

Jesus: Who?

Part I of V

“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

1 Corinthians 2:2

“This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:17; 17:5

The One Thing

THERE'S A POPULAR QUOTE from **John McArthur** about counterfeits. **“Federal agents don't learn to spot counterfeit money by studying the counterfeits. They study genuine bills until they master the look of the real thing. Then when**

they see the bogus money they recognize it.”¹ In an old blog post dedicated to putting this to the test, **Tim Challies** wondered if it was actually true. So, he called up the Bank of Canada and went and got his own personal lesson.² Turns out, Mac is right. They taught him four techniques, all involving a genuine bill. They are summarized by “**touch, tilt, look through, look at.**”

First, you **touch** the bill to see if it has the right texture, the right weight, the right width, the right feel. Next, you **tilt** it to spot the holographic stripe that is only detectable at that angle. Then, you hold the bill up to the light and **look through** it to find the ghost-like watermark of the main portrait. Finally, you **look at** the bill to detect certain fine-line printing and background colors that belong to that particular bill. In other words, when you get to know the real thing, including understanding the very difficult to replicate portions, “**Identifying genuine from fraudulent can be done with great accuracy, even on the basis of only a small amount of training.**”

¹ **John MacArthur**, “All That Glitters ... A Call for Biblical Discernment,” in *Fool’s Gold*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 31-32.

² **Tim Challies**, “Counterfeit Detection (Part 1),” *Challies* (June 27, 2006), <https://www.challies.com/articles/counterfeit-detection-part-1/>.

In a book called *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*, **Matthew Richard** identifies 12 counterfeit Christ's. He calls them The Mascot, The Option among Many, The Good Teacher, The Therapist, The Giver of Bling, The National Patriot, The Social Justice Warrior, The Moral Example, The New Moses, The Mystical Friend, The Feminized, and The Teddy Bear.³ Those are so well-named, they don't really need further explanation.

In the early church, it was much the same. Counterfeits were of major concern, and the churches came together to figure out what to do with views like Jesus being merely human but "adopted" by the Father (**Adoptionism**); Jesus being 2/3 human and 1/3 divine (**Appolarianism**); the view that Jesus was the first created being (**Arianism**); the belief that Jesus only appeared to have a physical body (**Docetism**); the idea that Christ's divinity dominates his humanity (**Eutychianism**); or that Jesus had two natures but only one will (**Monothelitism**); the sharp distinction between the two natures of Christ such that they are not really one person (**Nes-**

³ **Matthew Richard**, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? 12 False Christs* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017).

torianism); the idea that Jesus was never divine (Psilanthropism); the teaching that Christ is really just the Father and the Spirit with no distinct persons (Modalism/Sabellianism); or the view that Jesus is one of three gods (Tritheism).

The fact is, there are many “Jesuses” out there masquerading as the real thing, fooling people like trickster gods into believing a lie, and people happily allow it. This has been happening since the beginning. The Apostle writes, “For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed ... you put up with it readily enough” (2Co 11:4). Clearly, there’s nothing new under the sun.

Not all times and all places are as bad they could be in this way. I’ve seen much change for the worse in this in my own lifetime. And in some ways, we are returning to the wild, wild west of the early church as it regards the person of Christ and so many other things. A time where there is no religious dogma and every man believes what is right in his own eyes. Someone has called it “the heretical imperative”⁴ where “Sheilaism” pervades.

⁴ Peter L. Berger, *Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Doubleday, 1980).

What is Sheilaism? It is a religion named after one Sheila Larson (she actually named it this!) who now famously said, “I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice ... It’s just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other.”⁵ While not mentioning Jesus in particular, this is (as seen a moment ago) the very same thing people do with him. And getting him wrong is at the heart of all other mistakes, misunderstandings, or deliberate twistings or heresies that undermine true religion. Simply put: [he is the key](#).

