

# The Incarnate Word, Part 2

John 1:14

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## Introduction

Last week, we came to the treasure chest that is John chapter 1 and verse 14. And I mentioned then that, as we turn our minds, with this text, to the great truths of the incarnation, we're after true worship. The nostalgia and tradition and holiday cheer of the Christmas season are all wonderful blessings to be received from God's hand with thanksgiving. But we want more than that out of Christmas! We want the heart-thrilling worship—the soul-ravishing delight—that comes from beholding the beauty of the great mystery of godliness that is the incarnation of Christ: God becoming man, in order to stand in man's place and bear man's curse.

That is, as John Owen said, “the glory of the Christian religion, and the animating soul of all evangelical truth.” The infinite and eternal God, taking on the nature of finite and mortal humanity, into personal union with His divine nature, all without shedding or restricting or changing His divine nature in any way! “Two whole, perfect, and distinct natures [...] inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion” (2LCF 8.2). It is, as we've said, the miracle of all miracles!

And it is the heart of the Gospel of our salvation. Man committed sin, and so only man's payment for sin would satisfy justice. But no man could ever pay the infinite penalty that our sins deserve. Only the infinitely righteous God Himself could satisfy the infinite wrath that our sins earned us, and yet only man's sacrifice would be accepted on behalf of man. No one ought to pay but man; no one can pay but God. And so—miracle of miracles—to reconcile man to God, God would become man!

And when those truths arrive at home in your soul—when you can behold their glory with the eyes of faith—then there is communion with the Triune God. Then there is worship—genuine, soul-enrapturing worship! Worship of the Father for His wisdom in devising such a plan, and His love for giving so dear a Son as a Substitute for sinners! Worship of the Son for the large-hearted *grace* to accept such a humiliating mission! And worship of the Spirit for His skillful execution of the divine plan!

John Owen said again, “Let us get it fixed on our souls and in our minds, that this glory of Christ in the divine constitution of his person is the best, the most noble, useful, beneficial object that we can be conversant about in our thoughts, or cleave unto in our affections.” The reason you were given a mind, believer—the reason you are capable of rational thought above the animals—

is so you can contemplate this mystery. And so, by rooting your understanding deep in the truth, you will cause your praise to soar high in a manner that the Triune God is worthy of.

And to do that, we have turned to mine out the treasures of John chapter 1 and verse 14. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Last week, I likened that precious verse to a multifaceted diamond, which, when you shift the vantage point just slightly, the light of the truth passes through its facets in distinct but harmonious ways, so as to display the brilliance of the glory of the incarnation. I mentioned there were **seven facets of the incarnation** to behold in this verse, and we got to three of them last time. And I’ll take a brief moment to review them.

### **Review I: The Subject of the Incarnation**

**First**, we considered the **subject** of the incarnation. John says, “And *the Word* became flesh...” And that chased us back up to the opening verse of John’s Gospel, where we learned that, “In the beginning was the Word.” This Word is eternal—the One who was in the beginning. We also learned that this Word is distinct from the Father, because John says the Word was *with* God. And to be with someone is to not be that someone. But then we learned that this Word is God Himself. “...and the Word *was* God.” He is with God (and therefore distinct from the Father), and He is God.

He is the Creator—the One through whom has come into being everything that has come into being. He is the Sustainer—the One who has all life in Himself. He is the Savior—the Light that shines in the darkness, which the darkness cannot overcome. He is the One to whom John the Baptist bore witness. He is the true Light that shines upon every man, disclosing the spiritual state of every man’s heart. And He is the One who gives those who believe in Him the right to become the adopted sons and daughters of God. This Word who became flesh was none other than God the Son, the Second person of the Trinity.

### **Review II: The Substance of the Incarnation**

And that brought us to a **second facet**—namely, the **substance** of the incarnation. This Word “became flesh.” And we spoke right away about how that cannot mean that the divine person of the Son changed Himself into a human being, or that the divine nature transmuted into a human nature, or that the Son exchanged His deity for humanity, or that He divested Himself of the divine nature. It cannot mean that the Son diluted His divine nature by mixing humanity with it, or diminished His Godhead in any way.

