

Who Jesus really is.

No. 1 Jesus: the Eternal God

Bible reading from John 16:17 – 17:5.

Christmas 2004 Brenda and I drove down Oxford Street in London, as passengers on the top deck of a red double-deck bus. We were going to the British Museum to see an exhibition of Sudanese ancient history temporarily borrowed from Khartoum's Sudan National Museum. The Christmas decorations were in the big shop windows. The annual Christmas light display had been officially switched on the day before.

The decorations in the shop called Selfridges' were entitled, "The Christmas Story" – so I looked for the baby Jesus. As the bus dawdled by window after window in front of the huge store I saw the Muppets, the Polar Express, the Most Beautiful Dog in the World, the Little Left Out Angel, the Snowman, English footballer Michael Owen's interpretation of what Christmas means, It's a Wonderful Life, the Nutcracker, the Toys that Came to Life, and Family Get Togethers. But **there was no Jesus in the Christmas Story** at Selfridges.

House of Fraser was a few shops along the street. They featured "The Christmas Alphabet" in their decorated windows. It was not in alphabetical order. I spotted "P" for peace. This was promising I thought! Then I saw "L" for love. My hopes were rising! Next came "J" for joy. I was disappointed again. There was no Jesus in the Christmas Alphabet at the House of Fraser.

I am not writing this to criticise commercial stores today, but I am writing to say:

The real Jesus of the Christian Christmas will be at the centre of every Christian heart and Christian home, especially when Christmas is celebrated.

A real Christian will not be squeezed into the mould of the materialistic world. He or she will be worshipfully taken up by the most stunning miracle this world has ever seen.

Some readers may think that the resurrection of Jesus is the greatest miracle ever. I ask you to think again. Since Jesus Christ is God – then *he has to be alive*, because God is the living God.

The greatest miracle is Christmas: remembering the human birth of Jesus Christ.

The greatest miracle is the Incarnation: “the assuming of a human body by the Son of God”¹. “The act of God the Son whereby he took to himself a human nature”.²

The greatest miracle is described in John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, full of grace and truth”.³

God's very self-expression donned our humanity (except for sin)⁴ and so God lived among us on earth in a singular, one-off, glorious, awesome, fantastic,

¹ Collins English Dictionary, (Glasgow, Harper Collins) 1994.

² Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Leicester: IVP) 1994, p.543.

³ All Bible quotations from New International Version (International Bible Society) 1973-1984.

⁴ D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.127-129.

gob-smacking way!

John's gospel – the fourth in our New Testament – was written quite specifically to show readers (like us) who Jesus is. “Lamb of God”, “Word”, and “I am” are all titles unique to John's writings. In John's gospel Jesus is “the Son of God” or sometimes simply “the Son”.

John 20:31 states why John wrote what he did. It says:

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”.

As an older man he later expanded this to clarify it still more.

“He who has the Son has life: he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”, 1 John 5:12.

So, if you want to have a life this Christmas – make sure all of your activities are centred upon Jesus Christ.

“In him was life, and that life was the light of men”, John 1:4.

Twenty-first century razzamatazz has not changed this practical truth at all. All Christmas parties need Jesus as one of the invited parties.

Christmas presents need to be given, and received, in Jesus' presence.

Christmas dinner needs to be eaten with the Bread of Life who came down from heaven (John 6:33-35).

Christmas shopping needs to be done knowingly under the all-seeing eye of him to whom everyone will give account (Hebrews 4:13).

Seek to gain credit before him rather than credit on your card!

Christmas behaviour for the Christian must show the spiritual fruit of “goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22,23).

If you cannot behave like that where you plan to be this Christmas, then you simply should not be there!

I repeat, **the real Jesus of the Christian Christmas will be at the centre of every Christian heart and Christian home**, especially when Christmas is celebrated.

Let’s remind ourselves of *who this Jesus is*. We will examine some words Jesus spoke on earth:

“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began”, John 17:5.

This is fewer than twenty English words, but they pack more than a lifetime of worshipful thoughts.

From them I suggest to you six Christmas dinners (as it were) to chew over, to savour, to enjoy and to benefit from.

Six facts about this Jesus from John 17:5:

1. Jesus was before the beginning. The last phrase of verse 5 is “BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN”.

Humankind has a fascination with the past and the future. Where did we come from? Where are we going to? And why? Scientists research back and speculate. Film makers reach forward and produce fantasy block-busters! God the Son (Jesus) said to God the Father, "(I was with you) before the world began".

"God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being".⁵

God is unlimited or infinite in regard to time because he lives in eternity.

God is the "high and lofty one who lives forever", "who lives in a high and holy place...", "... and with the contrite and lowly in spirit", Isaiah 57:15.

And Jesus was God.

"Contrite" means full of guilt, shame and regret over sin.

"Lowly" means full of humility and meekness.