With all of this looming as background, I want to take five or so weeks and preach a series on it, or rather, [on Him](#). I don’t want to look much at the counterfeits propagated by cults, false religions and, frankly, 100 million or so Sheilas out there. How could I really do that justice anyway? And besides, what would be the positive, pastoral value? Rather, I want us to get to know the real thing, that way you can

⁵ [Robert Bellah](#) and Richard Madsen, *Habits of the Heart* (University of California Press: 1996, 2007), 221.

identify the genuine from the fraudulent even with just a small amount of training.

But as important as such a task can be apologetically speaking, I want to do this for a much more basic reason. I've spent much of the past 15 or so years trying to understand this Person better on a professional level, as a pastor, so that I can present him to you. But really, it hasn't been for professional reasons that I've done it, but personal reasons. I want to know Christ better. And I want you to know him better.

I've never done this in a concentrated series of sermons like I hope to do here. I hope you will benefit from it, even as I pray you will come to see that this really is the purpose of our preaching, of our gathering, and of our being Christians.

I ran across a relevant quote this week. “The secret to Christian living is absolutely basic: Jesus Christ ‘for me’ is the key to my justification, and Jesus Christ ‘in me’ is the key to my growth in grace and Christian progress. *But it is Jesus Christ, from beginning to end*” [emphasis mine].⁶ It sounds like something that you find in the middle of a long opening

⁶ [Eric Alexander](#). I do not know if this was a tweet or in a book or what.

statement to the most messed up church in the NT, a statement that gets to the heart of all the “other things” that can distract us, vie for our affections and attention, or tempt us to stumble in this life. The Apostle Paul said, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1Co 2:2).⁷

For today, I only want to look at the first part of this. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ. Rich Mullins put it this way,

Everybody I know says they need just one thing
And what they really mean is that they need just one thing more ...
Save me from those things that might distract me
Please take them away and purify my heart ...
Who have I in Heaven but You Jesus?
And what better could I hope to find down here on earth? ...
My one thing
You're my one thing
And the pure in heart shall see God⁸

⁷ Next week, when we come to the “what” remember Calvin here: “In adding the word *crucified*, he does not mean that he preached nothing respecting Christ except the cross; but that, with all the abasement of the cross, he nevertheless preached Christ.”⁷

⁸ Rich Mullins, *My One Thing*, Universal Music Publishing Group.

This, then, is the deeper purpose behind this short series of sermons. Not merely that you will learn to recognize Jesus, but that through the study you will come to see that you have before you a treasure worth more than all the gold in the world. So that you can say with the Psalmist, “**Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you**” (**Ps 73:25**); and with the Wise Man, “[You are]⁹ **more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her**” (**Prov 3:15**); and with the Apostle, “**I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**” (**Php 3:8**). *Christ Alone!*

But, so that you can know better what this means when you confess him and shout him from the rooftops, I’m going to delve into looking at him from the five basic “W” questions we have in English: **Who**, **What**, **Where**, **When**, and **Why**. Each question will fill as sermon. My prayer is that by the end you will both know him better and know why you have given or must give everything up in this life for him.

⁹ Technically, it is “she is” and “she” refers to Wisdom, which is Christ.

Jesus: Who?

BELOVED OF THE FATHER

Today we will look at the “Who” question. Who is this Jesus? The answer to this is the necessary beginning for anyone wishing to know why Christians have worshiped him for 2,000 years. But it is also necessary for understanding why his worship goes much farther back in time than that. Indeed, it is necessary for understanding why you must worship him too.

We’ll start with something the heavenly Father says to him, not once, but twice. “*This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). The first time this is said is at Jesus’ baptism, the beginning of his earthly ministry. The second time is at his transfiguration, just a short while before he headed to Jerusalem to see the end of his days in mortal flesh. In other words, these words bookend his ministry and the vast majority of his recorded life. Therefore, it seems to make proper sense to start here. It is obviously important, as it is the only thing the Father directly says anywhere in the Gospels as far as I can tell.