No, “the Word became flesh” means that the person of the Son, who had always subsisted in the divine nature, now, without ceasing to subsist in that divine nature, began subsisting in a human

nature as well. The person of that human nature—the subject which acted in and through Christ’s human nature—was the same person who had acted in and through the divine nature from all eternity: God the Son. Said another way: the eternal Son, who always existed in the undivided divine nature, assumed a full and true human nature into personal union, right alongside His full and true and unchanging divine nature. Fully God and fully man at the very same time.

Yes, the Son “emptied Himself,” Philippians 2:7, but He did not empty Himself *of* anything. The text says that the Son Himself is the object of this emptying. He didn’t empty Himself of the divine nature, of the divine attributes, or even of His divine prerogatives. The Son “made himself of no reputation,” by “taking the form of a slave, [by] being made in the likeness of men.” Not by putting anything off; not by shrinking anything down; not by subtracting anything from His divine existence; but by taking on a human nature into personal union with His divine nature.

Christ fully possessed His divine nature, attributes, and prerogatives, but for the sake of His saving mission, He did not always fully express the glories of His majesty in the view of men. He veiled His glory, concealing it in our nature—a nature in which He could become hungry, and weary, and sorrowful; a nature in which He could know pain, and shame, and even death—all so that He could live and die as the slave of all, and accomplish our redemption. This is the **substance** of the incarnation.

### **Review III: The Sweetness of the Incarnation**

And then, in the **third place**, we spoke of the **sweetness** of the incarnation—the eternal, omnipresent God—whom heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain—“became flesh, and dwelt among us.” And we observed that this term for “dwelt” could be translated “tabernacled.” The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us. We saw how that was a reference to the tabernacle of God in the wilderness, where He dwelt with Israel—where He met with them, and spoke with them, and sanctified them, and atoned for their sins.

And we spoke about how Israel profaned God’s temple, and how He delivered them into exile and allowed their captors to destroy His dwelling place, but also about how He promised to one day restore them to their land and dwell with His people once again. And after centuries of waiting, a baby is born to a poor virgin, and John says, “This is the eternal Word! Yahweh Himself! God the Son! the ultimate self-disclosure and perfect revelation of God—descending from heaven once again, and tabernacling among God’s people!”

Jesus is where God’s glory dwells. Jesus is the place where God condescends to man, and where man fellowships with God. Jesus is the place where God speaks to man. Jesus is the place where God’s people are sanctified to Him. Jesus is where all priestly ministry finds its fulfillment, and where full and final atonement for sin is accomplished once and for all. Jesus is where God’s

people go to worship Him. Jesus is God's dwelling place. And in this miraculous birth, He has come to dwell with us!

#### **IV. The Splendor of the Incarnation**

Well that brings us, then, to the **fourth facet of the incarnation** that we find in this text. And that is, number four: the **splendor** of the incarnation. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His *glory*."

And this only makes sense when we consider the previous point. Exodus 29:43 said that the tabernacle would be consecrated by Yahweh's glory. And in Exodus 40:34, when the construction of the tabernacle was complete, we're told that "the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle," so much so that Moses couldn't even enter in. And Exodus 40:36 says that the glory of God would reside on His dwelling place—whether as a cloud by day or a fire by night—and would lead God's people throughout all their journeys.

And 450 years after that, when Israel is dwelling in the land of Canaan, and it's time for Solomon to build a house for the Lord, the glory of God takes up residence in His temple in the same way that it did in the tabernacle in the wilderness. First Kings 8:10–12 says: "It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of Yahweh, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh. Then Solomon said, 'Yahweh has said that He would *dwell* in the thick cloud.'" You see? There is an absolutely inseparable connection between God's dwelling place and God's glory—so much so that, in Psalm 26:8, David calls "the habitation of God's house" "the place where Your glory dwells." They are inextricable!