How unlike so many of us. Yet, this living God the Son, from eternity past until now, will live with you and me. We need to humbly recognise our own sinfulness and continually repent over it. We need to wonder in amazement at who Jesus is.

No wonder the Psalmist could rejoice in the trials he faced, *when he thought about the Lord:*

⁵ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Leicester: IVP) 1994, p. 168.

“The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty; (his) throne was established long ago; (he is) from eternity”. “Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea – the Lord is mighty”, Psalm 93:1,2,4.

I live some 4 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. On stormy days with low pressure especially, the seas are breathtakingly awesome. Jesus is more awesome!

Believer, *this* Jesus, who has lived for always, from before the beginning, he is with you at this Christmas time.

2. Jesus was with God before the world began. John 17:5 contains the words of Jesus, “the glory I had WITH YOU before the world began”.

John began his gospel with this truth. He wants all readers at all times and occasions to grasp who Jesus really is.⁶

“In the beginning was the Word, *and the Word was with God*, and the Word was God”, John 1:1.

Before Genesis 1:1, the Word, the expression of God, was! He existed. He was eternally with God and indeed he was God.

John’s gospel – John’s Good News – was how people can be new creations in Jesus Christ.⁷ John referred back to the first creation and to Genesis which means “origin” or “beginning”.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.95.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.114.

At the beginning of everything “the Word” – Jesus, God the Son – was already there! He was God’s agent of creation.

“All things were made through him”, John 1:3,4.

Since “all things” were thus made, then Jesus, God the Son, must either be God or be with God. He is *not* a created person like everybody else.

John’s gospel tells us that Jesus is *both* “God” and “with God” at the same time.

God the Son was with God in intimate relationship. Yet he was also distinguishable from God. Jesus is not all there is of God. Yet the full divinity of all of God also belongs to him.

Think deeply about Jesus’ mysterious majesty!

Jesus is God’s ultimate self-disclosure. “He was the pre-existent Son of God, sent into the world to become the Jesus of history, so that the glory and grace of God might be uniquely and perfectly disclosed”.⁸

This same Jesus says to you and to me, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”, Matthew 11:28.

Jesus is not a hastily put together emergency response to humankind’s disastrous rebellion against God! *From before all time* Jesus was to be in-fleshed to call people back to personally knowing God.

Make sure you know him well this Christmas time.

⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p. 111.

3. Jesus was God himself. John 17:5, “THE GLORY I HAD with you before the world began”.

God is “awesome in glory”, Exodus 15:11. In my view it is a pity the word “awesome” is getting smaller in meaning by too frequent usage.

The dictionary defines “awesome” as “inspiring or displaying overwhelming wonder, admiration, respect or dread”.⁹ People use “awesome” today when they really mean “superstar”. God is much greater than any megastar!

“The glory of the Lord fills the whole earth”, Numbers 14:21.

Men and women are to “ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name”, 1 Chronicles 16:29, and to “declare his glory among the nations”, Psalm 96:3.

Through Isaiah the prophet – the greatest of God’s writing prophets, who revealed God’s awful judgement and God’s greater salvation – we read God saying, “I will *not* give my glory to another”, Isaiah 42:8, and “I will *not* yield my glory to another”, Isaiah 48:11.

Since God will not share his glory Jesus can only *truthfully* speak about “the glory I had with you before the world began” if he was and is God himself! He could not be anyone other than God.

⁹ Collins English Dictionary, (Glasgow, Harper Collins) 1994.

Let me insert three words in brackets into John 1:1 to spell out this meaning clearly:

“And (Jesus) the Word, (who) was with God, (actually) was God”.

In Old Testament times God pitched his tent to live among people. He was the shekinah glory of fire and cloud in the tabernacle and temple.

In Gospel times God pitched his tent to live among people as the man Jesus.

The Old Testament Word of God on two tablets of stone became the New Testament Word of God, with two dusty and sandaled human feet!

“For in Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form”, Colossians 2:9.

Christian believer, *this* Christ is your Christ this Christmas. Think on him.

4. Jesus was the God who lived among us. John 16:28 is part of the introductory context for John 17:5. In it Jesus says, “I CAME FROM THE FATHER AND ENTERED THE WORLD; now I am leaving the world and going back to my Father”.

Supposing you were going for the first time to visit the city of Sydney in Australia. You were given one choice from three for help on your journey. *Choice one* was to fetch books, maps, pictures etc. about Sydney from the library.

The second choice was to have advice from your neighbours who visited Australia for one month, ten years ago. They could tell you what they remember of their experiences.

The third choice is that you can travel to and around Sydney with someone who's home is Sydney. You have already met them where you live. Now you are invited, "Come to me and I will go with you, taking care of everything you need while you journey to and around Sydney".

Which of the three would you choose?

For a journey to Sydney there may be more than one choice.

For a journey to heaven Jesus is the only choice. Jesus came from heaven, and he will be with me on the journey and for every moment when I arrive in heaven too!

