

The Whole Counsel of God
Study 26

INTRODUCING THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.*

John 1.14

Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels with the story of Christ's birth. Like all human beings, Jesus had his beginning in this world through birth, and this secures the reality of his humanity. The conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, however, ties the birth story to the other side of this event. On this side, we do not have a beginning in the world but a coming into the world. The account of this side of the story is not given to us in a narrative but in the sweeping survey of the movement of the divine Word of God from his eternal existence with God to his coming and being in the world, which John gives in the prologue of his Gospel (Jn 1.1-18). When we put the Gospel accounts together, we see that behind and running through the story of the birth of Christ is the great movement in the trinity in which the Father sent the Son and the Son came into the world. Galatians 4.4 puts the two sides of this momentous event together in few words: "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman." There was a divine sending through a birth, and this is usually referred to as the incarnation.

The word, incarnation, comes from a Latin word that means enfleshment. John, in the prologue of his Gospel, gives the biblical statement of the incarnation in the simple though profound announcement, "And the Word became flesh" (Jn 1.14). The Word was eternally God with God and carried out the entire role of God in relation to the world by being the agent of creation, the life that is the source of all life within creation and the light of men (Jn 1.1-4). The full deity and divine function of the Word outlined in Jn 1.1-4 are to be carried forward into the announcement of v 14 that the Word became flesh. This brings the incarnation into focus: full deity became true humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit who breathed the scriptures did not isolate the subject of the incarnation and let us look into the event by itself. Rather, the incarnation is opened up to us as the truth of the person and work of Christ is unfolded throughout the NT. This means that we cannot simply build our study on a few passages but have to gather together the material for our study from a wide range of passages in the NT. A survey of this material will show that the great event of Christ's coming into the world is looked at from different angles, and in our study we want to take up the various perspectives offered in scripture. To simply look at this event for one theme, such as God becoming human, is to miss the fullness and richness of revelation. The scriptures on the incarnation can be grouped into four themes: 1) the mission of the Son, 2) the union of deity and humanity, 3) the manifestation that took place through the incarnation and 4) the change in mode of existence and the attitude of Christ.

In light of the range of themes found in the NT, the word, incarnation, is seen to name only one aspect of Christ's coming into the world—the union of deity and humanity. However, this word has become the term used to refer to the entire event in all of its aspects. There is good reason for this. The mission, the manifestation and the change in mode of existence were made real by virtue of the incarnation. Also, the incarnation is what makes Christ's coming a unique event in the history of God's relationship with mankind. Everything in history up to the birth of Christ happened within the parameters of creation. God worked wonders in the OT, but these were simply displays of the creator's power over nature. We must keep in mind that in creating the world God did not lock himself out of his creation but placed creation under his immediate power and government so that miracles are not contradictions of creation. At times God came down in special manifestations (called theophanies), but they were simply appearances. After a manifestation, all was left as it was: God was Spirit in heaven and man was flesh on earth. All divine works and revelations within the OT left the world where it was: every man on earth was a mere man, a sinner and a mortal. For all the special works of God in the OT, creation was never transcended and the fall of the world was never overcome. But, this changed with the incarnation. Through this event God entered his creation by becoming human and took his place within creation. This is more than relating to mankind. God became a member of the human race. This is not a passing appearance. God

took on humanity eternally. He raised humanity to divine and eternal glory in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, but in this transformation he continued to be truly human. What God became in the incarnation was never and will never be reversed.

We can liken the incarnation to the knot that ties two strings together to make them one. Yes, the whole of the united strings is more than the knot, but the account of uniting the two is the story of tying the knot. In the same way, the incarnation as the act through which deity and humanity were united is only one part of the larger whole. But, since the event of incarnation is what ties all things together, it is proper to speak of the whole subject in terms of its principal part. Having said this, we should not limit our examination of the whole to the central feature, i.e., the knot. We must see the knot in the whole. In the same way, we must see the incarnation within the whole process from the action in the trinity to its outcome for us.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INCARNATION AND THE SON'S MISSION (John 1.1-18)