In fact, last week I mentioned that the Hebrew word for "to dwell" is *shākan*. Well does that sound like any other popular Hebrew word you may have heard before? *Shekinah*. Which is a word for what? The glory of God! *Shākan* and *shekinah* come from the same root. They both signify the same idea: that the dwelling of God is absolutely inseparable from the glory of God.

But over the next 350 years, Israel profanes the temple of God by their idolatry and disobedience. He has already delivered the northern kingdom of Israel into the hands of the Assyrians in 721 BC, and in 592 the southern kingdom of Judah was facing the same fate at the hands of the Babylonians. And I want you to turn with me to Ezekiel chapter 8. In Ezekiel 8, God gives the prophet a vision of the gross idolatry that provokes Him to judgment of the Babylonian exile.

In verses 3 and 4 Ezekiel says the Spirit gave him a vision of the temple. And in the temple, right alongside the physical manifestation of the glory of God, was the seat of the idol of jealousy—an

idol that the people had placed in Yahweh's temple. Verse 6: "And [God] said to me, 'Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary?' Oh, we need to feel the weight of those words. So that God would be far from His own sanctuary? So that He would be absent from the very place that was designed to mediate His special presence with His people? This is unthinkable. "But," verse 6, God says, "you will see still greater abominations."

Then God tells Ezekiel to dig through a hole in the wall to see what was going on in there. Verse 10: "So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, . . . each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising." The elders of Israel—the spiritual leaders of God's people—were worshiping the images of idols that they had carved on the wall of Yahweh's temple! But, God says again, verse 13, "You will see still greater abominations." And then he sees women weeping for the Babylonian god Tammuz. And then in verse 16 he finds twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of Yahweh and their faces toward the east, bowing and worshiping the sun. They've turned their backs upon God's dwelling place, and they're worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. And these abominations—this mass idolatry—is happening in the temple of God, in the place where His glory dwells, in the place where He condescends and meets Israel and *cleanses* them from their sins!

So once again: what is God's response? Verse 18: "Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them." And then Ezekiel sees God send executioners into the city to destroy all those who have committed idolatry. Chapter 9 verse 6, God commands them: "Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, . . . and you shall start from My sanctuary." And Ezekiel is terrified. And he begs God not to destroy all the people, so that He won't be unfaithful to His covenant and dishonor His own name.

But then, even worse than that, the shekinah glory of God, which symbolizes God dwelling with His people, starts to stir. Look at chapter 10 and verse 1: "Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them." Ezekiel sees heaven opened over the golden cherubim that protect the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. And He sees the heavenly throne of God breaking into His earthly dwelling place. Verse 3 speaks of "the cloud [that] filled the inner court." This is the cloud of the *shekinah* glory that had been with Israel since the deliverance from Egypt in Exodus 13. Verse 4: "Then the glory of Yahweh went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of Yahweh." The shekinah glory cloud has gone from the

Ark, it moved to hovering over the cherub, and now it goes to the threshold of the temple—to the exit—and it stays there.

Skip down to verse 18: “Then the glory of Yahweh departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.” And these aren’t the golden cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant; these are actual angels in Ezekiel’s vision. Verse 19: “When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of Yahweh’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.” So now God’s glory is with His angels, at the very last exit of the temple. Skip down to chapter eleven, and verse 22: “Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. The glory of Yahweh went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.” The glory of Yahweh departs from the temple, and it hovers over the Mount of Olives. And then, after the glory of God leaves—seemingly reluctantly—from His dwelling place—it ascends with the angels back into heaven.

For the first time in Israel’s history—for the first time in 850 years—the people of God are without the presence of their God. Yahweh is no longer dwelling with His people. And that is the last time the glory of Yahweh is seen on the earth.