The key phrase is that he is the “beloved Son” of the heavenly Father. This term “beloved” is actually quite fascinating. It’s the well-known word “*agape*” (love). But another form of this word is found in **Genesis 22:2 LXX** where it translates a word (*yachid*) that means “only.” Thus, in Hebrew Isaac is Abraham’s “only son whom you love,” but in the Greek it becomes simply his “beloved son.” And, of course, this is the story where the father is going to a mountain to sacrifice his son to death, one of the most typologically charged stories in all the OT as it foreshadows Jesus. Strangely, when Hebrews quotes this verse, Isaac becomes the “only-begotten” (*monogenes*) son (**Heb 11:17**). In other words, circulating around the word “beloved” are two other ideas of being “one-of-a-kind” and “begotten.”

Of course, in **John 3:16** Jesus is famously called the “only-begotten” Son. But in the second of the four instances John uses that term, he is called “the only-begotten God” (**John 1:18**).¹⁰ Thus, the Apostles understood something

¹⁰ You will note this is how the NAS translates this verse. The ESV is similar with “God” but sees a different root word for *monogenes*, thus it translates it simply as “only God...” Other translations, however, say “only-begotten *son*.” This is a manuscript difficulty. The most likely original was “God,” not son. No doctrine is “on the line” here though, because other places call Jesus the only-begotten son with no manuscript troubles (**John 3:16**), while other places call him God (cf. **Rom 9:5**).

about Jesus. He is both the beloved, unique, and only-begotten son of the Father, and he is the only God at the Father's side, thus equal to him in all things.

This is where nearly every cult and Christological heresy has gone astray. Right here at the start. For in just these short few verses, we have seen that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of the heavenly Father, equal to him even in deity! To put it more simply, the claim is that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Thus, the third of the four uses of *monogenes*, “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” (John 1:14).

It will not do to make Jesus anything less than very God of very God if you want to be biblical. And if that is true, since there is only one God, and you are not him, then what happened when Jesus came here was totally unique in all the world. Never before had it been done. Never again will it be. *Kind of.*

ANGEL IN THE OT

Uh oh. Some might here those two words as big-time trouble when talking about such a lofty yet vital topic as this. But since we are talking about the “who” question today, I want to make something abundantly clear you all. This “something” is actually fuzzy and foggy, at best, in the minds of most Christians. In fact, some Christians see so little of it (or anything else of value) that they are now calling, as one popular Evangelical preacher is currently doing, for things like, “I am convinced for the sake of this generation and the next generation, we have to rethink our apologetic as Christians, and the less we depend on the Old Testament to prop up our New Testament faith the better because of where we are in [the] culture.”¹¹

Andy Stanley is one of millions of Christians who have literally no idea what the OT even is, why it exists, or most importantly, *who* it is about. But this is something he is “desperately [trying] to help people understand,” that is, not the

¹¹ Andy Stanley, apparently in the podcast *Seekers and Speakers* with Jonathan Merritt, as cited in Albert Mohler, “Getting ‘Unhitched’ from the Old Testament? Andy Stanley Aims at Heresy,” *Albert Mohler* (Aug 10, 2018), https://albertmohler.com/2018/08/10/getting-unhitched-old-testament-andy-stanley-aims-heresy/?utm_content=buffer946a1&utm_medium=social&utm_source=sbtstwitter&utm_campaign=buffer.

OT, but *why we don't need the OT!* Never mind that the NT itself tells us that these same “**Scriptures ... bear witness about me [i.e. Jesus]**” (**John 5:39**). Never mind that literarily every single claim made about Jesus in the NT is grounded, rooted, planted, quoted, alluded, or echoed in the OT.

So what's with that “uh oh?” I said that when Jesus came here it was totally unique in all the world. Never before had it been done. Never again will it be. *Kind of*. Kind of what?

Well, **I wasn't referring to another incarnation** of Jesus or anyone else. By incarnation I mean, as the word itself means, “**the act of being made flesh.**” What kind of flesh? Human flesh. Carnal flesh. Carnal is a word that means “**physical, human, mortal.**” What I'm saying is that the incarnation of Jesus, God coming as a human, is totally unique.

