

Each of the 4 Gospels starts out differently. Only 2 of them explicitly mention Christmas. Only Matthew and Luke explicitly narrate accounts of Jesus' birth. But at the beginning of all 4 Gospels, we are told that Jesus is the Son of God.

The earliest Gospel, Mark, doesn't say anything about Christmas. Mark begins with John the Baptist. An adult John the Baptist baptizes an adult Jesus. And Mark lets us know that Jesus is the Son of God, for at his baptism, God says, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." If we just had a copy of Mark, we might think that Jesus didn't become the Son of God until the Holy Spirit came upon him at his baptism. But the other 3 Gospels provide us with a fuller picture, with more information.

The next Gospels to be written, Matthew and Luke, push things back a bit. Matthew and Luke push back the time when Jesus becomes God's Son. He's not just the Son of God at his baptism. Matthew and Luke let us know that Jesus is God's Son from before his birth, from the time that Mary conceived this child by the workings of the Holy Spirit.

But then, the last Gospel written, the Gospel of John pushes things even further back. Further back than Jesus' baptism. Further back than Jesus' birth, further back than his conception. In fact, John goes MUCH further back.

John goes all the way back to before the beginning of time. John goes back before creation itself. John starts, "In the beginning," the same words which begin the Book of Genesis. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

That was our Gospel lesson today, John's prologue. And John is letting us know in no uncertain terms that Jesus Christ is God's only begotten Son not just through his baptism, not even through his birth, but instead Jesus is God's Son from before the beginning of time itself.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Christ, the 2nd person of the Trinity existed before the creation of the world. In fact, John tells us, creation occurred through the Christ. "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."

The Christ, the Word, God's Wisdom, God's Son was light and life for the whole world.

Now, at the beginning of his prologue, John isn't really saying anything unique in his culture. Both Jews and Pagan philosophers at the time understood that creation occurred through the Logos. The Logos gets translated in English as "Word."

This idea of the Logos or Word was familiar in both Greek philosophies and Jewish religious writings of the time. Both 1st Century Jews and 1st Century Greek philosophers would agree that it was through the Logos, through the Word, that God brought all things into being.

Both Jews and Greeks would agree with what John is saying at the beginning of his Gospel. That is, until you get to verse 14.

Verse 14 is where John parts company with both Jews and Greeks. In fact, both Jews and Greek philosophers would be scandalized by what John says in verse 14. For both Jews and Greeks, God was remote, untouchable, invisible, far removed from human affairs. But John says something else, something utterly remarkable.

The Word, the Logos, became flesh. That is a revolutionary statement. "The Word became flesh and lived among us."

John 1:14 is the heart and center of the Christmas Gospel. Forget about angels and shepherds and the Wisemen. They're nice to think about. They look great on Christmas cards and in nativity sets.

But the real meaning of Christmas in its fullest, deepest form is found in John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

God became flesh. God became muscle and bone. God became incarnate. And more than that, God dwelt among us. The literal word is "tabernacled." God tabernacled among us. God in a human body lived in our midst, he pitched his tent, his tabernacle in the middle of our campground. It was in a body, in the Word Incarnate, in the person of Jesus Christ, that God became seeable, and knowable, and touchable.

"We have seen his glory" John says. Not in a temple, not in clouds, not on top of a mountain, not high and lifted up, not in rarified philosophical theories. No. We have seen his glory in a person. "We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

And then John continues, "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God," John says; "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

This is the good news of Christmas. God is one of us. We can see God in a human being, in the person of Jesus Christ. God in heaven cannot be easily seen or known. But God in flesh, God in Jesus Christ is knowable and visible.

And because of God's action, we are given light and life. We are given grace and truth. This is the true joy of Christmas.

God has become enfleshed. God has become incarnate. God has become one of us.

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.