*Until, almost six hundred years later, a baby is born in a manger, because there was no room for Him in the inn. And some shepherds were out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks. “And,” Luke 2:9, “an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ... And suddenly,”* verse 13, “there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.*’”

After six hundred years of waiting, the next time the glory of Yahweh appears, it comes to the shepherds to proclaim the birth of Jesus: of “Christ, the Lord.” “Christ” is the Greek translation of Messiah. This is the Anointed One, the long-expected Coming One, who would deliver God’s people from their sins and rule over them in righteousness! And He is “Christ the Lord”—*ho kurios*. This is the Greek translation of the Divine Name, *Yahweh*. This angel, surrounded by the glory of Yahweh—the glory that no one has seen for centuries—is announcing: “Yahweh is here! He’s here!” And John says, “The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we saw His glory.” God has come again to dwell with men in Jesus, in this helpless infant, covered in amniotic fluid, lying in a feed trough for a bed, because there was no room in the world that He had *made* for Him to have a bed!

Here is the true temple of God, announced by the very glory of God, who would display the glory of God throughout His life—when He performed His miracles and testified to His deity; when He took Peter, James, and John up to the Mount of Olives (where the glory ascended into heaven back in Ezekiel), and there He was transfigured before them, and it was as if the veil of His humanity was briefly lifted, and the glory of His divine nature shone through, as His face shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light! He displayed divine glory when He rose from the grave on the third day, and when He ascended back into Heaven in a cloud of glory also on the Mount of Olives, Acts 1:9; which is where He will descend from Heaven, when He splits the Mount of Olives down the middle, Zechariah 14. Matthew 25:31 calls that time: “when the Son of Man comes in His *glory*.”

Dear people, behold your King! O come, let us adore Him: Christ, the Lord, in the **splendor** of the incarnation.

## **V. The Son of the Incarnation**

And if we can catch our breath, we come to another mountain peak of truth—the **fifth facet of the incarnation**—namely, the **Son** of the incarnation. Back to John 1:14: “...and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.” This term, “only begotten,” identifies this Word, who became flesh—the eternal One, distinct from the Father, but God Himself—this One is not just the Word of God but the eternal **Son** of the Father. He is God the Son.

And this is an important point to make, because when many Christians read that Jesus is “the only begotten from the Father,” or that He is “the only begotten *God*,” verse 18, or that He is the “only begotten *Son*,” John 3:16, I’m convinced that many read those as references to Jesus’ incarnation, rather than to His eternal sonship. Many think that “only begotten” refers to the fact that Jesus was begotten in the womb of Mary. But that is not what it refers to. John says that he beheld the *glory* of the incarnate Son, and that glory was “as of the *only begotten* from the Father.” And as we’ve just seen, this is a divine glory we’re talking about. It’s the fulfillment of the *shekinah* glory of God, dwelling with His people in the tabernacle and the temple. It’s the glory of the *transfiguration*. This is not a glory that Jesus has by virtue of His incarnation. It is the glory that He has by virtue of His being the eternal Word, the eternal Son of the Father.

And so, as it is not a human glory, it is not a human begetting that is in view here. When John speaks of Jesus as “the only begotten from the Father,” He is referring to a divine begetting. He is referring to yet another great mystery of the faith: the doctrine of **eternal generation** of the Son. And the doctrine of eternal generation has been an essential doctrine of the faith from the earliest days of Christianity. It is precisely how the persons of the Father and the Son are to be distinguished from one another. You see, both the Father *and* the Son fully subsist in the

identical divine essence. They are both truly and fully God. But though the Father is God and the Son is God, the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. Everything *that* the Father is, the Son is. But the Father is not *who* the Son is. They are the same What, but distinct Whos.

But on what basis can we distinguish the Father from the Son? Well, on the basis that Scripture calls the Father “Father,” and calls the Son “Son,” and “only begotten.” What does it mean for the Father to be Father? And what does it mean for the Son to be Son? Why does Scripture use those titles to distinguish the divine persons? Some people give the answer that it’s because a father exercises authority over his son and a son submits to his father. And therefore, they say, what it means for God the Son to be Son is to submit to God the Father. That is entirely unbiblical. There’s not a single text of Scripture that supports eternal relations of authority and submission among the persons of the Trinity, and such a position is fatal to the deity of the Son.