But his *coming*, his coming *to earth*, well, that actually isn't unique at all, at least to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He came here many, many times in the OT. He just didn't come here *as a human*. He did not come as one born of a woman. Rather, he came as the most important and major character in the entire OT. He came as the Angel of the LORD.

So who is Jesus? In the OT, he is the Angel of the LORD. That means, first of all, he existed prior to the NT! This is also understood in what we have just seen, for in Jesus being the only-begotten, it means that his begetting is unique, unlike any other who is begotten (which is all of us). We speak about this as being “eternally begotten.” Somehow, Jesus has always existed; he never came into being. But he was eternally begotten by the Father. We will see more of this as we go along.

The first time he comes by this name was when he met the outcast Hagar by a spring of water. The story reminds me very much of when the Lord Jesus came to another outcast woman, a Samaritan whom he met by a well. He is the same yesterday and today. In the story it says, “The angel of the LORD found her” and he started to speak to her face to face. He then made a promise to her that in the very next chapter it says “the LORD” made to Abram (Gen 17:1-2). “I will multiply your offspring” (Gen 16:9).

Amazingly, and this is something that nearly all who read the story miss, the text simply calls this angel “the LORD” or Yahweh. Not just “the angel of the LORD” but simply “the LORD.” “Yahweh who spoke to her...”

(16:13). Why? Because what Genesis is doing here is setting up what will become the norm throughout the rest of the OT, though again, almost nobody bothers to actually read and think about what the text is saying. That is, throughout the Patriarchal narratives, when it says, “the angel of the LORD” in one place, in the very next place it will simply say “The LORD.”

This happens nearly every time the Angel shows up. For example, in **Genesis 18:1** where we learn that three “men” come to Abram, two of these “men” are called “angel” later on as the story moves from Abram’s home to Sodom and Gomorrah (**Gen 19:1**). Meanwhile, the third “man” starts to make similar promises of children to Sarah, who begins to laugh. But “Yahweh” heard it (**18:13**). Then “Yahweh” and Abraham start having a conversation together over how many people it will take for Yahweh to spare the wicked cities. Abraham isn’t talking to the Father. He’s talking to the Angel of the LORD, to Yahweh. You see, in good writing, at some point it becomes redundant to keep saying the same thing over and over. At some point, the Angel language just becomes assumed and often just drops out, so that sometimes *all* he is called is Yahweh, and sometimes he is

called other things (see below). Nevertheless, the Angel is around constantly.

How can we call the angel a man? Doesn't this mean that in fact, the incarnation isn't unique and therefore that this Angel of the LORD teaching is dangerous or even heretical? First, whatever the answer to that question is, the Scripture is crystal clear about who this Angel is—if you bother to read the text. And nearly every church Father and most Reformers read it this way. So don't ever let a tough question keep you from somehow denying the text just because you don't know the answer.

But I think we can explain this. Note, the Angel is never called an *'adam*-man. He is called the more generic term *'ish*. Like when Jacob wrestled with a “man” during the night and “prevailed” ([Gen 32:28](#)). But who was this man? Hosea says, “[He strove with God \[see \[Gen 32:28\]\(#\)\]. He strove with the Angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor” \(\[Hos 12:3-4\]\(#\)\).](#)

Why is this possible? Because the Angel of Yahweh *is* Yahweh.

How can this be? The same way Jesus can be both the son of God and God. In fact, as the Sodom story comes to its

climax, it tells us that there are two Yahwehs, one in heaven and one on earth, and that the one on earth called to the one in heaven who sent fire and Sulphur and destroyed the town (**Gen 19:24**). Unlike Mr. Stanley, who apparently sees no apologetic value in this or any other OT passage, I've discovered that nearly every church Father of any repute¹² used this passage to talk about Jesus as a second Yahweh. And, again, many Reformers and Puritans were still aware of it in their day and used it, though it has mostly been neglected in our own.

But what a glorious truth, and one that fits right into NT theology about Jesus. The Yahweh of the OT is distinguishable in a Godhead. One God; Plural Yahwehs. And yet while one of them is Yahweh, he is also the Angel of Yahweh, or as the Jews sometimes called him, "Lesser Yahweh." So, there he is, in plain sight, in the OT, and you can make an argument that he's literally there on every page. Not merely in prophecy, but in Person.

