



John 1:1-18

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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 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. 15 (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.' ") 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

[Watch-Who is Jesus?](#)

Who is Jesus? According to a Barna survey, just over half of Americans believe that Jesus is God.¹ According to a Gallop poll, as compared to Americans, Britons were half as likely to believe that he is God.² Forty percent of those in England do not even believe that Jesus was a real person; that he is just a make believe story.³

What you believe about Jesus and how you respond to Jesus is the only thing that determines how you will spend eternity. And since Christmas is at least a potentially good time for people to

think about Jesus, Christmas can be an excellent time to share your faith. Just last night I shared the gospel with a young man at the fitness center. My opening sentence was “Well, it’s Christmas, so can I ask you a question?”

But most Christmas sermons are taken from Matthew, Mark and especially Luke, which has the birth narrative, the Bethlehem star, no room in the inn, and the visit from the nearby shepherds. But the gospel of John has none of the birth story, no shepherds, no angels, no wise men. But what it does have is vital to understanding the Christmas story and our core understanding of who Jesus really is.

1. Jesus is God.

The people on that video should have read John 1:1. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* That’s as clear of a verse as you can get. But it wasn’t always that clear to me. When I was a brand new believer I really messed up this verse. My first year of working as a camp counselor, I was still a very young Christian who had not really learned anything. I wasn’t reading my Bible. I didn’t know of any Bible studies to attend, so I was as green as I could be. Somehow this verse came up in a discussion with senior high campers and I told them that the Word meant the Word of God. I was trying to prove the reliability of Scripture. No one corrected me so I was not alone in my ignorance. Do you think I earned any points for good intentions? I cringe when I think of that story but thankfully that was the worst example of my unintentional heresy as a camp counselor.

But when you understand that the Word is Jesus, then it becomes a bedrock verse to define the deity of Christ. *In the beginning was the Word*—the Word existed from the beginning. If you have ever read the creation narrative in Genesis one, you will immediately recognize that John was creating a type of parallel passage.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word

So if that is all we knew, we would know that Jesus was in the beginning just as God was in the beginning. But we know a lot more than that, don’t we?

and the Word was with God Here we learn that Jesus was with God in the beginning. Now we have the idea of relationship developing. To be with someone else means that there is more than one person and therefore there is a relationship. Too often we treat the doctrine of the Trinity as some overly mysterious belief that is irrelevant to our lives. That is for another sermon but it is extremely relevant that the Godhead was in an eternal relationship. This relationship is the foundation for all relationships with other people and with God himself. It is extremely relevant that “the Word was with God.

and the Word was God The last phrase in verse one is the clincher. The word who existed from the beginning and was in a relationship with God is also God himself. This is the verse that Jehovah’s Witnesses love to hate. If you are in a conversation with them, they will likely bring up the point that John 1:1 says that the Word was *a* God, not *the* God. Don’t allow yourself to be distracted by this argument as the original language says nothing of the sort. You could always

ask them to break out their Greek Bibles and explain it to you. That may put an end to their argument as 99% could not do that.

John 1:1 is one of dozens of Scriptures that teach the deity of Christ. Jesus claimed to be God and his followers have all made the same claim. If he were just a man and did the things he did, they would have no lasting power except as a good example to follow. But if Jesus is God, then whatever he said and did are both eternally true and eternally powerful for us. Jesus is God. Without this truth, we are lost.

2. Jesus is the Creator.

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. If you only had Genesis 1:1, who would you say created the heavens and the earth? We would say exactly what Genesis 1:1 states—In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. So if you answer the question with “God,” the answer is correct. It is correct but not specifically correct. If someone asks you, “What kind of car do you drive?” and they give you an answer of “One with 4 wheels” you know they are being a smart alec because they answered your question very vaguely. I am not saying that God is a vague answer to the “who created everything” question, but it is much better and more accurate to say that Jesus was the creator.

This truth also strengthens the claim to deity in verse one. That verse tells us that the Word was with God in the beginning but it does not necessarily speak to Jesus’ preexistence. But if Jesus is God and created all that there is, then it follows that there never was a time when Jesus did not exist. John stated this fact both positively and negatively: *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

Before he took on flesh, Jesus existed for all eternity with the Father. Mormons do not believe this at all.