So then, what’s the answer? Scripture calls the Father “Father” and the Son “Son” because (1) a son has the same nature as his father, but the son has that nature (2) *from* his father. Does that make sense? (1) Consubstantiality (or sameness of nature), and (2) *fromness*. And I think we understand that. My son is human like I am human; we are the same sort of being, and so are consubstantial. But my son has his nature *from* me as his father. Consubstantiality, and fromness. This is what Scripture means to teach by calling the Father the Father of the Son, and the Son the begotten of the Father: the Son has the identical divine nature as the Father—He is *God* of very God; and the Son has that identical divine nature *from* the Father—He is God *of* very God. That is to say, that the Father communicates the undivided divine essence to the Son.

Now, you say, “Whoa, Mike, wait a minute! That sounds like you’re saying the Father created the Son, that He brought the Son into existence! How can we speak of the *generation* of an eternal, uncreated Word?” And the answer is: we have to speak of *eternal* generation. God the Father doesn’t generate God the Son in a manner that is one-to-one analogous with human generation. Human generation (a) has a beginning; it (b) happens at a single point in time; it (c) requires that a father exist before his son exists; and it also (d) requires a mother. But those things are not true of the eternal generation of God the Son. This is an incomprehensible, eternal communication of the divine essence. It is has no beginning. There is no single point in time when it takes place. The Father did not exist before the Son; there was never a time that the Father wasn’t the Father, and so there was never a time that the Son wasn’t the Son. He is “begotten, not created,” as the Nicene Creed says.

So, you say, “So why use the term *generation* if you have to qualify it so heavily?” And the answer is, one, it’s the term Scripture uses. The Greek word that translates to “only begotten” in John 1:14—along with John 1:18, and John 3:16 and 18, and 1 John 4:9—is *monogenēs*: from the terms *monos*, “only,” and *gennaō*, “to beget.” So, first of all, eternal generation is scriptural language. But secondly, Scripture not only uses the terms, it describes the phenomenon—



consubstantiality and fromness; the eternal communication of the full, undivided divine essence from the Father to the Son. Turn with me to John chapter 5.

In John 5, the Jews are angry with Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath. In verse 17, Jesus responds by saying, “I work on the Sabbath because My Father works on the Sabbath.” And that enrages them all the more, because they understood what He was saying. Verse 18: He “was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” Then, verse 19, He says He only does what He sees the Father doing, and “whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” Jesus grounds His equality with the Father in the fact that they work inseparably. He is God just like the Father is God because the Father’s acts *are* His acts. He’s saying, “We act from the same principle of action”—which is to say, the same nature; we are *homooousios*, consubstantial. And He goes on to speak of raising the dead, judging all people, and receiving worship just as the Father does. Truly remarkable claims by Jesus!

Then, as He speaks about the final resurrection, He makes this astounding statement in verse 26: “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.” What does it mean for the Father to have “life in Himself”? It means that He has the attribute of self-existence, or sometimes you’ll hear it called *aseity*, from the Latin *a se*, meaning *from oneself*. So, the Father has this attribute of self-existence. And Jesus says that He too has this identical attribute of self-existence. But He has it in a different manner than the Father has it. The Father has life-in-Himself that has been given to Him by no one. The Son has this same life-in-Himself that was *given* to Him by the Father. Do you see that? “Even so the Father *gave* to the Son also to have life in Himself.” How can one have life-in-Himself that was “given to Him”? Self-existence is either “in Himself” or “from another,” right? Well, apparently not, because Jesus thinks it no contradiction to speak of life-in-Himself that was given to Him by the Father.

