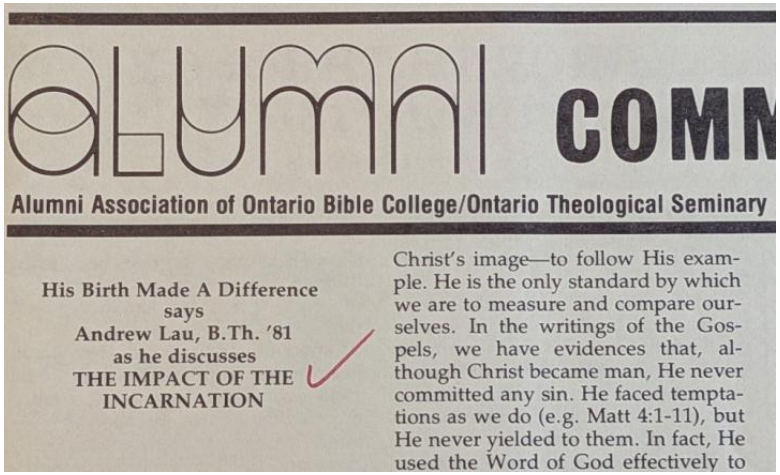
Christmas in the Gospels (Jn. 1:1-18)

Introduction:

Recently I have been reflecting on what might be the principal biblical truth that shapes my life and ministry over the years.


ALUMNI COMM

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His Birth Made A Difference
says
Andrew Lau, B.Th. '81
as he discusses
THE IMPACT OF THE
INCARNATION

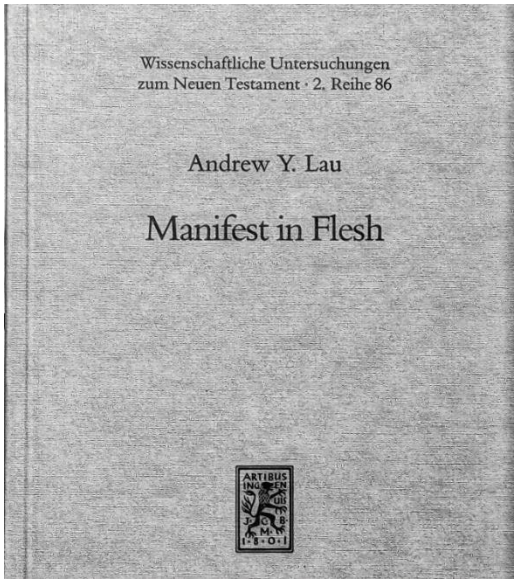
Christ's image—to follow His example. He is the only standard by which we are to measure and compare ourselves. In the writings of the Gospels, we have evidences that, although Christ became man, He never committed any sin. He faced temptations as we do (e.g. Matt 4:1-11), but He never yielded to them. In fact, He used the Word of God effectively to

After my graduation from Ontario Bible College (now Tyndale University) in 1981, a condensed version of a major paper I wrote, "**The Impact of the Incarnation**," was published in the college/seminary magazine, Evangelical Recorder.



Dr. Klaus Bockmuehl

When I was doing my master at Regent College, my theological development was very much influenced by Dr. Bockmuehl with whom I took a few courses; one of them was "The Doctrine of God" that underlines the saving action of God, i.e., the great "I AM" who "hears the cries of His people, reveals Himself, and **comes down to save**."



In 1996 my book based on my post-graduate research in the University of Aberdeen was published in an academic series - *Manifest in Flesh* focuses on a unique understanding of Christ's saving work in the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) through the lens of "Epiphany" (God-in-flesh appearing/re-appearing on earth).

As you can see the biblical theme of God-becoming-man, i.e., the revelation of God and His redemptive acts in the incarnation, is the unifying thread that runs through my theological formation and serves as the biblical foundation of life and ministry.

This morning we are concluding the series with Christmas in the Gospel of John, focusing on the Incarnation in Jn. 1:1-18. So this is a pretty personal message and, hopefully, it'd be encouraging as well as challenging for you.