In the prologue to his Gospel, John used different verbs for the mission of the Son of God and his incarnation. For the incarnation, he used the verb, became. When he wrote, "And the Word became flesh" (v 14), he announced a real change in the being of the Word. In v 1 he said that "...the Word was God." In the Greek, the word, God, is without the article, which points to the divine nature of the Word. We can illustrate this with the two statements: "He was the man," and, "He was man". In the latter clause, the word man is generic and points to the nature of the person. Similarly, the Greek construction of the clause, "...and the Word was God," makes it clear that the Word was generically God. We might say that he was deity. As for the other side of the incarnation, the word, flesh, is used, and this is a biblical term for human nature. To say that the Word became flesh is to say that the Word underwent a change in nature.

For the Son's mission into the world, John used the verb, to come. He spoke of the light *coming* into the world (v 9) and the one who *came* to his own people, i.e., the Jews (v 11). The word, come, does not contemplate a change in the nature or being of the light. The light did not undergo any change. The light functioned the same way before and after Christ's entrance into the world—it shone. In coming into the world, the light only underwent a relative change. From being with God and shining into the world from outside of it, he moved position to shine from within the world.

The incarnation involved a change in nature, while the coming involved a movement from one position to another. The coming has the sense of a mission, and this focuses attention on the function of the light, what the light does to the world. Of the two, incarnation and mission, John presents the mission first. We are made to see the incarnation (the *becoming*) in the setting of the mission (the *coming*). The mission is about Christ's function in relation to the world, and the incarnation is about his being. John presents the two in a given order, and we will follow him in this. A biblical study of the incarnation should not start with the union of deity and humanity in the person of Christ but with his mission, and this puts the incarnation in its true light.

B. THE SETTING FOR THE MISSION (Jn 1.1-13).

The incarnation brought opposite natures into a union in the person of Christ. In the OT, flesh is seen as the nature that is opposite to spirit which is the nature of God. This poses the difficulty of the incarnation to the human mind. How can the divine nature which is eternal, infinite, all powerful, unchanging and immortal be united with flesh that is temporal, finite, weak, changing and mortal? The Jewish mind was disciplined by the OT revelation which emphasized the fact that God is unique and stands in contrast to the created nature of flesh. When the Jews were confronted with the reality of the incarnation by Jesus acting and speaking as God, they naturally protested. Jesus did not fit into their view that held God and man apart. We might think that the Gentile mind would not have had this difficulty since in paganism the divine and the created natures were mixed and confused. But, the gospel testifies solemnly against this mixing of the divine and creaturely as a corruption of the view of the divine nature. The NT works with the view of divine nature and of flesh found in the OT, and it will not allow us to understand the incarnation within a pagan world-view. In philosophy the Gentile mind rose above the crudities of mythology to an abstract view of the divine, but when the philosophical

way of thinking came up against the faith it turned against the incarnation. This resulted in the Gnostic heresy that denied the reality of Jesus humanity, which John battled in his first epistle.

Whether it be Jewish or Greek ways of thinking, the human mind sees the idea of the incarnation as it is presented in Jesus as a stumbling block. If we try to understand the incarnation directly, we will also find ourselves dealing with a conundrum that the human mind with its own natural perception and way of thinking cannot handle. We will not know how to understand the incarnation. The word of God, however, brings us to the incarnation via another route, and that is the mission of Christ. The mission does not fix the mind on what is, from our point of view, incongruous, i.e., the divine nature and flesh. Rather, it focuses the mind on the fact that the divine function in relation to the world is brought into the world in the work of Jesus Christ. We must see the deity of Jesus, not by looking at his flesh but by looking at the divine work carried out through him, and only from this point of view can we accept and begin to understand the incarnation. In his prologue, John guides his readers to approach the incarnation through the mission of Christ.

1. The cosmic Christ: the divine functions that relate God to the world

In Jn 1.1-5, we see Christ as he functioned before his incarnation, and for this reason he is called the pre-incarnate Christ. However, we can look at John's presentation of Christ from a different point of view. He is seen in his cosmic role relating all things divine to the universe. In this view, we see him as the cosmic Christ, and this is what John wants us to see.

