

Word Became Flesh

Jesus, fully God and fully human, is the perfect expression of God's love for us, His children.

BIBLICAL REFERENCE

John 1:1-18

In the opening of his Gospel, John establishes the fact that Jesus was God. This was tough to comprehend for some of John's first readers (Jews and Greek-speaking and Greek-thinking Gentiles who were new Christians). To help them understand, John introduced Jesus as the Logos, the Word (**1:1**). In Greek philosophy, the Word was the principle of reason that governed the universe. In Jewish thought, the Word was an agent of creation, the source of God's message to His people through the prophets, and God's Law, often identified with God himself. John's description of Jesus supports and uses both of these cultures' philosophies of the Word—a human being who was at the same time the Creator and Ruler of the universe, the ultimate revelation of God, the One in whom “all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

In this opening passage, John clarified the role of John the Baptist. Many who saw and listened to John the Baptist were confused about his role in God's kingdom. The Gospel of John placed John the Baptist in his proper role as “witness to the light” (**v. 8**). His mission was simply to proclaim Jesus' entrance into the earthly world. Only Jesus is God.

In **verses 17-18**, John examined Christ's role in salvation history. Although God gave laws through Moses (at Mount Sinai), He is now coming with “grace and truth” in the person of Jesus (**v. 17**). John pointed out that Jesus didn't come to replace the Law of Moses with a new religion but came to fulfill the Law and the message of the prophets.

LIFE NEED

Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is this: Explain Jesus. Teenagers, if they haven't already, are at a point in their lives where they can grasp the truth that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. This truth is fundamental for understanding the awesome action God performed for each of us when He sent His only Son.

With this truth in hand, help your teenagers take the next step in realizing that Jesus was God's ultimate Symbol of love for humankind. Love is the key here. Christ lived among us, suffered and died on our behalf, and was raised to bring us new life, all because of God's love for us. Some may struggle with understanding the full effect of that love or how to extend it to others.

Some of your students may be dealing with basic questions like “Who is Jesus?” “How is He different from or related to God?” “Does God really love me?” and “What difference does my understanding Jesus this way make?” Use this lesson to provide guidance as they discover John's answers to these questions. Students in your class can understand God's love as never before when you help them understand the true nature of Christ and His earthly mission.

RESOURCES

- Bibles
- Bible dictionaries, concordances
- Copies of *The New Testament Genesis* handout
- Copies of the *Bustin' the Code* handout
- Pens/pencils, paper
- Chalkboard/marker board, chalk/markers

PREPARING THE TEACHER

You may have had heard analogy after analogy that attempt to explain the Trinity. Jot down:

- ☞ The best one you have ever heard.
- ☞ Your own original (example: one substance, but three personalities).

Think back across your own spiritual development:

- ☞ When did you begin to understand how Jesus could be both God and human?
- ☞ How did understanding that truth help you grow in your relationship with Jesus?
- ☞ What questions did you have about Jesus' deity? His humanity?
- ☞ What questions do you have now?

Now think about your students:

- ☞ Who in your class struggles with understanding the concept of Jesus as both God and human? What can you do to help them grasp this?
- ☞ Who seems to grasp this concept? What can you do to help them move to the next step: using that knowledge to understand God's love for us?

A lesson like this one is going to require some preparation and patience on your part. Know your denomination's doctrine concerning the Trinity. Know what the Bible has to say in other passages about the relationship of God, the Father, Jesus, and the

Napoleon was right when he said, "I know men, and I tell you, Jesus is more than a man. Comparison is impossible between Him and any other human being who ever lived, because He was the Son of God."

—Billy Graham

son may require you to come face-to-face with your beliefs as never before. Keep in mind that we need to establish who Jesus is before we can make claims about His love for each of us.

Understanding the interrelationships of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be very confusing. We can be sure that not one of us will really become an expert on the Trinity until we reach heaven. So take your time, and do your homework; then relax and focus on this: Understanding who Jesus is and was is an essential foundational truth in a growing Christian life because it helps us understand God's love for us.

Here are some tips for teaching tough topics like this one:

Human things must be known to be loved: but divine things must be loved to be known.

