

## Thru the Bible: Gospel of John [Prologue: part 3]

**Review:** “And the Word was God...”

**A Revolutionary Revelation: “The Word became *flesh* and made his *dwelling* among us” (1:14-18):** From the heights of the opening affirmations about the relationship of the Word to God and role in the creation of all things, John now makes a startling statement about God the Word making a personal and permanent investment in his creation by taking on our physical human nature and choosing to experience life as we do, living amongst us. This is the event we call the “Incarnation.”

**1. What does the term *Incarnation* mean?** From the Latin *carnis*: meaning *flesh* or *meat*, the doctrine of the Incarnation asserts that God took on human flesh in an embodied existence and identity as Jesus of Nazareth. John is intentionally very specific here: he doesn't say the Word became *human*, or a *man*, but that the Word became *flesh*, using the Greek word *sarx*. The Evangelist deliberately chooses a term describing humans in their mortal condition. God became human in the fullest sense in order to redeem us in the fullest sense. As St. Athanasius said, “*He became what we are that we might become what he is.*”

“Christ had to become fully human if he were to condemn sin in sinful man. If human flesh is the stage of sin, that same flesh must become the stage of redemption. *Likeness*, therefore, means that Christ did not take on any nature other than *our* nature, though apart from sin...” James Edwards, *Romans*, 202 “Twas much, that man was made like God before,  
But, that God should be made like man, was more.” John Donne (1571-1631)

**2. John and the controversy over the true humanity of Jesus:** Just as some groups in John's day struggled with Jesus being fully God, others struggled with the idea of God becoming fully human. During this same period, the Greek philosopher Epictetus wrote, “*The true nature of God is not flesh (sarx) – far from it!*” In his gospel and letters, John is addressing a very popular early Christian heresy called *Docetism*, which taught that Jesus only *appeared* to have a real body and did not actually suffer and die. As a matter of fact the Christian community addressed by the letters of John had already split over the issue.

“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come **in the flesh** is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” 1 John 4:2-3 “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming **in the flesh**, have gone out in the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.” 2 John 7

**3. The Word “made his *dwelling* among us”:** In all other stories of the relationship between humans and God, or in other cultures, the gods, we build dwelling places, altars, tabernacles and temples for the divine. In this stage of the biblical story however, God himself decides to take up mobile residence among us in the form of Jesus Christ.

**a. We have seen his *glory*:** In Exodus 33 it says Moses would pitch the ‘tent of meeting’ far from the Israelite camp and the LORD would speak to Moses ‘face to face’ (33:11). In that passage Moses asks God, “Show me your *glory*, I pray”, and God responds that “*no one shall see me and live*” yet compromises by allowing Moses to experience his glory indirectly (33:18-23). A few verses later, in the next chapter, Yahweh then reveals the essence of his character, “*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*” (34:6). John clearly alludes to these passages when he says the Word is ‘**full of grace and truth**’, reflecting the **glory** of the Father (1:14); and in the final verse of the Prologue: “*No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son...has made him known.*”

**b. The glory of the “one and only”:** In verses 14 and 18 John uses the Greek word *monogenes* to describe the relationship between the Word and God the Father. This has engendered a variety of translations and unnecessary ambiguity: “The only begotten Son” (KJV); “The only Son (RSV); “The only God” (RSV margin); “God the one and only” (NIV 1984); “The one and only Son, who is himself God” (NIV 2011). In all other NT uses the word simply means the only child of a parent, with the simplest translation as “one and only”; This is appears in John 3:16, 18 and 1 John 4:9.