In presenting the pre-incarnate Christ, John uses abstract language: the Word, the life and the light. The Christian reader knows that these abstract terms are used for a personal being, the Son of God, but this knowledge is not to override the significance of the abstract terms. They describe what relates God to the world. In Genesis 1 we see God creating by his word. This word is not something that God created. Rather, it goes forth from God and is the agency by which he created all things. The mind understands that this word was with God before he created the world, just like we have our word within our minds before we speak it forth so that it can be the means by which our will is carried out in the world. This word is the wisdom that the LORD possessed at the beginning of his works and was beside God like a master workman (Prov 8.22-31) through which God created the world (Prov 3.19-20).

The Word first of all is related to God prior to creation, and this means that the way God relates to the world in creation was with God eternally. Creation did not bring about a relationship with God but came about through the way God was eternally related in himself. From this relationship above creation, God relates to all things that have been created.

John stresses that there is nothing that exists apart from the Word's agency in creation (Jn 1.3). We must understand the force of this in light of the biblical doctrine of God and creation. The foundational truth of deity in the Bible is that God is the creator. If there was anything of which he was not the creator, he would not be the God of it. Also, God does not share his essential divine glory with any, and that means that he did not employ angels in the act of creating. In light of this foundational truth of monotheism, the affirmation of Jn 1.3 gains fullest significance. The Word shares the full glory of God the creator for there is nothing that has been brought into being by God that has not come into being through the Word. Equal to God in the glory of the creator, the Word is different in the order of the creative work. All that is from God is through the Word.

God is not simply related to the world as the creator to his creation. Within creation, there are creatures that have life, and they exist at a higher level of relationship with God. All life has its source in God and is communicated through the Word, so that the Word is the life source for all creatures. Again we must think in terms of the Biblical doctrines of God and creation. God alone is the source of life, and this glory is not shared with any creature. Through the life, the light of God is imparted to mankind. Indeed, only in human beings, by virtue of the life in them, is there the knowledge of God in the universe. As the life, the Word is the light of men, and as the light it shines in what is opposite to God—darkness.

2. The movement from God into the world

In John's account of the way the Word is related to everything, there is a definite movement. It begins with the Word eternally relating to God and then from here the Word moves out to relate to the world in three ways. He begins as the agent of creation, then within the setting of creation he functions as the life and finally as the life he is the light that shines in darkness. The movement reaches from God to the farthest reaches—the darkness—and from this divine action the light crossed the threshold and entered into the world to carry out his divine function within the world.

John's presentation of the divine movement into the world catches the overall drift of the OT. In the OT we do not see God acting to hold himself eternally off from the world. The whole movement of revelation is downward; it is one of God coming into his creation. In Genesis 1, God is above the world but through his creative work he relates to creation. In Genesis 2 he is seen as the LORD God working within creation in relation to man. Through his covenants, God bound himself and his very identity to his chosen people. At Mt Sinai, God came down from heaven to the top of the mountain and from the mountain top he went down to dwell among his people in the tabernacle that he ordered them to build for him. In the OT, we see that sin ever separated from God, but the vision of God coming into the world only intensified (Psalm 96 and Isaiah 40). The overall movement of God in the OT forms a trajectory that points to God's full entrance into the world.

The coming of the Son into the world takes up where the revelation of God in creation and in the OT left off. The pre-incarnate and cosmic Christ reached the farthest extent of his work by shining into darkness. Darkness did not overcome the light, so the light prevailed (Jn 1.5), but it is also the case that this light did not bring about a union between God and the world. The world was left in darkness, in a state opposite to God. This is true to human experience in the world. The light of the glory of God shines through creation, but darkness is not dispelled by it. The shining light raises the expectation that the relationship between God and mankind be fulfilled in a true union, but within the order of creation this remains unfulfilled. The same is true of OT revelation. For all the moves toward establishing a relationship between God and people, nothing changed. The world remained in darkness. It is at this end point of the pre-incarnate revelation, that the Son of God stepped over the threshold and entered the world to complete the movement of God into the world and bring about a true relationship between God and mankind. The cosmic Christ became the historical Christ.