In the beginning was ***the Word***, and ***the Word*** was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God ***in the beginning***. ***Through him all things were made***; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (Jn. 1:1-5 NIV)

John deepens our understanding of what we read from Matthew and Luke about the birth of Jesus.

John wants us to know that there is so much more than meets the eye; he pulls back the heavenly curtains so we can see what's behind the earthly scenes.[1]

John is not pitting his portrait against Matthew or Luke, but "punches a hole between the eternal and the temporal"[2] and begins the story of Jesus with "in the beginning"- a clear echo of Gen. 1:1.

The arrival of this Christ-child who lays helplessly in Mary's arms transcends the humble birth of a baby in a small Jewish village.

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[1] Andreas J.; Stewart, Alexander. The First Days of Jesus (p. 203). Crossway. Kindle Edition. E.g., about genealogies, Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zachariah, the virgin-born baby and the manger, the cruelty of King Herod, the angels and the shepherds in the fields, the visit of magi, and the family's escape to Egypt.

[2] Cf. Tim Keller's phrase.

In Greek philosophy, the word, logos, refers to the rational principle that ordered the universe.

In the Old Testament, it points to God's creative and revelatory speech – God's word is the dynamic force of His will.[3]

So John is saying that the Word already existed in eternity with God the Father, co-equal with God, yet distinct.

The baby in the manger is in fact the Lord of the entire universe, the Maker of all things, and the Lord of all creation.[4]

We catch a glimpse of God's eternal purpose and the progressive outworking of His saving plans from the beginning.

This Word is not an idea or a force, but a Person who is himself God active at creation[5] and encompasses the entire life and ministry of Jesus.[6]

[3] William F. Cook III, A Savior Is Born: From Heaven's Throne to Bethlehem's Manger, p. 3; Solberg, R. L. . Full of Grace and Truth: The Biblical Roots of Christmas (p. 70). Boyle & Co., Publishing. Kindle Edition. See also Gerald L. Borchert, John 1-11, pp. 105-106

[4] Cf. Andreas J.; Stewart, Alexander. The First Days of Jesus (p. 206). Crossway. Kindle Edition. "The light's coming into the world indeed has global implications and far-reaching consequences that far transcend the scope of the Jewish people."

[5] Solberg, R. L. . Full of Grace and Truth: The Biblical Roots of Christmas (p. 70). Boyle & Co., Publishing. Kindle Edition. See also Andreas J.; Stewart, Alexander. The First Days of Jesus (p. 198). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

[6] Cf. Andreas J. Kòstenberger, John, p.25.

The Word-became-flesh is not a divine afterthought—it's God's decisive answer to the ache of a fallen world.[7]

Chad Bird has succinctly articulated the kernel of truth of John's poetic words in 1:1-18:

In the beginning, God created all things through his Word. In the incarnation, God restored all things through his Word.[8]

Have you ever ponder this question,

"**What's the heartbeat and the driving force of the Eternal Word to leave the dominion of pure light and descend into the realm of darkness?**"

The pagan deities in the Greco-Roman world like **Zeus/Jupiter** (sky/king), **Poseidon/Neptune** (sea), and **Ares/Mars** (war) wouldn't want to reside in the earthly, human realms; they crave for power, might, and domination.

Common folks live in fear and always want to appease them with rituals and sacrifices to gain favours.

But clearly this is not the way of the Eternal Word:

[7] Solberg, R. L. . Full of Grace and Truth: The Biblical Roots of Christmas (p. 71). Boyle & Co., Publishing. Kindle Edition. Cf. Rom. 5:6; Gal. 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2-3.

[8] Chad Bird, https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=chad%20bird.
Cf. "The Eternal Logos, the Infinite Idea, the Logic of Love, the Divine Wisdom, God's Understanding of God's Self, assumed human nature to heal human nature." ("The Anticipated Christ: A Journey Through Advent and Christmas" by Brian Zahnd.)