Jesus was the God – the Eternal God – who lived among us. Think seriously about this.

- remaining what he was, he became what he was not
- eternity stepped into time¹⁰
- omniscience went to join woodwork classes
- omnipotence depended on his family for everything
- omnipresence lay contained in a small animal feeding trough
- Alpha and Omega became less than one day old
- the powerful Word could only muster a baby's cry
- the source of all life sucked milk from Mary's human breast

¹⁰ Michael Card, The Life CD, disc 1 track 6 "The Final Word", Sparrow Corp. 1988.

- the provider of everything for everyone had just 10 wrinkly, wiggly fingers and thumbs, each less than 2 centimetres long!
- God's final Word was Jesus!¹¹
- WOW!

Jesus said in John 16:28 (the context of John 17:5), "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to my Father".

The disciples who heard Jesus replied to him, "This makes us believe that you came from God", John 16:30.

Do you believe this too? I pray and trust that you do.

5. Jesus was submissive to the Father. "And now, FATHER, glorify me IN YOUR PRESENCE", John 17:5.

God the Son is never less than God, but is "functionally subordinate"¹² to his Father. Jesus gave his Father perfect obedience and lived his earthly life in unqualified dependence on his Father. They had a great relationship. It was as if they were one – and this was because they were one!

John intends the whole of his gospel to be read in the light of the opening verses. The Word, living among us, is God, (John 1:14 and 1:1). "The deeds

¹¹ Michael Card, *The Life* CD, disc 1 track 6 "The Final Word", Sparrow Corp. 1988.

¹² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.95.

and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God”.¹³ Jesus waited God’s time, God the Father’s appointed moment – for his birth into humanity, and Jesus waited God’s set time for his death on behalf of humanity, and Jesus waited God’s moment for his resurrection to eternal life as the God-man.

Jesus’ attitude was always: “This is God’s appointed hour, let Father’s will be done”. For example, John 17:4, speaking to God the Father he says: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do”.

Jesus’ heart was always in heaven, though his body was on earth. He was not overly interested in the Temple. He was not unduly interested in what some call the “Holy Land”. *The entire universe and beyond was all his* – let alone any buildings or tracts of land in this world!

Jesus lived in a different realm. It was not geography he lived for but spirituality, and he would soon be dying for these spiritual realities too.

Jesus was constrained in a crowd. Jesus was opposed in community. Jesus lived destined for a cross. And God the Son, Jesus, was content with the role his Father had given him.

I trust we will get beyond the tinsel to the Trinity this Christmas.

Christians must get beyond this world’s Christmas magic to the Word’s Christmas mystery.

¹³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP) 1991, p.117.

Join with more than your immediate human family by considering: “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God”.¹⁴

There is a plurality of persons in God himself. Jesus can be with God *and* be God. On earth Jesus gave up some status and privilege of heaven, but he never for one moment ceased being God. The miracle of Christmas is that the eternal God became flesh (John 1:14), the fulness of God in a man.

People who saw Jesus saw the glory of God.

But it was not quite what they had expected!

6. Jesus’ prayer for “glory” is a prayer for the cross. “AND NOW, FATHER, GLORIFY ME in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began”, John 17:5.

What is this “glory”?

John has grasped this truth and he has built towards it all the while he is writing his gospel.

- “Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified””, John 12:23
- “... it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name”, John 12:27,28
- “... the time had come for him to leave this world”, John 13:1

¹⁴ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Leicester: IVP) 1994, p.226.

- And in the immediate context of John 17:5 that we are exploring:
“Father the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you”, John 17:1.

What is this glory? This prayer of Jesus was answered a few days later.

Spikes were hammered through his hands and his feet. A thorn crown was rammed down upon his head.

The entire sin of humankind, which had not contaminated Jesus before, was loaded on to him as he was dying on a wooden Roman cross.

God was dying as a man in order to make it possible for any sinful person to reach his own heavenly presence. Glory is God’s word for Calvary.

Jesus said, “I have come to die, and now it is time”.

Jesus was almost universally unrecognised and rejected, (“his own did not receive him”, John 1:11). Even in our generation on Christmas days Jesus will not be given a thought by the majority of people.

Yet **SOME PEOPLE ARE BEING GIVEN THE RIGHT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD!**

John 1:12,13 “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God”.

Are you born of God? John tells us simply to receive Jesus into our lives.

The opening of ourselves up to Jesus, and to all of his will for us, will genuinely revolutionise every one of us who truly does so.

The real Jesus of the Christian Christmas celebration *will be* at the centre of every born-again Christian's heart during this Christmas season – and at all other times for that matter too!

Make sure the right Jesus is your foundation for life this Christmas.

Make sure the right Jesus is leading your daily life.

And when you are wished by others, “a happy Christmas”, reply,

“Now why don't we talk for a moment about who this baby Jesus really was?”

by Colin Salter.

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