—Blaise Pascal

- Articulate or even write down your convictions before you present this lesson to your class.
- As you move through the lesson to the times of discussion, be patient. Let your words soak into their brains.
- Don't be afraid of periods of silence. Tough ideas and concepts take time to understand and express.
- Consider scheduling an extra session to wrap up what you don't get a chance to finish in this lesson. It's better to make this lesson a two-week adventure than to miss the point for the sake of a schedule. Use the Teacher Planner, found on the inside front cover of this unit booklet, to help plan your lesson schedule.

Most importantly, as you prepare the message of this lesson, ask God to open your students' minds to understand Him better. He will.

TEACHING THE LESSON

LIFE

Student Goal: Discover what they think about Jesus' deity and humanity.

The Great Debate ⌚15

Select two teams, Team A and Team B. Then say to your class, **Let's debate this subject: While Jesus was on earth, was He God or human? Team A will argue that Jesus was God. Team B will argue that Jesus was human.**

Give each team three minutes to plan their arguments (and strategies). Some may even want to study. Consider providing copies of the Apostles' Creed (available for you in the sidebar column), Bible dictionaries, concordances, and extra Bibles for students to use. You may want to provide copies of your denomination's statement about who Jesus was and is. Wander from group to group to help students brainstorm for as many specific proofs they can think of to strengthen their argument in the debate. For example: Jesus was God. (His mother was a virgin. He performed miracles.) Or Jesus was man. (He died. He bled. He cried. He ate and slept.)

After three minutes, begin the debate. Give each team one minute to make an opening statement. Following both opening statements, each team can argue for or against what the other team has said.

Consider asking a student to serve as the debate mediator to free you up to take part in one of the teams. The mediator needs to have in hand primer questions to use when there is a lull in the debate. Here are some questions the mediator can use. (If you choose a student, you may want to photocopy the following information for the student to use.) Feel free to add other questions that relate to this debate.

Direct these questions to Team B first, then have Team A respond:

- **If Jesus was simply a man, why can't the rest of us who follow God do the things that Jesus did while He was on earth?**
- **If Jesus was both God and human, why didn't He just stay on earth instead of dying on the Cross? If He had stayed, wouldn't He have eventually convinced everyone that He was God's Son?**

Direct these questions to Team A first, then have Team B respond:

- **If Jesus was God and not human in any way, why was He so concerned about us?**
- **If Jesus was God while on earth, why did He allow himself to be killed?**

Both teams may want to say that Jesus was and is both God and human, but for the sake of argument make them stick to their assigned opinions. Keep the debate to no longer than 10 minutes. At the end of that time, ask each team to present their final statement.

In a typical debate, the mediator declares a winner. In this debate, however, allow the students to decide. Say something, such as, **Now that we've heard good cases for Jesus as God and for Jesus as human, let's vote by raising our hands to see who presented the**

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended to the dead. The third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

(updated to modern English)

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strongest argument. How many of you now believe that Jesus was God? How many now believe Jesus was human? How many of you believe differently than either argument?

This last question will give those who already understand that Jesus was both God and human an opportunity to say what they know to be true. Give them a minute or two to discuss and ask questions; then say the following in your own words as you move into the TRUTH phase of the lesson, **No matter how often the subject of Jesus' godhood and manhood is debated, the Book of John tells us Jesus was both God and human. Let's take a look at what John says.**



Student Goals: Discover what John said about who Jesus was and is; discover why Jesus came to earth.

Who Are You, Jesus—Really? ⌚10

Read John 1:1-18 aloud, then say, **Some of you may have read this passage before. The beginning of John's Gospel sounds a lot like another book of the Bible. Can you guess which one?** Give them a minute to try and guess. Some might say Genesis. You might, if you have time, want to highlight the similarities. Then distribute copies of *The New Testament Genesis* handout, which is printed at the end of this lesson. Ask seven students to participate in the reading of this litany while the rest of the class reads along silently. (If your class has fewer than seven students, have one student begin, and then add a student with each new part until all the students are reading together.)

Bustin' the Code ⌚10

Distribute copies of the *Bustin' the Code* handout. Say, **People in John's day had a lot of questions about Jesus just as some of us do now. John was trying to answer their questions. Some of the language he used was easy for the people of his time to understand, but it can seem downright mysterious to us. Let's see if we can't bust John's code.**

Divide the class into three groups. Give each group three phrases or words from the handout to bust. Move from group to group to provide some guidance for those who get stuck. In addition to the Biblical Reference and Preparing the Teacher sections of this lesson, the information below should help you assist your students in interpreting John's language:

The Beginning = Creation. Jesus is the Cocreator with God. He was there when it all started.