¹² Justin, *Dialogue* 127; Ignatius, *Antiochians* 2; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.6.1; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 13; Cyprian, *Against the Jews* 3.33; Novatian, *On the Trinity* 18:15-17; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.2.9; First Creed of Sirmium, *Canon* 17; Athanasius, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2.15.13; Hilary, *On the Trinity* 5.16; Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 29:17; Basil, *On Proverbs* 7:22; Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 1.3.22-23; Chrysostom, *Homily* 3:2 *Tim* 1:13-18; Augustine, *Tractates on John* 51:3; Cyril, *Comments on 1 John* 1:2; Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.30; *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 5.20; *Letter of the Six Bishops*.

How does this not help you know who Jesus is? What would taking this theology seriously do for the many confused and wrong-headed thoughts people have about God and Christ, from that “evil God of the OT” nonsense, to any idea that Jesus just sprang on the scene in the NT, or any idea that tries to separate things God does in the OT from things Jesus does in the NT, and so on?

What does Yahweh mean? This can help you even more to know who Jesus is. The word is explained to Moses by none other than the Angel of the LORD (Ex 3:2) who told him the meaning from a burning bush. “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14).¹³ Here again we see hints that Jesus is eternal. He

¹³ Going Deeper. Reformed Scholar [John Ronning](#) recently posted something fascinating about this name on Facebook. He writes (Aug 29, 2018),

Something else I should have noticed a long time ago. About 20 years ago I came across an interpretation by Alviero Niccacci of Exodus 3:14 that the correct translation of the explanation of God's name that he was giving to Moses at the burning bush is not "I am who I am" (which in and of itself means nothing; strange explanation), but rather "I will be who I have been" = "I do not change" i.e. I am the same God revealed to the patriarchs etc., and in contrast to the pagan gods who follow a certain career path, usually starting out as mortals, then minor gods, then if successful in battle get to be great gods (Marduk is an example, started out possibly as the mighty warrior Nimrod, then became a minor deity until he defeated Tiamat and became head of the pantheon, at least the Babylonian version. Josephus says some other gods were just glorified sinners from before the flood (Tubal-Cain >> Vulcan for example) - how wicked does one have to be to make gods after the flood out of wicked men who were judged in the flood, the "mighty men of old, men of renown"?)

Anyway, I thought about "I will be who I [always] have been" for a couple of years before deciding it was correct, not just for grammatical reasons but because other Scripture confirms it, and I put my conclusions in chapter 3 of my book *The Jewish Targums and John's Logos Theology*, applying it to the person and work of Jesus, whose mission on earth was to reveal the

didn't come into being. He simply is. And he always is. This is what his very name means. And please do not miss this. The Second Person is the one saying this to Moses, for it is the Angel calling *himself* this.

It is into this theology that the famous "I AMs" of John's Gospel *must* be understood. For when Jesus makes such claims as "I am the good Shepherd" (John 10:11), he is harkening back both to the name of God and to places like Psalm 23 where "Yahweh is my Shepherd" (Ps 23:1). He is claiming to be the God who never changes, who is the same yesterday, today, *and forever*, and therefore, since he is a Shepherd, you as his sheep can know that he loves you and lays down his life for you.

divine name (YHWH) according to John 17:6, 26, that name (YHWH) also having been given to the Son (which JW's and other Arian heretics vehemently deny). And John shows us throughout his Gospel the reality that "I will be [in the incarnation] who I have [always] been [throughout the OT]." I believe this interpretation also underlies the description of Jesus in Hebrews 13 as "the same, yesterday, today, and forever." Also Revelation, "He who is, who was, and who is coming."

So it would be nice if one could point to a place where the verb "will be/used to be" (= Hebrew הָיָה) is used in both senses (it's usually called the imperfect tense but that's not a perfect description) in the same sentence. Turns out that's what we have in Isaiah 7:23: "And it shall come about that every place where there used to be (יִהְיֶה) a thousand vines valued at 1000 shekels of silver, will become (יִהְיֶה) briars and thorns.