3. The cosmic and historical Christ

The mission of the historical Christ matches the role of the cosmic Christ and carries the divine relationship with mankind to completion. John brings this out by matching each aspect of the Son's mission in the world with his cosmic roles. The light that shines in darkness is the light that coming into the world enlightens everyone (v 9). He who was the agent of creation (v 3) was in the world he made (v 10). His works in the world show this connection, for in working his miracles he was working with the power of the creator in the world. He was the life, and in the world he is the means by which God gives birth to people (vv 12-13). Jesus in his mission in the world is the perfect match to the way deity relates to the world since creation.

The coming of the Word into the world carried the divine function forward in a significant way. Coming into the world, the cosmic light came into personal encounter with people to be personally known and received. This shows that the divine functions of creating, of being the life and shining as the light are not mere powers that go out from God. In Jesus these functions are the agency of a divine person who is one with God, is God toward this world and brings people into a personal relationship with God.

To reject the coming of God into the world through his Son is to show that one has not gathered from revelation the form of God. Jesus brought this against the Jews who rejected his divine work when he said concerning the Father, "His voice you have not heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you" (Jn 5.37-38). The form of God is the character of God which defines God as God and is revealed through his revelation. The Son's mission matches the very shape of the divine character revealed.

In the mission we see the congruence between the way God relates to creation and the historical fact of God having come into the world. The point we are pressing is important for understanding the Gospel of John and

the doctrine of the incarnation. God ever and only related to the world in a way that matches the way Jesus relates to the world. The difference that Jesus' historical mission made is this: he brought the divine-human relationship to people in a person to person encounter.

C. THE INCARNATION AND THE REVELATION OF GOD (Jn 1.14-18)

John does not announce the incarnation when he tells us of Christ's coming into the world (v 9). Rather, he holds this announcement off to v 14. At this point in the prologue, the world is left in the background. The focus now turns to Christ's special relationship with those who have received him. We will explore the significance of this for the way we are to see the incarnation.

1. The changed setting

We have looked at the movement of the Word from being above the world (carrying out the divine role in relation to the world) to entering into the world (vv 6-13). Verse 14 relates a further move. This is a move from being in the world (v 10) to dwelling among us, i.e., the disciples (v 14). The move is marked by a shift from the third person (them) to the first person (us). The first move is that of his *coming*; that second is his *becoming* flesh.

In each of the moves that John relates, we see Christ moving over a threshold. The move from relating to the world from above to being in the world was carried out over the threshold of John the Baptist's witness (vv 6-8). While the light came into the world through the incarnation, it only stepped onto the public stage through John's witness. The move from being in the world to dwelling among his disciples was carried out over the personal reception of the light in vv 12-13. The world did not know Jesus as the light, and his own people did not receive him (vv 10-11). This means that in the world and in Israel, the Lord did not find his home or society. Those who did receive him in vv 12-13 are marked off from the world. They received the right to become the children of God and they are the ones who were born of God. Christ dwells in this family of God on earth.

There is a marked difference in relationship between Christ and the world, on the one hand, and Christ and those who received him, on the other. In the world, Christ shines as the light. He is actively relating to the world and communicating, but the world does not know him and relate to him. Against this background, the disciples are set in contrast. They are active in the relationship. They are marked off by receiving him. Verse 14 speaks of the glory of the Word, and in the Bible the divine glory is seen as light, but John does not say that the Word manifested his glory. Rather, he says that the disciples beheld his glory. Also, he does not say that Christ imparted his fullness but that they received it. In v 13 John tells us what makes them active in receiving Christ and receiving from him. They were born of God. In this work of God, they were made receptive of him and ceased to be of the world that did not know him.

When John spoke of Christ shining as the light in the world, he did not make mention of God. He has left the subject of God in vv 1-2. What the world receives of God from verse 3 onward consists only in the Word's contact with the world. The world that did not know the light that came into the world does not know God at all. This changed in the case of those who received Christ. Jesus brought them into a relationship with God. He gave them the right to be the children of God, and this means that he brought them to a relationship with God the Father. God gave birth to them and so carried out the role of the Father in relation to them. The disciples saw the glory of the incarnate Word as the glory of the only Son from the Father.