When you remember that God is a simple being, and that all the divine attributes are identical to the divine essence, you recognize that the Father’s “giving” to the Son the attribute of self-existence is nothing less than the Father’s communication of the entire divine essence to the Son. Jesus is speaking of **eternal generation**. He does the same works as the Father because He is consubstantial—of the same nature—as the Father. And He has that nature *from* the Father. The Father *gave* to the Son to have the simple divine essence in Himself. The Son has all that the Father has: the whole divine essence, the identical divine nature. But the Son has the identical divine nature in a manner distinct from the way the Father has it. The Father has it from Himself; He is begotten of no one. The Son has the divine nature from the Father, because He is eternally begotten of the Father. That’s just what it means to be Son.

And Scripture communicates this same truth—of both consubstantiality and fromness—by the use of different figures. Turn with me, quickly, to Hebrews 1. The author of Hebrews begins his God-breathed letter in a similar way that John begins his Gospel. John says there was an eternal

Word who is only begotten Son, and Hebrews says in these last days God has spoken (His Word) to us in His Son. John says without Him was not anything made that has been made, and Hebrews says, through this Son God made the world. And then in Hebrews 1:3 it says, “And He [the Son] is the radiance of [the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature.” The Son is the perfect imprint of the Father’s nature. He is consubstantial with the Father. But He is the *radiance* of the Father’s glory, which implies *fromness*. Both the Father and the Son shine in glory, but the Son’s shining is somehow derived from the Father’s shining. “Just as light naturally radiates its brightness, so too God naturally radiates his Son” (Swain, *REG*, 41), because Sonship denotes consubstantiality and fromness. This is what the Nicene Creed of 381 means when it confesses faith in “one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

Paul points to this same truth in Colossians 1 when he calls Christ the *image* of the invisible God. He is not the Father, but He is the perfect reproduction of His image, so that all the Father is the Son is (consubstantiality), but the Son is what He is by virtue of what He receives from the Father (fromness)—just as an image is distinct and derivative from what it represents. And in fact, John means to communicate this same truth in John 1 by calling the Son “the Word” of God. God’s Word is as God Himself, which is why 1 Samuel 3:21 says that “Yahweh appeared ... at Shiloh ... by the word of Yahweh.” Psalm 138:2: “You have magnified Your word above all Your name” (NKJV). Yahweh’s Word is as His own name! His own character, or nature. Consubstantiality. And yet, God’s Word *goes forth* from His mouth, Isaiah 55:11. His Word is uttered *from* Him. Fromness.

So, whether it’s begotten, radiance, image, or Word, from before the foundation of the world—before all things—the Father eternally communicated the fullness of the whole divine essence to the Son, in this incomprehensible, inexpressible act internal to the life of the Triune God Himself. That is what it means for the Son to be the “only begotten.”

Can you feel the weight, then, of what John wants to land on you, when he says, “and we beheld His glory, glory as of the *only begotten* of the Father”? “This glory, dear reader—this glory that we beheld in this Word become flesh—it wasn’t a cloud! It wasn’t a pillar of fire! It wasn’t the *shekinah* glory that went out from the temple of Solomon over the Mount of Olives! No, Matthew 12:6: “Something greater than the temple is here”! The only begotten Son is here! The eternal radiance of the Father’s glory is here! The very image of the invisible God is here! The One to whom the Father has given to have life-in-Himself is here! We beheld the glory of the eternally generated Son! “God of God! Light of Light eternal! Lo, He abhors not the virgin’s womb! Very God! begotten, not created! O come, let us adore Him!”

## **VI. The Savor of the Incarnation**

But can you imagine? It doesn't end there. We come now to a **sixth facet of the incarnation**—what I'm calling, number six, the **savor** of the incarnation. “We saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, *full of grace and truth.*”

And how truly lovely it is that our Savior—this glorious, only-begotten One—would be full of grace and truth! What is sinful man's greatest need, but grace? We have defiled ourselves by our disobedience to God's law, and holy justice demands to be satisfied in nothing but our eternal ruin. But here comes our incarnate Savior, full of grace, full of unmerited favor to be bestowed upon poor sinners, who could do nothing to satisfy divine justice but go to our everlasting misery.

