

# TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

John 1:1-18

Fourth Wednesday in Lent (Series B)

March , 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 1, verses 1 through 18. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 1, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

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

<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ") <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Who is Jesus? Tonight we consider the topic of Jesus' nature. So, at least for tonight, the focus isn't so much on what he did, though we can't really avoid that. But we'll focus on his nature. What sort of being is he? The next couple of Wednesdays we'll consider his works, especially his death, resurrection, ascension, and return.

Last week we considered those words in the creed concerning God the Father: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Tonight we turn to the Son, especially these words, "And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." Who is Jesus? He is the only Son of God the Father. But he was also born of a woman. So he is true God and true man.

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If ever there was a hill worth dying on, this is it. And many Christians have died on this hill. The big thing that offended the Roman Empire about Christianity was our claim that Jesus is

God. The earliest Christian creed was probably this very short statement: “Jesus is Lord.” And when the first Christians confessed this, they didn’t merely mean that Jesus is their boss. But by “Lord,” they meant that he is God. It meant that Jesus is the Yahweh we read about in the Old Testament. He had come down in the flesh of Jesus Christ. This offended the Jews, or at least the ones who refused to accept that Jesus is Lord. But it also offended the Romans, especially the Caesars, because in the Roman Empire, the Caesars were not simply kings or emperors, but the Romans held the Caesars to be gods. So it offended them to have a rival god in human flesh. For a while the Romans tolerated the Jews. I suppose one of the reasons was because, until Jesus, the Hebrew God stayed up in heaven. But when Christians started claiming that Jesus is God on earth, that felt like a threat to the Caesars. And it further offended them that the first Christians did not say that Jesus is *a* lord, as if he can be one of many. But they confessed, “Jesus is Lord.” That is, there is no other lord. Jesus cannot be some lesser lord under Caesar. He is *the* Lord. There is no other. The Caesars took offense to this, and by the end of the First Century, they were killing Christians. And this was the reason why: they confessed that the man, Jesus Christ, is Lord. He is true God and true man.

So they killed the apostles, unless someone else got to them first. And they began a systematic persecution of Christians, pastors especially, but also lay people. Some were crucified. Some were beheaded. Many were burned at the stake. They would ask them to recant their confession that Jesus is Lord. And when they would not, they would light the fire. For the first Christians, this was their hill to die on.

I suppose there are many things in Christian doctrine worth dying for. Every word of the Bible is worth more than I am. But this is at the top of the list. Jesus is true God and true man. If this is not true, not only is Jesus a liar, but the atonement wouldn’t work. Jesus is true God and true man.

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Luther summarizes this doctrine in the *Small Catechism*: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.”

Jesus has two natures. First he has a divine nature. That is, he is God. He is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. We talked about this a few weeks ago regarding the Trinity. Jesus is eternal. He always has been. He was not created by the Father. He was not born. He just is. For all eternity, he is. That’s the nature of being God. And if Jesus is the Son of God, then he must have the same nature as God. We think of sons as having a beginning, because, for created beings like humans, you become a son or daughter by being conceived and born. That’s how it is for humans and for all created beings. We have a beginning. But the nature of God is different. God is eternal, so the Son of God is also eternal. If Jesus had a beginning, he would not actually be the Son of God, because he would be a different kind of being. To be the Son of God means that he has the same nature as his Father. That nature is eternal and infinite.

So we do not say that the Son is born or created. Instead, we say that he is begotten of the Father. And I’ve always struggled to define the word “begotten.” I suppose the difficulty is that there’s nothing like it in creation. We simply mean that the Son of God is. He has no beginning. His existence is dependent on the Father, but there is no point in time when the Son begins to exist. Part of the reason for that, I suppose, is that before creation, there is no time. And God is not bound by time. It’s not like he moves along the timeline like we do. But he sees it all and rules over it all at once. God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are beyond time. Our brains might

go in all sorts of directions from there. But we'll just keep it here: the Son of God has no beginning. He just is.

But Jesus is also true Man. And, according to his human nature, he does have a beginning. He was born of the Virgin Mary. This means that he is true man, but also different from the rest of us in the sense that he was born without sin. This is why the virgin birth matters. We inherit original sin from Adam, not Eve. Even though Eve also sinned, the Bible speaks of sin being passed down from Adam (Rom. 5:12-14). If you want to think of it like genetics, original sin is a trait passed down from fathers to their children. Mothers are also infected with original sin, but it's passed down by fathers. Now I don't know if there's actually anything genetic to it, but it is spiritual. So instead of being conceived with the help of a man, Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. So he is true man, and he is born under the Law, but without sin.

These are the two natures of Christ. He is true God and true man. We might think, then, that he is a mixture or a hybrid, part God and part man, like Hercules. But he's not. He is true God and true man. He is fully God and fully man. He is 100% God and 100% man. If he were a hybrid, he wouldn't actually be God, nor would he be man. He would be something else entirely. And something else cannot save us. In order to save us, he must be true God and true man.