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and ***though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him*** … ***his own did not receive him*** … We have seen his ***glory***, the ***glory*** of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, ***full of grace and truth***. (Jn. 1:9-11, 14 NIV)

The Word has deliberately made a decision in eternity past to step into His creation and to reveal His plan to heal all brokenness, to shine light in darkness, and to show the way of life by grace and truth.

In fact, contrary to contemporary cultural yearning for power and glory, in the Gospel of John the ultimate manifestation "Shekinah glory" (the divine presence) of the Word is the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.[9]

This grand story of how the eternal God-in-descent steps in the world to reconcile all things underscores "a sacrifice of astounding magnitude"[10] and presents us with this daily challenge in whatever we think, say, or do:

Give up our personal rights to live out a life-enriching generosity for the flourishing of others.[11]

I love what R.L. Solberg has eloquently written:

The Nativity is not the end of a story—it's the beginning of a mission ... The manger was a launching point. The birth of Jesus marked the divine invasion of a broken world, the opening act in the drama of rescue.[12]

The Creator God did not just observe from a distance – it's God moving in, putting some skin on, up close and personal. The highest became the lowest.

The One whom angels adored descended to the dust, a perfect image-bearer ("eikon") to make visible the invisible Father, taking the form of a servant.[13]

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us … ***No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son***, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, ***has made him known***. (Jn. 1:14, 18 NIV)

With the phrase "in the beginning" as direct reference to Gene. 1, we are talking about "a back-to-the-future" like journey, i.e., a Genesis 2.0.

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[9] Cf. Jn. 3:14-15; 7:29; 12:16, 32-33, 41; 13:31-32; 16:16-17:5

[10] Andreas J. Köstenberger, Alexander Stewart, Justin Taylor, The First Days of Jesus: The Story of the Incarnation, p. 194.

[11] Paul echoes the weight of glory and humility of the baby in Bethlehem: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9 NIV)

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6-8 NIV)

[12] Solberg, R. L. . Full of Grace and Truth: The Biblical Roots of Christmas (p. 88). Boyle & Co., Publishing. Kindle Edition.

[13] Cf. Solberg, R. L. . Full of Grace and Truth: The Biblical Roots of Christmas (pp. 72, 73). Boyle & Co., Publishing. Kindle Edition.

The image-maker made Himself into the image-bearer like Adam, the Creator becomes a creature!

Chad Bird describes the baby Jesus in these words:

"a fellow human being who spent forty weeks in utero, learned how to crawl then walk, suffered through puberty, and eventually faced the firing squad of Roman crucifiers."[14]

Jesus - the perfect image of the invisible God and in whom God's fullness dwells[15] - becomes the new Adam and accomplishes what the old Adam failed to do and displays a life fully lived in obedience and righteousness,[16] a life overflowing with grace and truth.

This one and only Son defines perfectly who God is[17] and shows how one can receive him and believe in his name, obtaining the right to become children who regain the glory of God as transformed image-bearers — children born not of natural descent but born of God.[18]

The Eternal Word took on flesh and "tented" among us as the tabernacle/temple of God with glory became the highest point of human history:

"***when the set time had fully come***, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.[19]

God is accessible and approachable; but the dark, fallen world needs spiritual rebirth that can be given by the Word-became-flesh.

So the Eternal Word pitches a tent amongst humans so the vital connection made between God's infinite grace and the finite human deficiency.

Jn. 1:14 is considered "the most important verse in the Bible"[20] and presents yet another challenge to us:

Live life to the fullest by doing God's will and imaging the great "I AM" in words and in deeds.

[14] "The Hebrew Meaning of Emmanuel," https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=chad%20bird.
[15] Cf. Col. 1:15-16, 19.
[16] Cf. Jn. 1:12; Rom. 5:12-21; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 17-19; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 2 Tim. 1:9-10.
[17] "All ideas and images of God must surrender to the supreme revelation of God as seen in Jesus Christ. Christ alone is the perfect definition of who God is. The conclusion we are to draw from John's theopoetics at the beginning of the fourth Gospel is this: God is like Jesus. God has always been like Jesus. There has never been a time when God wasn't like Jesus. We haven't always known this, but now we do." ("The Anticipated Christ: A Journey Through Advent and Christmas" by Brian Zahnd.)