As our great Priest, He reconciles us to God by accomplishing atonement in our stead, righteously purchasing the saving grace that effects our salvation. As our great King, He subdues our rebellion by sovereignly applying the saving grace that He purchased for us. And as our great Prophet, He leads us and guides us in the truth of God's Word, dispelling the lies that our sinful hearts are always tempted to wander after, and instructing us in the paths of truth. You see? The One full of grace and truth is the One who is Prophet, Priest, and King: the Divine Messiah.

And I also think, given John's comments in verse 17, that the Apostle means to show how Jesus excels the revelation of God that came before Him. The tabernacle and temple were types of God's dwelling place among men. But Christ the God-man is not a type. He is the truth to which all the figures point. Similarly, the glory of Yahweh dwelt in the tabernacle and the temple of the Old Testament, but it did so under a time of *law*. It did so under a covenant that the Apostle Paul called in 2 Corinthians 3 “the ministry of death,” and “the ministry of condemnation,” because the Mosaic Covenant could not justify. It could not impart life, Galatians 3:21. It could only condemn. The law could never impart righteousness. It could only expose how far short of God's standard of righteousness we fall, and point us to something greater, to *someone* greater. John says, “He's here! The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ!” “The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24). Where they had law, here is grace. Where they had types, here is truth.

But there's another reason John makes this comment, and that is to show in yet another way that this Jesus is Yahweh in the flesh! The Old Testament equivalent of the phrase “grace and truth” is the Hebrew phrase *chésed* and *émeth*—often translated “lovingkindness and truth.” And it is used all throughout the Old Testament to refer Yahweh's character. Psalm 25:10: “All the paths of Yahweh are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.” Psalm 89:14: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You.” And then listen to Psalm 138:2: “I will bow down toward Your holy

temple And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth.” Talk of a temple, and grace and truth.

And then back to Psalm 57:3: “He will send from heaven and save me... God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth.” Grace and truth sent from heaven to save God’s people! And then listen to Psalm 85:9–10: “Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, That glory may dwell in our land. Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” And Proverbs 16:6 caps it off by saying, “By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for.” Do you see what John is doing?

But perhaps no text is more significant in this regard than Exodus 34:6, that passage that is affectionately termed, “God’s Autobiography.” As Moses pleads for the people before Yahweh on the mountain, he cries out, Exodus 33:18: “Show me Your glory!” And God says, “Ok, yes, I will make all My goodness pass before you. I’m going to put you in the cleft of the rock, you can only see My back, but I will show you My glory.” And Exodus 34:5 says, “Yahweh descended in the cloud and stood there with [Moses] as he called upon the name of Yahweh.” And then verse 6: “Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in *lovingkindness and truth*.’” Can you see the parallel? The glory of Yahweh descends from heaven, and He proclaims that He is abounding in lovingkindness and truth. Now, in John 1:14, the Word of Yahweh descends from heaven, and John declares that He is the glory of Yahweh, dwelling among us, and that He is full of grace and truth. John is telling us again: The baby in the manger is the God who was on the mountain with Moses.

Lovingkindness and truth have met together in the person of the Redeemer. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other in the cross of His redemption. And inasmuch as it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the *fullness* to dwell in Christ, Colossians 1:19, and inasmuch as in Him all the *fullness* of deity dwells in bodily form, Colossians 2:9, so this only begotten glorious One is *full* of grace and truth.

## **VII. The Supply of the Incarnation**

And that brings us, then, just briefly, to our **final** point. Number **seven**: the **supply** of the incarnation. And for that we look to verse 16: “For of His *fullness* we have all received, and grace upon grace.” He is full of grace and truth. And *from* His fullness we have all received, have we not? This is the testimony of every one of God’s people! We who have feasted upon this Savior by faith have received nothing but the gracious dispensations of a loving Shepherd of our souls. Charles Spurgeon once testified to this truth when he said, “I never dreamed that He could be such as He has been to me. Oh, how I must have vexed and grieved His gracious heart, and caused Him pain! But never, never, never once have I had anything from Him but love.”

