



December 4, 2011

## Recognize God's Gift

### **Background**

#### **Passage**

*John 1:1-18*

### **Focal Verses**

*John 1:1-4,10-18*

### **What This Lesson Is About**

This lesson is about the identity of Christ. It addresses the fact that God's greatest gift is more than a baby born in an

obscure stable many centuries ago.

### **Why This Lesson Is Important**

Many adults in today's culture have no problem with Jesus in the manger at Christmas—but unfortunately, they try to keep Him there. They don't see the connection between the baby

Jesus and the Creator of the universe, who is the only way to salvation. These are one and the same.

### **How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life**

This lesson will help you understand and value the complete story of Jesus, God incarnate.

**W**hat does Christmas mean to you? In Germany, where we live and serve, Christmas is lavishly celebrated with beautiful decorations and family traditions, but for most it holds no personal religious meaning.

Being German, Simon had always celebrated Christmas as a national holiday, but last Christmas was different because he had become a believer himself. Visiting our church one Sunday with friends, he trusted Christ as His Savior and came to know the real meaning of Christ's coming into the world.

What about you? Do you recognize God's Christmas gift?

➔ *Do any aspects of the world's celebrations of Christmas add to Christian message? If so, which ones? Which ones especially detract from the true message of Christmas? When—and how—did the arrival of Christ at Christmas become important to you?*

## **Jesus is Completely God**

**John 1:1-4**

**<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

**<sup>2</sup>The same was in the beginning with God.**

**<sup>3</sup>All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.**

**<sup>4</sup>In him was life; and the life was the light of men.**

God divinely inspired four different writers to record the story of Jesus' life on earth.

- Matthew told the story from the perspective of the former tax accountant he was and gave a great amount of background detail about Jesus' family history.
- Mark presented Jesus as the Man of action, the Servant of the world.
- Luke, recognized as a top-notch historian, offered an account that reveals Christ as the Friend of the needy, the poor, the lost, the Gentile.

- The fourth man to record an inspired account of Christ's life was John. John's account is unique in much of its content. John's Gospel contains no parables. Only in John do we find an account of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. Moreover, the introduction to John's Gospel is quite unique.

John described Jesus as **the eternal Word** who **was with God** and who **was God** from eternity past. John apparently had in mind Genesis 1:1. Jesus existed even *before* the world was created. In calling Christ *the Word*, the apostle used the Greek term transliterated *logos*. In this term we see a picture of God's yearning to communicate His love and His truth to humanity.

➔ *According to John 3:16, how far was God willing to go in order for the world to know about and to be transformed by His love?*

But Christ is more than an expression of God. He is in His very nature one with God. Theologians have used the term *Trinity* to explain the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—not three gods, but one God in three Persons. This means Jesus Christ always *was* and always will be *God*. The unity that existed in the Godhead before creation also was involved in bringing creation into being. **All things**—*all things* in the entire universe—**were made by him**. John insisted that **life** proceeded from Christ. Jesus was and is the Source of real life.

➔ *As you consider Jesus' humble arrival on that first Christmas, how does the truth that Christ the Creator was coming to reclaim His people by dying for them alter your thinking about Him?*

Jesus is the One today who gives life to those who call on Him. In John 1:1-4, the apostle laid the foundation to address the fall of humanity and the world's need for true life. Regardless of different explanations for man's condition and differing agendas about what needs to be done, people still are widely and acutely aware that the world is not as it should be. The greatest challenge facing humanity is neither global warming, nor economic difficulty, nor even

the war on terror; rather it is being separated from God. Christ, as the original Source of physical life and, especially, spiritual life, reaches out redemptively and lovingly to touch and renew hearts. As God, He offers to do what only God can do—reconnect human hearts to Himself. As God, Christ is central in the solution that ultimately makes all things right. In fact, He *is* the solution.

## **Jesus Is Completely Man** **John 1:10-11,14-15**

**<sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.**

**<sup>11</sup>He came unto his own, and his own received him not.**

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**<sup>14</sup>And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.**

**<sup>15</sup>John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.**

**He was in the world** is one of the most remarkable statements in all of literature. John made this statement forthrightly and unapologetically. The Creator of the universe entered into creation Himself as a human being. This is the meaning of the Hebrew word, “Emmanuel”—“God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Redemption’s work could not be accomplished by any ordinary human being. Only the death of a sinless person could pay the price for humanity’s sin, and Jesus was the only sinless person who ever lived. Only the One who gave life could truly redeem it, but to do so He would have to enter into the world as a human being. **He came unto His own,...and dwelt among us.** In physical attributes Christ appeared like any other man. **The Word was made flesh;** Jesus took on all the weaknesses of humanity—except sin.