“Therefore, the Father and Mother of Jesus, according to the flesh, must have been associated together in the capacity of Husband and Wife; hence the Virgin Mary must have been, for the time being, the lawful wife of God the Father...”⁴

So you have to be careful with the teaching of Mormons. They say they believe that Jesus is eternal but they reject the idea that he was preexistent.

“Thus it is shown that prior to the placing of man upon the earth, how long before we do not know, Christ and Satan, together with the hosts of the spirit-children of God, existed as intelligent individuals, possessing power and opportunity to choose the course they would pursue and the leaders whom they would follow and obey.”⁵

In contrast to Mormons and JW’s, we believe that the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is preexistent God and creator of all that is or ever will be. He is truly eternal in that he never had a beginning.

Matthew—Jesus’ lineage traced back to Abraham

Mark—story begins with John the Baptist

Luke—story begins with John the Baptist and includes Jesus’ lineage back to Adam

John—Jesus pas pre-existent Creator

3. Jesus is Lord.

The first two about Jesus—that he is God and Creator, also mean that Jesus is the Lord and master of every person. Even if Jesus is not your Savior, he is still your Lord in the sense that he rules over his creation. He created you therefore he rules over you. I don't mean this in a fatalistic way, that he is some sort of task master who whips us into shape at his divine whipping post. But I mean it in the sense that we cannot thwart his will, we cannot change his plans and we are 100% accountable to him for all that we say and do. Even if you do not recognize him as Lord and bow your heart to him in allegiance, this does not at all change the fact that he is your Lord.

4. Jesus is Light & Life.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

We need to understand that the first eighteen verses of chapter one are a prologue of what happens in the rest of the book. Everything in these 18 verses are described in more detail in the rest of the gospel of John. The Word as Life clearly looks forward to John 14:6—"I am the way and the truth and the life." Jesus as light looks forward to one of his "I am" sayings—I am the light of the world. Moreover, light and darkness is a prominent theme throughout the book.

Everyone knows John 3:16 but you may not be able to quote John 3:19. *And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. And John 12:35. Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."*

Light and darkness is an overriding theme of John's gospel. It also looks back to Genesis chapter one with Jesus as Creator. "I am the light of the world" flows directly out of Genesis 1:3—*Then God said, "Let there be light." And there was light.* Jesus literally spoke light into the darkness in creation and he was in every way the light shining in the darkness of the big, sinful world.

5. Jesus adopts those with faith into his family.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. Here again we have the language of relationship—children of God. Children have fathers and fathers have children. The Bible doesn't just use the language of personal relationship to describe God. God is a personal relationship. You either have a personal relationship with him or you don't. This is how many Christians describe their faith. They say, "I have a personal relationship with God." Even though that phrase is not in Scripture, the theme of personal relationship is on practically every page.

The apostle Paul likes the word adoption. Galatians 4:5 is a self-contained Christmas story.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. God's son was sent to be "born of a woman." There's the nativity for you with a goal of redemption. While John does not use the word adoption, the idea is clearly present. If you believe in his name, he gives us "the right to become children of God." If we are given this right then it follows that we did not possess it before he granted it to us. We are given the right to become a child of God. This is the idea of adoption, plain and simple.

But not everyone is adopted, are they? You hear people say things like "We are all God's children." Now if you mean that we are all created by God and accountable to him, then that is a true statement. However, most of the time someone says "We are all God's children" they mean it as type of universalism. They believe that God couldn't possibly reject anyone so everyone is a child of God. But that is not what this passage says.

I asked the young man at the fitness center the EE question—if you died, why would God let you into Heaven. He thought for a moment and said, "Well, doesn't God forgive everyone?" He was struggling with the same issue that most people do—they have created a God in their own image. I do appreciate that he took the question seriously and was giving it some good thought.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Scripture consistently states that repentance and belief and both necessary for salvation. Only those with faith in Christ are given the right to become children of God. This faith not only has an object—which is Christ—but it must be the real Christ. Faith in a false Jesus is no faith at all.

Through some odd circumstances, I began an email conversation with a Christian man who paid \$75,000 to get a wife from Russia. He thought the woman was a believer but not long after she arrived in the states, she began an online affair with a man several hours away. She eventually took a job near this man and moved in with him. The guy I am talking with is understandably devastated in many ways.