**c. Jesus Christ and Moses:** Many people read 1:17 as a contrast, “*The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*” But in light of all the intertextual allusions to the story of Moses in the immediate context and the fact that the law “was given” by God, it is best to see them as complementary, not contradictory or conflicting. As Willard Swartley notes, “*The law given through Moses is one layer of divine gift; the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ is the layer over the earlier revelation. If we view the two clauses antithetically, we undermine Jesus’ appeal to Moses as witness to himself (5:46)*” (John, 61)



“If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me”  
John 5:46

The Incarnation, meaning “enfleshing,” is the event that the Apostle John announced by saying “the Word became flesh” (Jn.1:14). The concept is not that the Son put on a human body as one puts on an overcoat, nor that a human being and a divine person lived together under one skin, nor that a divine person came to possess two sets of powers (natures), each of which he could switch on or off as he chose. It is, rather, that first in Mary’s womb, and then in this world, **and now forever in heaven**, the Son lives life through the mind-body complex that constitutes humanity - bypassing none of it...Without diminishing his divinity, he added to it all that is involved in being human...Being as fully human as divine became one strand of the Son’s identity, destiny and glory. Evangelicals, Orthodox and Catholics unite in believing this.

J. I. Packer, christianitytoday.com 3/10/2004

**Application:** What are the practical effects of the true humanity of Christ and the material resurrection of his body? And then, what are the implications of the Incarnation for the overall biblical story of God’s activity in Creation and Redemption?

**1. Personal:** What practical benefit does Jesus’ fully human experience and temptation have for us today in our own daily struggles? Compare the following quotes from the Book of Hebrews:

- “Since the children have flesh [**sarx**] and blood, he too shared in their humanity...For this reason he had to be made like his brothers **in every way**, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest...Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” **2:14-18**

“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in divine and human favor” **Luke 2:52**

- “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted **in every way, just as we are** - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” **4:14-16**

“For what has not been assumed has not been healed” **St. Gregory**

**2. Corporate:** The NT writers were clear, not only on the reality of Christ’s bodily resurrection, but also on its materiality. In this way his resurrection was understood as a model, or as Paul says, the *firstfruits* of our future bodily resurrection:

- “He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you” **Rom. 8:11**
- “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is” **1 John 3:2**
- “They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a spirit. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a spirit does not have **flesh [sarx]** and bones, as you see I have.” **Luke 24:37-39**

“I believe in the resurrection of the **flesh [sarx]** and the life everlasting”  
**The Apostles Creed**

**3. Creational:** The final stage of the biblical drama of redemption is the renewal of God’s “good” physical creation, as the place intended by God *from the beginning* to be the eternal “home of righteousness” (**2 Pet. 3: 13**) and the final installment of the biblical theme of God as “Emmanuel.”

- “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed...in hope that the **creation itself will be liberated** from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” **Rom.8:18-21**
- “Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of **universal restoration** that God announced long ago through the holy prophets” **Acts 3:21**

“Thus says the LORD: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you will build for me, and what is my resting place? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the LORD.” **Isa. 66:1-2**

## Resources:

- Norman Geisler: “I Believe in the Resurrection of the Flesh”: <http://www.equip.org/PDF/DR165.pdf>
- The Bible Project: Word Study on Soul in the Bible: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_igCcWAMAM&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_igCcWAMAM&t=1s)
- Three Minute Theology: The Doctrine of the Incarnation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6XMn-yH71E>
- Kevin P. Emmert, “You Need a More Ordinary Jesus”: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/october-web-only/you-need-more-ordinary-jesus.html>

“Christian resurrection hope is radical faith in the God who became incarnate in material and mortal human nature, setting the seal of his own presence on its eternal value for him...The images of holistic resurrection presuppose the Jewish and Christian understanding of the body as integral to human personal identity, by contrast with the Greek philosophical view that the real person is immaterial spirit”  
**R. Bauckham and T. Hart, Hope Against Hope, 124**

“Since God’s material creation fell, it is clear that in order for redemption to be effective it must restore this material creation. Humans sin and die in material bodies and they must be redeemed in the same physical bodies. Any other kind of deliverance would be an admission of defeat. Likewise, just as the world God created and which subsequently fell was material, even so God will eventually deliver this material universe from decay...If redemption does not restore God’s physical creation, including our physical bodies, then God’s original purpose in creating a material world would be frustrated.”  
**Norman Geisler (reference above)**