

## LESSON ONE: THE WORD MADE FLESH

*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. (John 1:1-3)*

The New Testament includes four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All four tell the story of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. While some key events—Jesus' baptism, his feeding of the multitudes, his trial, and his crucifixion, among others—appear in all four books, each author emphasizes different aspects of Jesus' story.

We'd expect these writers to begin their stories with Jesus' birth, but only two of them do. Luke gives us the Christmas story that we read each December, with the shepherds and the host of angels. In Matthew we meet the wise men, who travel many miles to pay tribute to baby Jesus. Mark, on the other hand, skips all this and opens with Jesus as a full-grown man at his baptism.

John, like Mark, doesn't cover any of the material about the birth of Jesus. But one could make the case that John is the only Gospel that actually starts at the beginning of Jesus' story. Matthew and Luke tell us about Jesus' birth and give us lists of his ancestors, back to David and Bathsheba, Abraham and Sarah, even Adam and Eve. But John goes back even further to the start of all creation: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

### Wordage

What do you think of when you hear the phrase *Word of God*? Often we associate God's Word with the Bible. But for John, the "Word" isn't a collection of books; it is Jesus Christ himself. Though Jesus spent thirty-some years living on earth as a human being, we know that he is also God and has existed for all time and will live for eternity. Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus mostly on Jesus' human life. John is different. He wants us to know that Jesus is God, and he gets his point across by telling us that Christ—the Word—was present and active when God created all things.

The Greek word for "Word" in these verses is *logos*, which is the root of the English words *logic* and *logical*. Stoicism, a school of ancient Greek philosophy, considered the *Logos* the mind and purpose of God at work throughout the entire universe. For that reason we often use *log* to refer to the study of something. You probably get your fill of *logos* every day when you study *biology*, *sociology*, *geology*, *psychology*, and *cosmetology*.

The *logos* was a well-known concept in Jesus' day. But what John says in 1:14 would have rubbed a lot of people the wrong way: "The Word became flesh and made his home among us." Claiming that the *Logos* lived on earth as a human being was scandalous. John was telling his readers that Jesus was God's heart, mind, and will in human form.

We call this idea *Incarnation*. You may recognize the root *carn* from words like *carnivore* and *carnage*. It comes from Latin and means "flesh." While Christians for

centuries have struggled to explain exactly how Jesus could be human and God at the same time, John tells us what is most important about the Incarnation: “No one has ever seen God. God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made God known” (John 1:18). In Jesus, God became one of us and gave us a picture of who God is, what God values, and how God relates to us.

### **God’s Flashlight**

John uses the language of light and darkness throughout his Gospel, starting with his fourth verse: “the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people.” Light allows us to see; it carries information from one place to another; and it provides energy. When we “see the light,” we have a moment of clarity or a realization of what is right or true. Darkness, of course, is the absence of light. Metaphorically it refers to being lost, to times of despair and destruction, or to evil. Those with wicked tendencies are said to be on the “dark side” (a phrase popularized by the *Star Wars* movies).

Plenty of people in Jesus’ day lived in darkness, as do plenty of people in our world today. Darkness can take the form of despair, grief, illness, violence, or spiritual longing, among other things. Light for the world cuts through that darkness, offering new life and new hope. If you’ve ever been caving or camping in a remote area, you appreciate having a source of light that can cut through the darkness. The illumination provided by a flashlight or lantern is often the difference between moving about safely or getting lost, injured, or panicked.

No matter how intense the darkness, Christ’s light will always break through, guiding us and giving us hope. We never have to worry about dead batteries!

### **Live Eternally Now**

John’s opening verses also tell us that the Word offers us life. Many Christians and non-Christians alike are familiar with John’s most famous verse, from 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life.” Something that is eternal goes on forever. We usually think of eternal life beginning after our deaths. But we don’t have to wait. When we trust and enter into a relationship with Christ, we defeat death and start living eternally now.

While we are still in this world, our eternal lives will not spare us from the struggles and weaknesses that come with being human. But we can face these challenges with the confidence that they will not have the last word. We can live with the knowledge that Christ, the *Logos*, is in control; and we can reflect the light of Christ to those who are living in darkness.

*A note on “John”: The Gospel of John never identifies its author by name. It frequently refers to a disciple “whom Jesus loved.” In the book’s final verses, this unknown disciple says that he is the book’s writer. In the other Gospels, John, along with James and Peter, is one of Jesus’ closest disciples. But the disciple John isn’t mentioned in the Gospel of John, leading many early Christians to assume that John must be the “disciple whom Jesus loved” and the author of the book. In this study, we’ll refer to the author of the book as “John,” even though we don’t know with certainty that “John” was actually his name.*

### **Individual or Group Work**

As an individual or as group, read through John 1:1-18, the Prologue to John's Gospel. Everyone should have some time to read through the verses silently. Then read the scripture aloud. Each person can read aloud one verse. Rotate around the room until the entire Prologue has been read. Then ask:

- Who, or what, is the "Word" in this Scripture?
- What do these verses tell us about God and how God works?
- What questions do you have after reading this Scripture?

### *Who Is This "John" Guy?*

John was a very common name in the first-century Jewish world, and scholars have different theories about which John wrote the New Testament books attributed to John (the Gospel of John, the three Letters of John, and the Revelation to John). The Gospel of John never actually names its author, so it's possible that the writer wasn't even named John. At any rate, there is one major biblical figure named John who most definitely didn't write any of these books: John the Baptist.

