

Christmas Eve 2023: Veiled in Flesh the Godhead See, The Revelation, John 1:18

John 1:14,17-18 ¹⁴ *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

¹⁷ *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

There's the story, and then there's the story behind the story...Let's say you go on a first date and you get home and your best friend is texting you- [Texting Slide 1] so....how was your date? One way to tell the story is to say- Well, he picked me up at 6, we went out for dinner at La Fia on Market Street and we saw a show at the Queen, we talked for a little and he dropped me back home at 10:30. Your friends will reply....[Texting Slide 2] OK- so HOW was the date! They don't just want to know the story, they want to know the story behind the story. Did you like him? Was there a connection? Is there a second date or is a one and done situation? What does this mean for your relationship status?

[Title Slide] See there is the Christmas story Mary and Joseph and Baby Jesus, and there is the story behind the Christmas story the story about what it all means, why it matters. The gospel writer John, who was with Jesus for his entire ministry, witnessed his life, his miracles, his death, his resurrection, John's interested in telling the story behind the Christmas Story... The story without Joseph, without Mary, without the stable, without the cattle lowing, without the manger, without the shepherds, without the wise men, without the star, without the angels, without all the familiar components of the Christmas story. In John 1:1-18, he is telling the greatest story ever told, behind the greatest story ever told- that this baby born in Bethlehem is God, the creator and reason for all existence, veiled in flesh, God incarnate come to be with us so that we can know God and have life that never ends in Him.

The incarnation is entirely unique to Christianity. No other religion claims this. If Jesus came like any other religious leader who claimed to be pointing people to God, we might say that all the religions could sit together with a piece of the pie of understanding God, sort of all equal. And this is how most people think about religion. But this isn't what Jesus claimed. He claimed to be God incarnate. And his followers, like John, as unbelievable of a claim that it is came to believe this too.

Any of you have a doppelganger? Someone that people tell you that you look like? About a decade ago when those Divergent movies came out and were a craze among teens, I would have people come up to me and tell me I look like Theo James...What do you think? [Picture] Maybe the less good looking, less fit, less talented, less wealthy version. One time I decided to have some fun with it, and I convinced some teenagers that I was Theo's twin brother. Simon...And that if they wanted to facetime with them I could arrange that for a small fee and they were freaking out ready to give me their money! Gullible, don't worry I didn't take their money and I told them the truth... But I thought about it. It's one thing to maybe trick a few

naïve people that I met be Theo's brother...[Title Slide] It's something completely different to convince people, especially Jewish people, you are God. We have to realize just how incredible it is that a Jewish person like John and many other Jewish people came to believe that Jesus was God in the flesh. I suppose that the Greeks could have believed that gods came down if they looked like gods, athletic, good-looking, looking like they were chiseled out of a rock, quoting the philosophers. Or if he came to Eastern people who believed that god was in all of us...I suppose maybe it would be feasible. But Jesus was a Jew and he came first to Jews. The Jewish people believed what the Law and the Prophets of the OT said about God, that God was outside of the world, a being of infinite glory and power, who made the universe. The uncreated one. Isaiah 6, when Isaiah had a vision of God in his throne room in heaven that was so vivid, so close to the real thing that even though it was just the hem of the robe of the Lord filling the temple, all he could do was fall to the ground and hide himself crying out *"Woe to me, I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips."* God is so holy that even the angels cannot look directly at him. That is why the angels surrounding God's throne in Isaiah's vision had two wings shielding their faces. Even the great Moses, who boldly asked to see the glory, that is the face, of God, God says to Moses...that's a death wish... in Exodus 33:20 *"You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."* And was only permitted to see the afterglow as it were of his glory.

And yet Jesus somehow got Jews to believe that He was God, not godlike, not a messenger from God, not an angel...but God himself in the flesh. Incredible, unfathomable...unless when they looked at him, walked up close with him, when they really gazed at him...at his virtue, his teaching, his miracles, his love, compassion, truth, his perfection...ultimately his sacrifice and resurrection...they saw the glory of God, as John says, *"full of grace and truth."* Once they saw Jesus for who he really was, they would never be the same. It changed the purpose of their lives (living to show others who Jesus is), their identity (they now saw themselves as belonging to Jesus and as children of God) and their eternal future (they experienced forgiveness and a relationship with God forever).