There are other names given to this Angel, that is to Jesus. Hagar calls him *El Roi*—the God who sees (me). She specifically calls this angel “God” and uses the name for the high God (El) to do it. This name tells you that *Jesus* is omniscient, he knows all and sees all things.

When Jacob wrestles with him, he asks him name and the Angel tells him, “Why do you ask my name?” ([Gen 32:29](#)). But later, when Samson’s father sees the very same angel and asks his name the response becomes, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful” ([Jdg 13:18](#)). *Wonderful* becomes the new name. This becomes the very name of Messiah in the famous Isaiah prophecy, “Wonderful Counselor.” And curiously, in the LXX, which becomes “Angel of the Great Council” ([Isa 9:6](#)). In other words, Jesus again. To have a name like “Wonderful” means that you are full of wonder, that awe is attributed to you, that you are glorious and powerful. How incredible that people devalue the name of Jesus so much in culture and in the Church. Beloved, he is wonderful. Have you personally seen him this way in your own life?

If we were to take other names that were given to Yahweh in the OT, they would include *Elyon*. This means “God

Most High.” “Who is this who even forgives sins” (Luke 7:49)? That’s something only the Most High can do. *Aman* means “Faithful” God. “Christ is faithful over God’s house” (Heb 3:6). *Emet* is the God of Truth. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...” (John 14:6). *El Tsaddik* means the Righteous God. “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous” (1Jn 2:1). *El Shaddai* is usually translated as “Almighty” God but may mean “God of the Mountain.” Jesus regularly went to these places to teach or show himself as divine (Matt 5:1; 17:1-2). *El De’ot* is the God of Knowledge. They said to Jesus, “Lord, you know all things” (John 16:30). *El Kavod* is the God of Glory. “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). *El Kadosh* is the Holy God. “Honor Christ the Lord as holy” (1Pe 3:15). *El Shamayim* is the God of heaven. “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (John 3:13). *El Channun* is the Gracious God. “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). *Yahweh Shalom* is the God of peace. “Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’” (John 20:26). *Immanuel* mean God is with us. In all but the last of these I fear that when people read them

in the OT, they one thought that doesn't come into their mind is that this is the name of Christ in the OT. Yet, that's the point of all these NT verses harkening back to those names and attributing those very attributes to Jesus Christ.

What do these names tell you? They tell you about His infinitely superior incomparable unchangeable uncreated incomprehensible **nature**, and his perfect infinitely superior **moral excellence**. The very idea of God's nature is beyond understanding, and these names explain that. He knows all, sees all, is at all times. He is the Most High of heaven and earth, and nothing compares with him. He is also pure and perfect in all that he does, full of truth and faithfulness and holiness and glory and goodness. He is a good God, not evil, not wicked, not mean, not capricious. And it is the same Jesus whom many people know this to be true of in the NT who is the God of the OT! He is the same God.

As I said, all of these things are applied to Jesus in the NT, even as they are to Yahweh, who cannot be separated from the Angel in the OT. Therefore, they teach you about *his* nature and about *his* moral excellence. For to be taught about God is to be taught about Christ and vice-versa, for he is the perfect image, the exact representation of God to

man. And the place you first learn about this, from start to finish, from the first chapter to the last, is in what we call the OT. Without it, you have no foundation for any of the claims that are made about Christ in the NT. But with this understanding, suddenly you see that the God of the OT is Jesus Christ, and he is the main character of its entire story. He is not merely there in prophecy and type, but in Person. Oh, I pray this truth may once more captivate the minds of God's people.

ADAM OF THE NT

As glorious as that all is, this idea of teaching us—humans, children of Adam and Eve—all about God is made infinitely more possible because of that last name: *Immanuel*. God with us. This is a prophecy. He will be with us in a way that he wasn't in the OT. There is much we will say about this in coming weeks. But for now, I want only to keep focusing on the “who” question. Who is Jesus in the NT?