The Word = Jesus. The Greek word for *word* is *logos*. It means "word" and "reason." Here it means Jesus Christ, because Christ was the way God told His people about himself.

Life = The supernatural life. More than just being alive physically, Jesus was alive spiritually. As God, He is the life in all of us.

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Light = Jesus. He shines in the darkness (the evil world).

John = John the Baptist. Many who saw and listened to John the Baptist were confused about his role in God's kingdom. Some even wondered if he was the Messiah. John, the Gospel, puts John the Baptist in his proper place as "witness to the light" (v. 8). John the Baptist's mission was simply to proclaim Jesus' entrance into the earthly world.

Born of God = The spiritual birth that comes when we accept Jesus as God and Savior. This was important to John's readers because their place in society depended on whom they were related to.

Moses' Law = God gave the prophet Moses the Ten Commandments and other rules at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20—21). These laws guided the Israelites during Old Testament times and still guide us today in our daily lives.

Grace and Truth = Jesus' coming added a lot to Moses' laws. The laws were given only to the Israelites, but God's grace and truth are for everyone. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of the prophets. He began a new era in our religion. God's grace and truth came to us in the form of Jesus.

God the One and Only = Jesus and God are one and the same.

After five minutes have the groups come back together and share how they busted John's cryptic phrases into everyday language.



Student Goal: Understand and state in their own words God's personal love for them.

Creed Writing 101 ⌚5

Using a chalkboard/marker board, write in all capital letters these three words in a vertical column: WHO, WHAT, WHY. Then say, **Let's take what we've learned and use it to write our own statement of WHO Jesus is, WHAT He did for us, and WHY He did it.** Ask a student to come to the board and write down the class responses to the following questions:

- Who is Jesus?
- What did Jesus do for us?
- Why did Jesus do it?

When students have had ample time to respond, ask your students to think silently about this question: **Now that you have a deeper understanding of who Jesus is, what difference do you think that understanding should make in your life or in your relationship with Him?** If some would like to respond audibly, allow one or two to do so. Encourage the students to ask themselves these questions:

- **Where do I stand in my relationship with Christ?**
- **Do I know who Jesus really is?**
- **Have I recognized and received Him into my life?**

Close in prayer, asking God to help your entire class grow in their understanding of Jesus in the days and weeks ahead.

CREATIVE OPTIONS

Music

In the VISION phase of the lesson use the song “Different Now” by Out of Eden from the album *No Limits The Mix* (Barefoot Ministries) before you close in prayer. The lyrics of this song convey the results of personal commitment to God: and finding purpose for our lives as God works through us. After you’ve played the song, ask your students the following questions: **How did this songwriter’s life change? How is your life different now that Christ is a part of it?**

Charades

During the LIFE phase of the lesson, divide the class into two teams. Before class, come up with a list of items for the students to become. Do not use activities like “playing soccer.” Instead, write down “soccer ball.” One of the stipulations of the game is they have to become the object, not just act out the motions of the object. For example, if a student drew “soccer ball,” they could begin by motioning as if they were kicking a soccer ball into a goal. Their team will probably guess “soccer.” Then the actor would have to attempt to shape his body into a circle, and then he could point downward toward his feet. The class would then probably guess “soccer ball.” If the actor does not become the object but simply points to it or acts it out, he is disqualified. After each team has done this a couple of times, ask, **Was it difficult to become the object instead of to merely act it out? What’s the difference between saying something and actually being something?** After students respond, say, **Jesus was more than a messenger of the Word; He was the Word.** This would be a good place to transition into the TRUTH section.

Creeds in the Making

During the TRUTH phase of the lesson, tell students they are the founders of a new church. They cannot invite people to join this new church until they create a statement of faith. Have students create their own statement, following the model of the Apostles’ Creed, to explain their understanding of Jesus as both God and human. Encourage them to do a good job so that they can present their creed to the pastor for possible use as a responsive reading in the worship service. Or they may want to use this creed in a youth worship service.

Home Video

Interview people on video to find out when they began to understand God’s personal love for them. Use the interviews during the TRUTH phase of the lesson, right after students work on the *Bustin’ the Code* handout.