If all we see when we experience Christmas is the manger, and Joseph and Mary, the baby and the wise men and shepherds and the lowing cattle...as great of a story as it is, we've actually missed the greatest story ever told! John wants us to know and experience in the Christmas Story- the story behind the story. He wants us to look into the face of Jesus, really gaze at him and how he lived as we read about him in the gospels and come to believe that he really is God in the flesh...not a doppelganger, not angel or prophet or sage. But God incarnate. Why does this matter to me today over 2000 years later? Let me give you two reasons.

The Christmas Story matters because God has revealed himself to us in Jesus. I will sometimes hear people say, "How can we know God? We can't see him. So the best we can do is get some vague ideas of who he is using our logic and subjective feelings, and he's different for everyone." But that's not true. We can see him and know him because he entered space and time, he entered history in a real, practical way: Jesus. What is God like? What does he care about? What makes him mad, what makes him happy? What makes him sad? What does he think matters most in the world? What does he want us to know about him? What does he say is true

morally? How does he feel about me? What would he say to me? Every single one of these questions and many more are answered in the Gospels in the life of Jesus.

When you attempt to look at the sun unfiltered you it hurts your eyes, you can't really get a direct look, it blurs and blinds your vision, but when you filter the sun through a proper lens of a telescope, you can suddenly see all its contours, the flames and details of colors and beauty and power. What you see when you look at Jesus is God through the lens of a human nature. And you see his beauty and power, his grace and truth, his glory.¹ Jesus is God demystified. God explained.

The Christmas Story matters because it reveals God's love demonstrated to us in Jesus. How do we know God loves us? I mean, if you look at the world or look at the circumstances of your own life- it might be hard to really know if God loves us. At best it might be subjective and circumstantial- when things are going well, I score the winning goal in the game, I get a Christmas bonus, I'm in good health, a loving relationship with someone...we might feel like God loves us. But when things aren't going well, you are benched, your Christmas bonus is a Jelly of the month club membership, or your health deteriorates, or a relationship breaks up...you might not feel so loved by God. How do we really know? But if the Christmas story is true, if it really happened that God became flesh, then we can know definitively that he loves us.

Let me allow another theologian to explain it, maybe better than I can- Bono of U2 *"I remember coming back from a very long tour.... On Christmas Eve I went to St. Patrick's Cathedral...It had dawned on me before, but it really sank in: the Christmas story. The idea that God, if there is a Love and Logic in the universe, that it would seek to explain itself is amazing enough. That it would seek to explain itself and describe itself by becoming a child born in straw poverty? That's unfathomable...Unknowable love describes itself as the most vulnerable. I was sitting there, and ...tears came down my face, and I saw the genius of this, utter genius of picking a particular point in time. There must be an incarnation. Love must be made flesh."*²

God coming to us, with us, and for us in this way, so humble, so vulnerable, as a servant to be with us...this is a demonstration of his love. And ultimately his love was demonstrated not only in the Christmas Story, but the Easter Story. Jesus said, greater love has no man than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends. And then he proved it by going to the cross, dying as our sin substitute, dying for us.

This Christmas, read the story- read of the baby born in a manger in O little town of Bethlehem...but get to the story behind the story. Maybe God to you is like attempting to stare into the sun. You have to look away, you don't see him and you don't really know him. You don't know what he wants for you or from you. You don't know if he loves you or could love you. This Christmas, gaze into the face of Jesus and see the Glory of God, full of grace and truth. See the

¹ Idea from Tim Keller- <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/fullness-of-his-grace-advent/>

² <https://revkevcc.wordpress.com/2008/12/26/bono-on-the-incarnation/>

invisible God made visible. Get to know God by getting to know Jesus revealed to us in the gospels. See what he's like, and what he wants for you. Allow God to embrace you with his love demonstrated in Jesus, ultimately on the cross.

Why Christmas book.