they do not recognize him.

Sending the Word to Israel the chosen people do not recognize him.

This is the central problem that dominates the entire Gospel. Jesus comes to God's people; and they prefer darkness to the light.

William Temple Notes¹³

In the beginning:

Opening of Genesis

Beginning can also mean In Principle in Greek

Means both "in the beginning of history" and "at the root of the universe"

Word has two meanings:

Word of the Lord by which the heavens were made and came through the prophets

The rational Principle which gives unity and significance to all existing things

Evangelist is using language familiar to both the Greeks and the Jews in his audience.

Both Greeks and Jews would recognize Logos as the ruling fact of the universe and the self-expression of God.

The Word has its whole being with the Deity, but the Deity is more than the Word. God is self-revealing and self-capable of being revealing. Thus both the Word and Self Revealing exist in essential relationship to God.

What has come into being

4 in him was life,[a] and the life was the light of all people.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

1:4-5 Here is where the interpretation for Christians and Non-Christians will diverge:

- For Non-Christians the words mean that within that supreme principle is and always has been Life
- For Christians a new suggestion is present. What has come to pass is in Life. Jesus ministry is an example of the light shining in the darkness and the darkness not overcoming it.

The divine light shines through the darkness, cleaving it, but neither dispelling it nor quenching it.

The darkness in no sense receives the light. The two exist in relation to each other, but separate.

¹³ Notes from "Readings in St. John's Gospel", William Temple

John may also be including the OT references to the light of the Hebrews breaking through in the pagan world.

The darkness in which the light shines unabsorbed is cosmic. The evil which for John presents the problem is not only in people's hearts, it is in the whole ordered system of nature.

John's insight is that the redemption of people/humanity is part, perhaps the crowning part, of the redemption of the universe.

1:9-13

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.[b]

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

11 He came to what was his own,[c] and his own people did not accept him.

12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,

13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

A new revelation: the divine light has shown from the beginning of time.

Always the light has been coming into the world; enlightening every person in reason and conscience.

What is noble in non-Christian thought, conduct or worship is a result of the work of Christ upon them and within them.

By the Word of God/Jesus Christ, Isaiah, Plato, Zoroaster, Buddha and Muhamad have been inspired.

There is only one divine light.

Every faith that claims to have a monopoly on divine light is receiving only a portion of the full light of God/Jesus Christ.

To come to Jesus one must both self-surrender and seek self-fulfillment. Israel should have been the one nation prepared to receive Jesus Christ fully. Because they were God's light before Jesus. However his own people largely reject Jesus. Thus John is raising from the beginning the theme of rejection of the light and Jesus among the Jews.

Are we not all children of God? Yes by creation. But John also implies that not all men are children of God by faith. The true child of God is one who by the grace of God are able to reproduce God's character in the world.

So all have the right to be children of God, to believe in his name, baptized in the name, and show the manifested love from God in their lives – but not all do.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,[d] full of grace and truth.

The Word became flesh is the absolute identify of the Word is Jesus and Jesus is the Word.

And his true disciples and believers saw his glory.

The incarnation was an act of sacrifice and humiliation – real however voluntary, But it was not the last word, Sacrifice and humiliation are divine glory – if God is Love than his love shines through no matter what has happened.

The Cross of shame is also a crown of glory.

John here is recording the experiences of the disciples as they have been told and explained to others. "We beheld his glory." The glory does not come from Jesus, it streams through him from beyond.

16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,[e] who is close to the Father's heart,[f] who has made him known.

We have received the spirit of adoption – (Romans 8:15) and now ask what will please God the Father, not to gain reward or avoid punishment but because our desire and joy is to lease God.

We are won to the new disposition of grace and truth in Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God. John is not a mystic. A direct vision of God is not possible in John. He is intensely and profoundly sacramental. He sees the spiritual in the material, the divine nature is in human nature. **The Word made Flesh is a statement and affirmation of sacramental principle.**

The Son loves the Father and is dependent on him.

Jesus does not reveal everything about God. But what he does reveal is that God is the Father. Fresh grace is needed: in addition to the grace given through the Law – given to Moses and to the chosen people through him.

The old grace does not get you to the promised land – for that you need Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.

PRAYER

“It is not you. It is me in you. Why are you worried about doing? You are an instrument. An instrument in the Master's hand will be well used.” The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun

REFLECTIONS:

How do I experience the incarnation?
In myself?
In others?
In creation?