

Christ the Eternal Word

John 1:1-3

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Are you aware many of our mental images about Christmas come from medieval art, Christmas cards, or Christmas carols? Speaking of Christmas carols, sometimes it's challenging for kids to sing the lyrics correctly.

- For example, in "Joy to the World," instead of singing, "*and makes the nations prove,*" some children declare: "*and makes the nations prudes.*"
- In the place of "*the cattle are lowing,*" some kids prefer: "*the cattle are glowing.*"
- Instead of "*boughs of holly,*" a few have been known to belt out these words, "*Deck the halls with Buddy Holly.*"

Speaking of kids and Christmas, you won't want to miss next weekend as our EdgeKids Christmas Choir will be singing Christmas music in all three services.

Let me give a warning as I begin: I'm going to walk through a list of ten common myths about Christmas, and you may experience some push back because some of us don't have the correct lyrics of the first Christmas narrative. Make sure you have your Bible handy so you can compare what is cultural to what is truly Christmas.

Did I mention you may push back on what I'm calling, "Merry Mythmas."

1. There's no evidence Mary rode on a donkey to Bethlehem. Luke 2:4-5 only says Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, not how they got there.

2. There's no record of the innkeeper saying anything in the Christmas story. In fact, he's not even mentioned in the Bible. Luke 2:7 simply says, "*there was no place for them in the inn.*"

3. We don't know the exact day of Jesus' birth. It's more likely He was born in the spring or fall, though it's totally fine we recognize His birth on December 25.

4. The ox and the lamb didn't keep time while the little drummer boy drummed on his drum. Matthew 2:11 does say the wisemen "*fell down and*

worshipped” the Christ child and gave him gifts, so perhaps the drummer boy was just following their lead by offering his drum solo to Jesus.

5. Jesus was not born in a wooden crib. Luke 2:7 says Jesus was *“laid in a manger,”* which was a stone feeding trough. BTW, this may mean animals were present, but the Bible doesn’t say.

6. Even though one of our carols declares, “no crying He makes,” it’s likely Jesus did cry since He later wept when Lazarus died (John 11:35). In addition, Hebrews 2:17 says, *“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”*

7. The Bible doesn’t say, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” Luke 2:13 indicates the angels were *“praising God and saying…”* but there’s no indication they were singing.

8. The Bible never says there were three wiseman. Matthew 2:11 does mention three gifts which were given. Sorry, the Bible doesn’t say they came on camels either. Oh, and the Bible never records them singing, *“We Three kings from Orient Are…”* They were *magi*, probably Persians, men who likely belonged to the group described in Daniel 2:2: *“magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers.”* As the context indicates, part of their focus involved astrology and astronomy. Our English word *magic* comes from the same word used to describe these pagan seekers.

9. Speaking of the wisemen, they did not arrive the night of Jesus’ birth, but up to two years later. Now that messes up our manger scenes, doesn’t it? Matthew 2:11 indicates they went *“into the house”* and saw the *“child,”* which is the word for toddler.

10. Speaking of manger scenes, the Bible doesn’t state there was a star over the place where Jesus was born. Matthew 2:2, 9-10 indicates the star caused the wisemen to head out on a journey and when they got closer, the star guided them to the *“house”* where Jesus was.

There’s one more myth we must address at the start of the Christmas season: *Many believe that Jesus Christ got His start in Bethlehem.*

As we will see, because He is the Son of God and God the Son, Jesus Christ has always existed. Unfortunately, many today know very little of the glory of Jesus both before and after his birth.

Let's make sure we get the facts straight about the Christmas narrative by reading the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke. These two gospels give us insight into the birth of Jesus and provide much of what we know about the first Christmas. While the Gospel of Mark focuses on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Gospel of John actually begins much earlier than even the accounts of Matthew and Luke.