It is “grace upon grace,” or, literally, grace *in place of* grace. What does that mean? It’s just this never-ending **supply** of grace after grace after grace from Christ our dear Savior. Pastor John says it’s like waves of grace rolling in on the seashore. When one wave of grace breaks onto the shore and washes back out, there’s just another wave right behind it with a fresh **supply** of grace.

And which of you who know Him will deny it? We know the grace of the atonement, in which our Substitute purchased for us a full and perfect redemption, in which He extinguished the fierce wrath of God that burned hot against our sin, by bearing that wrath in His own person, as He suffered for His people on that cross. We know the grace of regeneration, in which the Holy Spirit of God overcomes our spiritual death, and by an exercise of absolute sovereignty births in us the divine life. We know the grace of repentant faith, in which we are given the gifts of turning from our sins and trusting in Jesus. The very instrument whereby we lay hold of Christ and every spiritual blessing in Him is granted to us as a gracious gift!

We know the grace of union to Christ, whereby all that is His becomes ours. The grace of justification, whereby we are declared righteous apart from our own works, but on the basis of the righteous works of Jesus, imputed to our account. The grace of adoption, whereby we become children of God, welcomed into His very household, enjoying all the rights and privileges of being His own sons and daughters! The grace of sanctification, in which we are set apart from our sins to be the special possession of God; in which we are decisively freed from the dominion of sin; and in which our corruption is cleansed, day by day, as we are progressively transformed—in actual practice—more and more into the very image of Christ Himself. The grace of fresh pardon for sins, as we go to Christ every day with our heads hanging in shame, asking forgiveness for the same sins we confessed the day before, and we find nothing but a sympathetic high priest who loves to forgive. The grace of perseverance, wherein we are assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, and that no matter what trials and temptations befall us, we will make it home to heaven. All the way to the grace of glorification, wherein our very bodies will be raised from the dead imperishable, reunited with our souls, and be rid of any trace of sin whatsoever! so that we may live in sinless freedom on the new earth in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

### **Conclusion**

And because every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is received in Christ our mediator, Ephesians 1:3; every “grace upon grace” that we receive is because of the incarnation. Each of those graces come to us only by virtue of the mediation of Christ, and He can only mediate by virtue of His being God *and* man, Word *and* flesh, begotten of the Father *and* born of a virgin!

Dear Christian: Praise God for Christmas! Praise God for the incarnation! This is what we celebrate: the subject, the substance, the sweetness, the splendor, the Son, the savor, and the supply. May it be that you draw from the deep wells of the theology we've meditated upon in these last weeks to flood your heart with worship and adoration to the Father who sent the Son in love, to the Son who came in grace, and to the Spirit who seals Christ to your heart and brings you to the Father.

And dear unbeliever—you who have not yet cast your soul upon God the Son incarnate for the forgiveness of your sins—can you be moved to behold this glorious God-man in all the riches of His beauty? Can you look upon Him with the eyes of faith, and see in Him all the sufficiency of the very Savior you need to forgive your sins by His death on the cross, and to provide you with the righteousness of His own life of perfect obedience? Would you receive grace upon grace this morning, by turning from your sins and trusting in Christ alone for your righteousness before God?

It is no accident that just before this treasure chest of a verse that tells us of Jesus' qualifications to be our incarnate Savior, we're told that "as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right to become *children of God*, even to those who *believe* in His name, who were born ... of God." Would you receive Christ this morning, and so become an adopted child of God? Would you believe in His name, and lay hold of heaven?

"Mild, He lays His glory by, / Born that man no more may die! / Born to raise the sons of earth! / Born to give them second birth!" He was born for this: "Calls you one and calls you all, / To gain His everlasting hall. Christ was born to *save*." Believe on Him, and be saved. No gift that you'll unwrap this month will be greater than this glorious Savior. "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"