[18] Gary M. Burge, John, p. 64.
[19] Cf. "You see, ***at just the right time***, when we were still powerless … ***God demonstrates his own love for us*** …" (Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 5:6, 8 NIV).
[20] Gary M. BURGE, John, p. 59.

Cf. Mary did you know?

Mary, did you know
That your baby boy
Would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know
That your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This Child that you delivered
Will soon deliver you.

Did you know
That your baby boy
Has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little baby
You've kissed the face of God?

Mary, did you know
That your baby boy Is the Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know
That your baby boy
Will one day rule the nations?
Did you know
That your baby boy
Was heaven's perfect Lamb?
And the sleeping Child you're holdin'
Is the Great I Am!

Oh, Mary, did you know?[21]
[Turn to the ones sitting beside you and ask, "Did you know?"]

By taking on human flesh Jesus experiences human weakness and limitations yet without sin,[22] enabling him to be compassionate toward those who are frail, helpless, and vulnerable; He crosses socio-economic boundaries and breaks religious and ethnic barriers.[23]

> Jesus feeds the 5000 to show he is the only one who can satisfy spiritual hunger – "I AM the bread of life." (Jn. 6:35)
>
> Jesus restores physical sight of the man born blind to prove he is the source of spiritual truth and vision – "I AM the light of the world." (Jn. 8:12)
>
> Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave and proves he has authority over death and life – "I AM the resurrection and life."(Jn. 11:25)

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[21] **Lyrics:** Mark Lowry (1984). **Music:** Buddy Greene (1991)
[22] Cf. Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15. See also, Jey J. Kanagaraj, John (New Covenant Commentary Series), p. 6.
[23] For examples, talking with Nicodemus in Jn. 3; the Samaritan woman and healing an official son in Jn.4; healing an invalid in Jn. 5; debating with the religious leaders and dealing with the woman caught in adultery in Jn. 8-9; relating to Greek philosophers in Jn. 12.

Jesus provides security, contentment, and freedom – "I AM the gate." (Jn. 10:7).

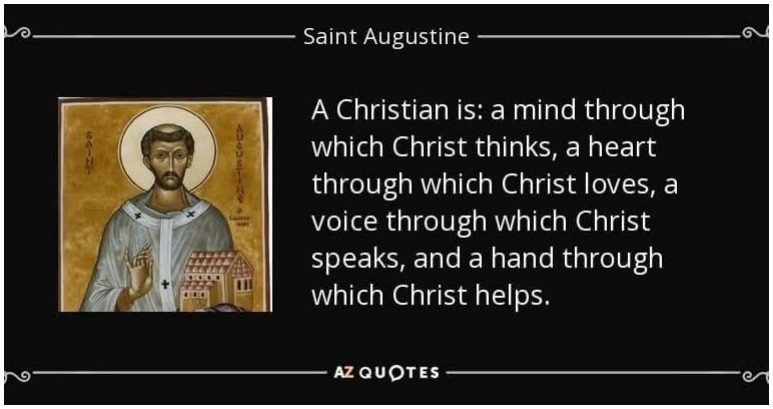
Jesus is the one who leads, knows, and dies for his sheep – "I AM the good Shepherd." (Jn. 10:11)

Jesus is the only true path to a life with God the Father – "I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (Jn. 14:6)

Jesus is the source of all spiritual nourishment and fruitfulness – "I AM the true vine." (Jn. 15:1)

Jesus shows us how to live through all His earthly days and models "grace and truth" for us to follow.

Jesus teaches the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (Jn. 20:21 NIV) The Christian walk is a missionary journey.



The critical issue for our daily walk with Jesus is not whether we can change the world but whether the world has been changed in Christ through our lifestyle, i.e., the Word-became-flesh has shaped us along the same lines as the life of his Son, the people we were designed to be from the very beginning.

Conclusion:

Follow Jesus' God-became-flesh path:

Make our words and works, our needs and deeds

an index to God's will and promises.