Matthew and Luke give us the details surrounding the birth of Jesus while John reflects on the doctrinal significance and the identity of Immanuel. Luke gives us timestamps – *“in those days”* and *“in that region,”* while John's approach is more cosmic and eternal – *“in the beginning.”*

John's gospel is not so much biographical as it is theological, recording seven “I am” statements and seven miracles to show that Jesus is the divine Son of God in whom we should believe. His purpose is spelled out in [John 20:31](#): ***“But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”***

These first 18 verses contain stunning truth that should give us a sense of wonder which leads to worship. Augustine said, *“It is beyond the power of man to speak as John does in his prologue.”* Calvin commented about these opening verses, *“...it says more than our minds can take in.”*

Let's consider these words about the Word worshipfully, humbly, and with a sense of awe and wonder. Let's pause, ponder, and praise Him for who He is. As one author captured it, *“Rather than focusing on bringing Jesus down to earth, John wants to take us up with him to heaven, to a time when there was no creation, no humanity, no animals, not even angels, a time when Jesus, the Word, co-existent with God in perfect love and unity of purpose.”*

Here's our main idea: *Jesus had His birth in Bethlehem, but not His beginning, because He has always been.* Listen to [John 1:1-3](#): ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.”***

John takes us back to the beginning, to show us that Jesus had no beginning. He goes behind creation to show that the baby in the feeding trough was the Creator of the world. He doesn't meander but gets right to the point so there is no uncertainty about the magnificence and majesty of Jesus.

1. Jesus is eternally God. John begins in a stunning way in the first phrase of verse 1: ***“In the beginning was the Word...”*** These first words are identical in Greek to the first two words in Genesis: ***“In the beginning God...”*** What follows in Genesis is a statement about God and what comes next in John is a declaration about the Word, showing that Jesus is God.

In Genesis, God created by declaring these words eight times: ***“And God said...”*** and John explains that Jesus Himself is that Word of God. Moulton writes, *“In Genesis 1, the historian starts from the beginning and comes downward, thus keeping us in the course of time. Here John starts from the same point, but goes upward, thus taking us into eternity preceding time.”*

Jesus is *before* the beginning of time as He said in John 8:58: ***“Before Abraham was born, I am.”*** He is eternal because He has always and absolutely existed before time itself. 2 Timothy 1:9 says God gave us grace ***“in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”***

The word ***“beginning”*** speaks of *“authority, rule, head, and cause.”* Jude 25 captures this well: ***“To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”***

Amazingly, as Micah 5:2 prophesied, the Messiah would not only be born in Bethlehem, but He would also be the one ***“whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days.”*** My mind also goes to Daniel 7:13: ***“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.”*** Hebrews 13:8 picks up on this: ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”***

The word ***“word”*** is the Greek word *“logos,”* which means, *“the act of speaking and the thing spoken.”* One reformer called this the *“speech of God,”* while a contemporary commentator remarked, *“This verse is the most compact and pulsating theological statement in all of Scripture.”* This is made clear if you drop down to John 1:14, where we see the Word is Jesus. This is the preaching text for our four Christmas Eve services (Saturday at 5pm; Sunday at 9am, 10:45am, and

1pm): ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”***

In the Old Testament, *logos* communicated the creative power of God and was a reference to God. Psalm 33:6: ***“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.”*** In Greek culture, *logos* was more of a philosophical principle than a power. It was what gave meaning to all things, embodying thought, wisdom, and rationality.

John was using a term everyone was familiar with and yet he expanded and transcended its meaning. Since a word is an audible expression of a thought, as the Word, Jesus has revealed what goes on in the mind of God. He is the bridge between God and us. One pastor captured it well: *“John goes beyond the familiar concept of Logos that his Jewish and Gentile readers would have had and presents Jesus Christ as a personal being, fully divine, yet fully human.”*

There are several passages in the Old Testament which speak of the preincarnate Christ. Also called *“Christophanies,”* we can see how Jesus made appearances before taking on flesh in Bethlehem. According to 1 Corinthians 10:4, Jesus led the Israelites in the wilderness: ***“And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”***

The clearest example of a Christophany is found in Daniel 3:24-25: ***“Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, ‘Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?’ They answered and said to the king, ‘True, O king.’ He answered and said, ‘But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”***

Jesus had His birth in Bethlehem, but not His beginning, because He has always been.