** *If Christ came into our world to save us, how far should we be willing to go so that the world might know of His love?***

Many wealthy and influential people had their possessions confiscated and were imprisoned in the concentration camps of World War II. Former wealth notwithstanding, when each one walked through the doors of the prison, he or she became just another person, one more number in the system. In a similar but not identical way, Christ entered into human reality, born into a poor family, growing up in an out-of-the-way place, living in apparent obscurity. The difference was in who He was, for although He was man, He also was God. He wasn't partly human and partly God; He was completely both. You can't wrap your mind around that, but you can accept it by faith! Though to the unbelieving world He appeared no different from others, those who believed saw in Him **the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.**

➔ *Many people have preconceived notions about God that are just plain wrong. How was Christ's revelation of God's glory surprising to people? How is it surprising to people today?*

**John** the Baptist (not the apostle) said of Christ, **he was before me.** John was born about six months before Jesus (see Luke 1:36,56-57; 2:6-7), so he had to be referring to Jesus' eternal divine nature. He provided for us an example of faith, upholding both the real humanity of Jesus of Nazareth as well as His true divinity. Among simple people lived the eternal God in human form. "Made in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:7), He laid aside His divine glory (see Isaiah 6:1-4), yet not His Deity; but in this very process revealed the glory of grace associated with His redemptive heart.

## **Jesus Is Completely Necessary**

**John 1:12-13,16-18**

**<sup>12</sup>But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:**

**<sup>13</sup>Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**

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## ***Discover Deeper Meaning***

**Believe** is a word John frequently used in his Gospel, especially in relation to believing in Jesus for salvation. But one makes a grave mistake to assume John was referring to mere intellectual assent regarding Jesus. In John's day, one's name stood for the entire personality and character of a person rather than simply the term's being used to address or refer to him or her. To *believe* in the name of Jesus for salvation means to understand, give allegiance to, and confess His teaching and claims, works and ministry, and person and relationship with God. To *believe* in Jesus in this way means receiving Him and being allowed by God to become adopted into His own family.

**<sup>16</sup>And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.**

**<sup>17</sup>For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.**

**<sup>18</sup>No man hath seen God at anytime; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.**

Christ came not only to live on earth but to die—to be executed—for the world's sins. “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). John the apostle was an evangelist in the core of his being; he didn't get far into his presentation of Christ's life before he gave an invitation.

Human redemption is impossible without Jesus. Having effectively made this point, John urged his readers to believe. Believing and receiving Jesus are essential for us **to become...sons of God**; but the spirit of the passage emphasizes privilege: we are **born** into God's family, **and of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace**. This refers to the *fullness* of the *grace* we find in Christ. Living the Christian life means living daily in the reality of the spiritual blessings Christ brought and brings.

## Christmas Grace

Arthur, a successful attorney in the eyes of the world, experienced a personal crisis around Christmas a few years ago. He felt the need for God and went to a church to speak with a pastor. He was somewhat dismayed to find the church locked and had to come back a few days later. But when he did, he found what he'd been looking for. Arthur trusted Christ and discovered the true meaning of Christmas and of life. He is now a faithful witness for Christ, using his international law practice where appropriate as a vehicle to share Christ with others. *What resources and assets are you using to help others know about Jesus? How are you helping them find forgiveness and purpose in life?*

John said **no man** ever **hath seen** the Spirit of **God** with his eyes, for such a thing is impossible. But Christ, His **only begotten Son**, revealed the character and heart of God through His compassion, teachings, and miracles. Moreover, Jesus *was* God—in the flesh! Christ's first miracle was recorded by John; in Cana, at a simple village wedding celebration among obscure people, Christ changed water into wine (see John 2:1-11). You may remember these things from our study on October 2. This miracle was a symbol of His power to transform ordinary people into extraordinary vessels of His grace. The very obscurity of the locale for this miracle seemed to speak of the amazing love and glory of God. Christ never used His ministry to maneuver for the applause of the crowds, though He did challenge people to place their faith in Him. Throughout His ministry, Jesus showed compassion and love to people the world deemed unimportant or viewed with disdain. With His first miracle, Jesus “manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him” (v. 11b).

➔ *How do some popular religious leaders today use modern methods to build large congregations and media audiences? Contrast this to the way Christ, starting in Cana, revealed God's glory.*

John wrote His Gospel as an old man, far removed from his young adult years when he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee with Jesus. Time, however, had not dimmed the significance of those years for John. If anything they loomed grander and deeper than ever, because John had walked with God's Spirit in the years that followed. He spent the remainder of his life telling the story of Jesus—His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and everything these things meant. John dwelt in the reality of the **grace and truth** that had come through Jesus, qualities that contrasted sharply against the push of the Pharisees for people to try earn righteousness through obedience to Moses' law. **The law of Moses** had brought an awareness of sin, God's holiness, and humanity's need of redemption (see Rom. 3:20). Christ, however, *brought redemption!* We receive this redemption and eternal life when we trust Christ for salvation.

➔ *Why can we never earn salvation?*

## The Life Word

The image of a weak and helpless infant in a manger in and of itself does not give us enough information about who Christ was or why He came into the world. Christ is fully God and fully man. He entered the world to reveal the Father, to save us from our sin, and to give us real life. Through His sinless life, His sacrificial death, and His glorious resurrection, He paid for our sin and overcame our most ominous enemy—death.

By turning from sin and trusting Christ for salvation, we receive forgiveness and eternal life. As John wrote in his first epistle or letter, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11-12). Do you have Him in your life right now? If not, receive Him today!