In the Prologue, when verse 6 says, "A man named John was sent from God," the author is not referring to himself but to John the Baptist. To better understand who John the Baptist is and why he is important, read the following scriptures. After reading these verses, brainstorm a list of things you know about John the Baptist.

- Matthew 3:1-15
- Luke 3:7-20
- John 1:6-18
- John 1:19-34

Once you have a pretty good list, think/discuss:

- Why do you think the Gospel writers emphasize John the Baptist so much toward the beginning of their stories?
- How is John the Baptist similar to Jesus? In what ways is he different?

### **Additional Discussion Questions:**

- Read John 1:1-5. What do these verses say about "the Word"?
- What does it mean for Jesus to be the Word in human form? What does this tell you about Jesus?
- What qualities should we embody as Jesus' followers? How can we take on these qualities?

## Video Accompaniments

**Adam Hamilton (COPY LINK):**

<https://my.amplifymedia.com/amplify/video/unitedmethodistpublishinghouse/13883-john/13886-study-sessions/60945-john-session-1-the-word-made-flesh>

**The Bible Project (geared towards youth):** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT41M013X3A>

## Discussion Questions

For Adam Hamilton:

- Have you ever thought about which gospel is your favorite? If so, what draws you to one gospel over another? If not, I encourage you to take some time and read each of the four Gospels in a relatively short period of time. They all have unique styles, personalities, and show different parts about who Christ is.
- There is something both comforting and mysterious about not fully being about to understand the trinity— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit— yet it is an essential part of Christianity. What question would you want to ask God most about the Trinity?
- Hamilton makes the distinction between the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Gospel of John. The Synoptic Gospels have more of an emphasis on being a follower of Jesus, whereas the Gospel of John has more of an emphasis on belief. He says that, in order to have a complete Gospel, you need both parts. He proposes that we are to trust in Christ, but three-fourths of what we are to do is living of the Gospel in the world by following Christ in our daily lives.
  - Which part, belief or follow, do you struggle with more? How can you grow in that way?
- Christ brought light into the darkness. Where do you see light in the world?
- How can you be Christ's light in the world in a real and tangible way?

For Word Study: Euangelion - "Gospel"

- What does the term "Gospel" mean in English?
- What is the difference between *Euangelion* in the Old Testament and the New Testament?
- How did Jesus' followers share the good news after his death and resurrection?
- How are things different in Jesus' Kingdom?
- Why do you think it can be hard for people to hear and comprehend the good news of Jesus? How is it different than what the world tells us? How do you think people's lives are then changed?

**LOGOS: Get Logical Activity**

James, John, Martha, Mary, and Peter are headed to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Each person is coming from a different city—Alexandria, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. Each person also is bringing a different food item to the festival—bread, figs, fish, olive oil, and wine. Using the clues below, determine who is coming from what city and which food item he or she is bringing.

1. The man from Corinth brought a liquid.
2. The woman from Rome also brought a liquid.
3. The man who brought the bread and the man who brought the fish both came from a cities whose names start with the letter “A.”
4. Martha brought a food whose name starts with the letter “F.”
5. Peter also brought a food whose name starts with the letter “F.”
6. A woman brought the olive oil.
7. James did not bring the bread, and neither did the man from Antioch.

The best way to solve a logic problem is to use a chart like the one below. Start by using a process of elimination. For example, the first clue, “The man from Corinth brought a liquid,” doesn’t tell you who came from Corinth. It does however say something about who didn’t come from Corinth. So in the “Corinth” column put an x in the box corresponding to any people you know for sure aren’t from that city. When you find a match, mark it with a circle, smiley face, or check mark.

	Alexandria	Antioch	Corinth	Ephesus	Rome	Bread	Figs	Fish	Olive Oil	Wine
James										
John										
Martha										
Mary										
Peter										
Bread										
Figs										
Fish										
Olive Oil										
Wine										

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## Create a Prism Activity

Supplies: cup of water, flashlight, large sheet of white paper or cloth

You've probably learned in science class that light contains all the colors of the spectrum. Ordinarily light appears white. but there are ways to disperse light and separate it so that it appears like a rainbow. A prism is one device for dispersing light. Prisms vary in shape, style, and substance, but they consist of transparent materials such as water and glass.

When light moves from one medium to another—such as from air to glass to water—it changes speed, causing it to bend. The degree to which the light bends depends on its wavelength; each wavelength appears as a different color. So when light passes through a prism, every color of light bends at a unique angle, dividing the light into many colors.

Create and experiment with a prism of your own:

- Fill a glass with water so it is mostly full.
- Place the glass on a table (preferably one low to the ground, such as a coffee table) so that it hangs over the edge. Watch it carefully to make sure that it doesn't fall.
- Set a large sheet of white paper or cloth on the floor beneath the cup. (If you have a white tile floor, don't worry about this step.)
- Hold a flashlight above the glass and shine it downward, through the water and onto the floor.
- Adjust the angle of the flashlight as needed until you see the light separate into colors.

Discussion questions:

- When the light hits the water and glass, it bends and separates. What happens when the light of Christ hits the earth?
- White light is made up of all the colors of the rainbow. What is the light of Christ made up of? (Examples might include: hope, justice, and so forth.)