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This scripture from John 1 is one of the primary passages that teaches who Jesus is. I should note, however, that this passage does not stand alone as the proof of who Jesus is. It's not just about what the apostle John says about Jesus. This passage is merely the introduction to the book. It introduces the doctrine of who Jesus is, and then the rest of the book is filled with the historical proofs to verify it. Those proofs consist of Jesus' miraculous signs, as well as his own statements concerning himself. These are the proofs of what John says in the introduction: in short, that Jesus is true God and true man. And there are other passages of Scripture that teach the same thing (e.g., Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4).

Most false teachings concerning Jesus have slid into the ditch on one side or the other. A few of the earlier heresies affirmed that Jesus is true God, but denied that he was fully human. But the majority of heresies, especially the ones that continue today, recognize that Jesus is a human being, but they take something away from his divinity. Most of them don't completely deny Jesus' divinity, but they make him out to be a lesser kind of God than God the Father. They might say that Jesus lived such a great life that God adopted Jesus as his Son. Others might think of Jesus as being the first and greatest being that God the Father created. This sounds a bit better, but it still leaves Jesus as some kind of lesser God. I suppose the primary question regarding the divinity of Jesus is this: "When did Jesus become God?"

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John answers this question by opening his Gospel with the very familiar words, "In the beginning" (1:1). What do those words remind us of? How about, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1)? When John says, "In the beginning," he is drawing our attention back to creation, to Genesis.

Now imagine we are reading the Gospel of John for the very first time. When we hear the words, "In the beginning," we might expect John to tell us a genesis story, an origin story. And if we know beforehand that John is writing about Jesus, we might expect him to tell us about the beginning of the Son of God. We might expect him to say something like, "In the beginning God created his Son." But John doesn't do that. Matthew and Luke, in their Christmas stories, tell us how the Son of God became man. Now we expect John to tell us the story of how he became God, but he doesn't. He can't. Instead, he writes, "In the beginning was the Word." And "Word,"

with a capital “W,” refers to *Jesus*; we see that in verse 14. John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). John can’t tell us how Jesus *became* God, or how the Son of God was *created*, because he did not *become* God, and he was not *created*. When John talks about how the Son of God became *man*, he can tell us. He says, “The Word *became* flesh” (1:14). But he doesn’t say anything about the Word *becoming* God. He simply says, “And the Word *was* God.”

So notice the difference between the words “became” and “was.” “Became” has a definite historical starting point. Sometime around 5 to 2 BC, “The Word *became* flesh.” But the word “was” is timeless. There is no starting point. The eternal Word did not *become* God. “The Word, with a capital “W,” *was* God.” He just *was*. The Word was not created. The Son of God has always been. He is the eternal Word.

Now if we expected John to tell us how Jesus was created, we are in for another surprise. Not only was he not created, he is, himself, the Creator! “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (1:2-3). Jesus cannot be a created being, because nothing has ever been created without him. He is the Word by which the Father created all things.

In the creed we confess that we “believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” We talked about that last week. But the Father did not work alone in creation. “In the beginning, God”—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—“God created the heavens and the earth.” God the Father is the primary person responsible for creation, but he was not alone; he did the creating through the Son. The Son is the eternal Word through whom heaven and earth were created.

So John calls him “the Word.” And he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus is true God. Then in verse 14, John says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” So Jesus is also true man.

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Doctrine is not trivial. The things God reveals about himself matter. He doesn’t reveal this stuff to us just because it’s interesting. I suppose there are an infinite number of things about God that are interesting. But he has revealed certain things about himself because they matter for our eternal salvation. It matters that Jesus is true God and true man because, in order for all his works—especially his death on the cross—but in order for all his works to be credited to us, he must do them as true God and true man. In order for his sacrifice to be valuable enough to cover all of our sins, he must be more than a mere man.

People ask about this sometimes. *How could Jesus pay for all the sins of the world when he’s just one man? One man should only be able to take the place for one other person.* But Jesus is more than a man. He is also true God, and the value of God is infinite.

A mere man is not valuable enough to cover more than one man’s sins. To cover all the sins of the world, he must be true God. And in order to withstand the temptation of the devil, he must be stronger than the first man, who failed. He must even be stronger than the devil. In order to accomplish all that he did, he must be true God. But, and here’s the other side of it, in order to represent all of humanity, he must also be true man. In short, he must have the strength and value of God but the blood of a man.

He is fully God, and he is fully man. Everything he does, he does it as both God and man. He always has been God, and he always will be. But at a certain point in history, somewhere between 5 and 2 BC, the Son of God became man and was called Jesus. He was born as true God and true man. He lived as true God and true man. He suffered and died as true God and true man.

## TRUE GOD; TRUE MAN (John 1:1-18)

He rose from the dead as true God and true man. He entered into heaven as true God and true man. And he lives forever as true God and true man.

He has taken on our nature in order to restore the image of God to us. He took on our sin to suffer with it and die with it in order to remove it from us. He rose from the dead as a man in order to open the resurrection to all mankind. And he ascended into heaven, and continues to live in heaven, as a man, to open heaven to all mankind. From the time of his conception, through the rest of eternity, everything he does, he does it as true God and true man, and he does it for our sake. Jesus Christ, true God, and also true man, is our Lord. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.