2. The incarnation announced

John did not announce the incarnation at the point of Christ's entry into the world because Christ's ministry in the world did not disclose the reality of the incarnation.

Jesus presented himself to the world through his divine works, but the world never saw past what the eye could see, i.e., that he was a man. The Jews saw the divine power in the miracles he worked, but they did not recognize that God was working in Jesus in a unique way. They insisted on seeing Jesus as a mere man through

whom God worked as an instrument. Jesus, however, presented to them a different relationship between him and God. He received from God the works of God to be done by him as his own works. This is not the relationship between a master and his slave but between the Father and the Son. The ministry of Christ in the world did not carry this revelation of the Father and Son through to the world. On the contrary, it only brought out the blindness of the world. This means that the reality of the incarnation was not revealed to the world.

Christ testified to the fact that God was his Father and that he worked in equality with God as the Son works with the Father. Those who received his testimony received him, and to them the reality of his unique person was disclosed. When he was received as the Son of God, it became clear that in his person deity became human, and this opened up a whole new revelation. Jesus' miracles set before the human view the concrete demonstration that he was acting as God from God, and that means as the Son of the Father. This presents Jesus as unique. But, the disclosure of his incarnation brings something else into focus—that the full glory of God is imparted to human nature in the person of the incarnate Son, and this makes it possible for God's fullness to be received by us. John 1.14-18 resonates with this discovery.

3. Understanding the incarnation

John does not isolate the incarnation as an event into which we can look. Rather, he engages us in seeing the incarnation through the personal relationship that the disciples had with the incarnate Christ and makes us understand the incarnation for how it functions within the relationship between God, Christ and us.

a. The revelation of Christ in his relationships

We have been following the movement in Jn 1.1-18. This is the Word's movement from *being* eternally with God (vv 1-2) to *coming* into the world (v 9) and *becoming* flesh to dwell among the children of God. The movement is linear in that there is a moving out from the eternal state of deity to becoming human. This journey of the Word, however, is also presented as a return. This is built into the very structure of the whole passage which can be laid out as follows:

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| A1. | The Word was eternally
- with God
- God | (The Word in his eternal relationship) |
| B1. | Relating all things divine to the world
- He is the Life
- He is the Light of men | (the cosmic Christ) |
| B2. | Coming into the world
- enlightening everyone (the Light)
- making people the children of God (the Life) | (the historical Christ) |
| A2. | The Word became Flesh
Verse 18
- the only God—this answers to v 1, “And the Word was God.”
- at the Father's side—this answers to v 1, “And the word was with God.” | (the incarnate Word in his personal relationship with us) |

This structure of the prologue shows that the incarnation, when its reality is seen, brings in a whole new level of revelation. The mission of Christ (B2) only brought into the world the functions of the cosmic Christ (B1), which only show how the divine is related to the world. The incarnation, in contrast, brings to us the revelation of the eternal, divine reality above the world. This is about how the Word is related eternally to God.

b. John 1.18

The connection between vv 1-2 and vv 14-18 is clearly marked. John begins v 14 with “And the Word...” This is the first time since v 1 that he used this term. The closing verse (v 18) clearly harks back to the relationship between the Word and God in v 1. John wrote, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” The expression, “... who is at the Father’s side,” answers to the Word being with God in v 1. The fact that Jesus Christ is called the only God answers to the statement in v 1 that the Word was God.

The translation of Jn 1.18 needs some clarification. The translation, “the only God” (in the ESV), is at best an attempt to say in English in a simple way what John wrote in Greek. The phrase John uses is *monogenes theos*. *Monogenes* has traditionally been translated with *only begotten*. The problem with this rendering is that the Greek word does not contain the idea of birth but of kind (genus). *Monogenes* means one-of-a-kind. This word does not suggest an isolated existence, as if this one was God all by himself. Rather, the one who is *monogenes* receives his unique nature or position in relation to another. Jesus called God the Father the only God (*monon theos*, Jn 5.44 and 17.3), but he could not call him *monogenes*, for this would suggest that the Father receives what he is in his relationship with another. This can only be said of the Son. He is equal with God with this difference: the order of the relationship moves from the Father to the Son and not the other way around, and the word *monogenes* makes that clear.