2. Jesus is equally God. The next phrase clearly states that Jesus and the Father have always been together and yet are distinct from one another: ***“...and the Word was with God...”*** Instead of using the common word ***“with,”*** to indicate being near or close, John used a much stronger word which means, *“towards God”* or *“face to face.”* We see a hint of this in Genesis 1:26 with the use of plural pronouns: ***“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”***

Jesus, as the Son of God, has always been face to face with God the Father as we see in John 17:5: ***“And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”***

To reinforce His eternal preexistence, John restated and reinforced this truth in verse 2: ***“He was in the beginning with God.”*** The pronoun ***“He”*** shows we are not saved by a principle or power, but by a personal Savior.

As we were reminded in “Our Holy Helper” series, we worship a triune God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, distinct in roles and yet co-eternal and co-equal.

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3. Jesus is essentially God. Verse 1 concludes: ***“...and the Word was God.”*** This can’t be any clearer. In the original language, it is even stronger because the word ***“God”*** is in the emphatic position. The Greeks would put the word they wanted to emphasize first in the sentence, so it reads this way, ***“God was the Word!”*** John could not have said it more emphatically.

Jesus Himself said in John 10:30: ***“I and the Father are one.”*** A word is composed of letters and Jesus Christ declares He is the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet in Revelation 1:8: ***“I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*** According to Hebrews 1:1-2, Jesus is God’s *last* word to mankind: ***“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”***

John delivered weighty doctrine with simple words to show that Jesus is God. As one pastor says, ***“We fall down with Thomas before Jesus in John 20:28 and confess with joy and wonder, ‘My Lord and my God!’”***

Jesus had His birth in Bethlehem, but not His beginning, because He has always been.

4. Jesus made everything. Let’s worship as we learn how the world was created through the Word. In verse 3, this is stated both positively: ***“All things were made***

through Him...” and negatively: “...and without Him was not any thing made that was made.”

The phrase “*all things*” is a categorically absolute statement. The phrase “*through Him*” reminds us Jesus Christ is the agent of creation as we see in 1 Corinthians 8:6: “*There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*”

Apart from Christ, there “*was not anything made that was made.*” Colossians 1:16-17 says, “*For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*” Jesus is the Creator of creation and the glue of the galaxies.

Since Christ made everything, and without Him was not anything made that was made, it follows that Christ was not made. When you consider He is the Creator of the universe, the birth of Jesus as a baby is even more amazing. One pastor says it well:

“The Creator of creation humbled Himself and became a creature in Creation...Jesus, who was the agent of Creation, stepped out of eternity, laid aside His glory and entered this world as a human baby...that’s why this season is not about trees and tinsel; packages and parties; bows and boxes, or meals and mistletoe. This season is about Him!”

One reason we’re spending time in this passage is to firm up our Christology (doctrine of Christ) as a church. According to the State of Theology Survey, which we took this past summer, way too many of us believe, “*Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.*”

While nearly 60% answered correctly, according to the survey, one-third of us believe Jesus was a created being and 8% are not sure. Brothers and sisters, as John 1:1-3 makes clear, Jesus was not created because He is the Creator: *Jesus had His birth in Bethlehem, but not His beginning, because He has always been.*

While we are not known as a church that recites creeds, I think it’s appropriate at this point to affirm the statement of faith known as the Nicene Creed (we sang the Apostle’s Creed last weekend). Listen carefully to the precise wording which

addressed the heresy of Arianism, which was popular in the 4th Century. This false teaching denies the deity of Christ and is still followed by Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons today, who believe Jesus was a created being.

*We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.*

*And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets...Amen.*

Even though I took a potshot at "Hark, The Herald Angels Sing," the last verse does get it's doctrine right. Let's worship as we hear these words:

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings
Ris'n with healing in His wings*

*Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth*

Without His birth there wouldn't be a second birth for us. Listen to what Matthew 1:21 says: ***“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because He will save his people from their sins.”*** (Matthew 1:21)

And that's no myth.

Communion

As we prepare for communion, listen to how Revelation 19:13-16 describes Jesus as the Word who must be worshipped: ***“He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”***