He wrote, it is a miracle that I am not curled up on the fetal position crying every day." But despite his pain, he is working hard at forgiveness and said, "My concern is now for her salvation." I think it's amazing that he is chiefly concerned for her soul. However, he has a serious but all too common roadblock. He added, "She said that God will forgive her because He loves her." Ah, there's that false Jesus again. This woman probably represents the most common false notion of Jesus that exists, at least in the U.S. She claims to believe in Jesus but she actually believes in a fairy tale Jesus.

You see, it's not enough to just have faith in Jesus. You must have faith in the real Jesus. You must have faith in the Jesus of the Scriptures who is all of these things and more. He is God, he is Creator, he is Lord, he is light and life. He will receive you into his kingdom, but on his terms, not yours. If I bought something with counterfeit money, the worst thing that could happen to me is I would spend some time behind bars. But if I have faith in a counterfeit Jesus, the worst thing that could happen to me is an eternity in Hell.

6. The real Jesus is rejected by most people.

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

The world did not know him and his own people, the Jews, did not know him. There are many reasons for rejecting the real Jesus but two common reasons are self-sufficiency and a love of sin, which really are two sides of the same coin.

Several years ago I was part of a diversity group with 6-8 people from the New Age community. We would meet monthly and talk about hard topics like homosexuality and abortion. I had them over to our house on two occasions and the last time, we all watched *The End of the Spear* together. Karen and I really thought that this powerful movie would resonate at some level with these folks. Boy were we wrong. Watching that movie was the beginning of the end of our group because they had such a strong backlash against the movie. They thought it was wrong for anyone to intervene in the lives of tribal groups such as the Waorani. When we explained that the gospel message almost completely eliminated their 50% murder rate we thought that might impact them. Instead, they said that maybe evolution was supposed to wipe them out and it was the height of arrogance to intervene. It was one of the strangest conversations I have ever had. I had a close encounter with the lengths to which people will go to reject the real Jesus. Most people accept the fairy tale Jesus and reject the real Jesus.

7. Jesus became flesh.

The most amazing thing about so many who reject Jesus is the length to which he went to reach them all. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

This is the nativity story in a single phrase—the Word became flesh. Much is made of Jesus death and resurrection, and rightly so. Almost half of the gospel of John is reserved for this topic. But without the incarnation there is no death and resurrection. It is really impossible for us to comprehend what it meant for the eternal Word to take on human flesh.

First of all, it meant giving up his rights. He set aside his full glory that had always been his. Now make no mistake. He was still fully divine. In the otherwise great hymn, *And Can it Be?*, there is a very unfortunate line.

Emptied himself of all but love

This might leave the impression that in his incarnation, Jesus gave up some of his attributes as God. He didn't empty himself of all but love. That may sound nice but it is Biblically incorrect. But in his flesh, he was severely limited. Just think about entering time and space. He created space and time. It did not exist before creation and after creation he was not limited by it. But in his flesh he was. Imagine if we went from the three dimensions of space to only two dimensions. It would be like entering into a flat space. It would be like we were stuck on the pages of a book. But even this does not capture what Jesus gave up to take on flesh. He gave up his rights. He laid aside his glory that was his due.

the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. All that remains is to decide how to respond to this Jesus. Even though I love this church and see a lot of spiritual growth, I never assume that everyone is a believer. There are probably some sitting here who have been following a fairy tale Jesus. You have created a Jesus in your own image, a Jesus who forgives everyone no matter

what you do. This false Jesus will not lead you into God's family. You need to bow your knee and place your faith in the real Jesus. The Creator, divine, eternally pre-existent, Lord, light and life who became flesh so that we could be redeemed from our hopeless condition. On the Sunday before Christmas in 2015, you could throw away your false Jesus and cast your faith and trust in the Jesus of the Scriptures and of history. You cannot depend upon a fairy tale Jesus of your own making.

If you have already done this, I would ask you this question: are you treasuring Christ above all else? Can you look back over 2015 and see that you have moved forward in your faith?

Rich Maurer
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¹ <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/714-what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs#.Vmm4FUorK00> (and about half believe he lived a sinless life)

² <http://www.gallup.com/poll/7471/who-jesus.aspx>

³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-34686993>

⁴ http://www.christiandefense.org/mor_jesus_pater.htm

⁵ <https://www.lds.org/manual/jesus-the-christ/chapter-2?lang=eng>