When John calls Jesus *monogenes theos* in Jn 1.18, he is drawing together the two terms that he has already used for the deity of Christ. In v 1 he said that the Word was God (*theos*). We have already seen that in this statement John is pointing to the divine nature of the Word. He is saying that he was deity. We must also keep in mind that the Word is presented as deity in relation to God, and this indicates that his deity is defined in relation to God the Father. In v 14 John points out the glory of the Word, and in light of v 1 this glory is the divine glory. John goes on to say that the glory of the Word is the glory as of the *monogenes* from the Father. Here the idea of sonship is clearly implied, so the ESV translates with, “of the only Son from the Father.” However, the word, Son, is only implied in the Greek text. To translate the exact sense of the Greek, we would have to render the line something like this: the glory as of the one-of-a kind from the Father. In Jn 1.18, John combines the word, *monogenes*, of v 14 and the word *theos* (God) in v 1 to give Christ the title, *monogenes theos*. This compound title combines the eternal deity of Christ with his personal and unique relation to the Father. The way John develops the understanding of the deity of Christ and brings it all together in v 18 is subtle but rich in thought. However, it is impossible to render this simply into English without losing something of its meaning. To catch all of the ideas contained in the expression, we would have to combine three thoughts: he is deity, he is divine within his relationship, and in this he is unique, one of a kind. The *monogenes theos* is the one who is uniquely God in his divine relationship.

John, in Jn 1.18, also draws on the Word’s relation to God expressed in v 1. The precise way John expresses that the Word was with God in Jn 1.1 suggests that he is turned toward God (*pros ton theon*). John is not simply saying that he was there as something that existed alongside of God but that he was related to God. This is drawn into v 18 by use of a metaphor. The phrase in the ESV, “who is at the Father’s side,” is literally, “who is in the bosom of the Father.” The image is that of reclining at the table. At the last supper, the disciple closest to Jesus (i.e., the disciple whom Jesus loved and who sat next to him) was leaning on Jesus’ bosom, and this means that he was leaning toward Jesus and so was in intimate communion with him. The Word was eternally turned toward God, in intimate relation to him (v 1). In v 18, John tells that Jesus in his humanity continued to be in the intimate relationship with the Father and from this position fulfilled his role as the Word in making known the God whom no one has ever seen. In his incarnate life, the Son of God was not simply the Word who relates all things divine to the world but the one who reveals that which no one can see—the Word in his eternal relation to the Father. He did not make the Father known simply by talking about the Father. As he told his disciples, the one who has seen him has seen the Father because he is in the Father and the Father is in him (Jn 14.9-11). When the Son showed himself to his disciples, they saw him in his essential relationship with the Father and through this they saw the Father.

c. The significance of the incarnation

The overall movement of Jn 1.1-18 shows that the incarnation extended the relational life of the Son. He began in his eternal relation to God. His movement out into the world ended with him becoming flesh, which was an essential change in his being. In this incarnate state, he continued in the eternal relationship of vv 1-2, as v 18 makes clear. As the incarnate Son, he is uniquely God and is ever in the bosom of the Father. There is an uninterrupted and undiminished continuity of his deity through the incarnation. But there is also real change. He became flesh, and this change in his being brought about an essential change in relationship. A comparison between v 1 and v 14 will show this up. He was with God, and through incarnation he dwelt among us.

The Greek word translated with *dwelt* in Jn 1.14 literally means *tented*. John used this expression to connect the incarnation with the tabernacle (or tent) in which God dwelt among his people in the wilderness. The glory of the LORD filled this tabernacle (Ex 40.34-35), and John took up this theme when he said that they beheld his glory. There is an essential difference between the tent in the OT and the tent in which the Word dwelt. The former was a tent made of materials whereas the Word's tent was his body. Jesus took up this contrast in Jn 2.19-22 when he spoke of his body as the temple in contrast to the temple standing in Jerusalem. By dwelling in the tent of flesh, i.e., of human nature, the full glory of the Son of God was brought into full union with humanity, and through this it was seen by the very eyes of the disciples (see 1Jn 1.1-3), and seeing it they received it.

The incarnation brought about an essential change in the revelation of God and in the relationship between God and his people. Where there once was distance between the divine and eternal reality of God and mankind, there is now union and full communion. Paul expresses this significance of the incarnation as follows: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him" (Col 2.9-10).

To fully understand what it means for the Son to dwell among us, we must keep his essentially relational being in mind. The Son has no existence or identity in and of himself. He is ever and only what he is in relation to his Father. This means that the only way we can be joined to him and he with us is if we are related to God as our Father. He is the unique Son of the Father and we through him are the children of the Father. Only in the Fatherhood of God can we be joined with the Son, and only in this relationship with the Father does he dwell with us.

The incarnation of the Word brought a whole new revelation of God into the world. In Jn 1.15-18, John points out how this new revelation relates to the earlier communications for God. First he takes up the matter of timing. Jesus came after John, but in actual fact he was before him (v 15). The verb, *was*, in the Baptist's confession, "He was before me," echoes the verb, *was*, in v 1. The Word was there in the beginning and so was before all that happened in history. This pre-existence of the Son ranks him before John. The earliest has come in late. The first has come in last. This does not subordinate the last revelation of God but elevates it to the final place in which the eternal has come through at last.

After dealing with the question of time, John turns attention to what came through the incarnation. Here he makes a contrast with the law that was given through Moses (vv 16-17). John works from what the disciples saw in the incarnate Word in v 14. They saw the glory of the Son as being full of grace and truth. The grace is the impartation of the divine fullness seen in the Son, which was imparted, not in limited measure but in all its fullness in an endless stream of grace or, to use John's words, in grace upon grace. In the incarnation, all of the divine fullness is communicated to and through the humanity of Christ.

The grace revealed in the incarnate Word is linked with truth. Truth in John's Gospel is not the same as fact. It is not a matter of saying what is correct or what corresponds to the reality in the world. Rather, all is seen for what it is in relation to God. Mankind exists in a kind of relation to God, but people live in a way that is not true to God and is not in union with God. The Law of Moses positioned people in an external relation to God, but the form in which they related to God left them alienated from God. Jesus referred to this in Jn 4.23-24. He pointed out that the Father seeks people to worship him in spirit and in truth. God is spirit, and only in spirit can we relate to God in a way that is wholly true to him and so be in a true fellowship with God. This means that to worship God in truth, i.e., in a way that is true to God as spirit, we must become spirit. In John 3 Jesus pointed out that this is what he came to bring about. What is born of the flesh is flesh but what is born of the Spirit is

spirit. When we are born of the Spirit, we receive the divine nature and through this we come into a true fellowship and union with God. The Law of Moses never brought in truth in this sense into the world. Truth came into the world through the incarnation, for in the incarnation the divine glory was imparted to flesh and through Christ this divine fullness is imparted as grace and through the grace comes truth.

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John's prologue establishes the order in which the incarnation is to be understood. We must begin with the order of the movement of divine revelation. The incarnation must be understood within the context of Christ's mission to the world, and this mission must be seen in the context of the movement from God into the world. So, we move from the knowledge of God through creation to God's coming into the world carrying out the divine role in history to the incarnation and the union between deity and humanity. We must also see the human context for understanding the incarnation. The light that shines from God through creation shines in darkness, and into this world in darkness the light entered. Through this the personal encounter between the light and the world took place, but the world did not know him. Those who did receive him form the society in which he dwells. He eternally exists in his relationship with God the Father, and only those who are born of God can be within his own living space. In this fellowship, the meaning of the incarnation is disclosed. It is not opened up in terms of understanding the paradoxical nature of the incarnation but in terms of the completion of that divine movement toward a full relationship between God and mankind within creation.

The mission of the Son, which is presented in the gospel, sets before our view the divine role Christ carries out, and this is the vantage point from which we must see him. When we accept him in his divine work, then we are brought into a new relationship with God as Father, and only in this context can we understand the reality of the incarnation.