The most important thing, **the unique thing**, the single greatest fact of the NT and of world history, is that the God of heaven came down to earth not as an Angel who was seen

rarely and by few people, but as a man—a son of Adam—and was seen by everyone because he actually became one of us. In a statement that is reminiscent of the way the Bank of Canada taught Challies to inspect real money John says, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life--the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us” (1Jn 1:1-3). This is how his first letter begins as he talks about the same thing he did in the opening of John’s Gospel—the Word.

This is no accident, nor is it some tangent, nor is it some apologetic against Gnostics. No. The Word of God is simply another name for the Angel of God. The Word of God often came in visions in the OT (cf. **Gen 15:1**; **1Sam 3:1ff**; **Jer 1:4ff**; etc.). Because the **Word** of the LORD could be seen, not merely heard. Thus, sometimes it just uses “Word” rather than “Angel.” “**But now “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14)**. I’ve given this verse

already today, because it is vitally important to understanding who Jesus is.

In fact, the entire prologue of John simply drips with OT language for the Angel. In this same verse it speaks of the “**Glory.**” It calls Jesus the Glory. This is, for example, what Ezekiel says when he saw him. “**And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance” (Ezek 1:26).** But just two verses later it becomes, “**the likeness of the glory of the LORD**” (28). In Zechariah two angels are talking to one another and one of them says, “**I will be the glory in her midst**” (Zech 2:5).

Another term John uses here is “**Name.**” It says, “**To all who did receive him, who believed in his name...**” (John 1:12). Many people think this is referring to the totality of Jesus’ human ministry, when people like the Apostles believed in him. But it isn’t. That isn’t the flow of thought at all. He hasn’t introduced Jesus in the flesh yet. Rather, this refers to Jesus as “the Name” of God in the OT. Again, it refers to the Angel. “**Behold, I send an angel before you ... Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel**

against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my Name is in him” (Ex 23:20). “Behold, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury, and his tongue is alike a devouring fire” (Isa 30:27). But now, the Angel, the Word, the Glory, and the Name has been made flesh!

The point of these terms and more is that Jesus is the same God who came to his people in the OT. But now, the great difference, the thing that makes it all infinitely greater than before. He came to us as one of us. And we stand in awe of it. And, as we will see in coming weeks, we are saved and have hope and life because of it.

All of this began in the womb of a young virgin Jewish girl named Mary. If you were to compare any one person in terms of who Rome talks about compared to Protestants, without question, the one with the biggest discrepancy of times mentioned would be the person the Fathers unanimously called “the mother of God” (*theotokos*), because Elizabeth called her “the Mother of my Lord” (Lord means God here; Luke 1:43). Sometimes I think we talk too little of Mary.

But the solution isn't to see that Mary is so great that somehow she is sinless or becomes queen of heaven or co-redemptrix or something. Rather, she is important because it is through her with the help of no human male that the Christ was born into this world. God chose Mary by grace. The Holy Spirit overshadowed her by grace. Her gift was utterly unique. But it is this **virgin birth**, not the mother of it, that becomes the first thing, humanly speaking, that tells you who Jesus is. And it leads to all the others.

These include his **sinless life** on planet earth. “**Tempted in every way yet without sin**” (**Heb 4:15**), the **spotless lamb of God** (**1Pe 1:9**) did the impossible and obeyed the law perfectly of which we all fell short. Sometimes Jesus is thought to be “**a good man**” and people like him for this. Jesus was, of course, a good man. And in this, he was **a moral example**. **But** his example was not one among many, but the perfect moral example of how the law of God is to be kept. This is because he was more than a good man. He was the *only* good man. “**Why do you call me good, no one is good? No one is good except God alone**” (**Mark 10:18**). And All this is true because he is God and not merely man. His had no biological

father. And the virgin birth is necessary because he is himself God.

With all the false Jesuses out there, you need to therefore understand some things. He is often said to be a **great teacher**. **But** he is more than a great teacher. He is often thought to be a **great healer**. **But** he is more than a great healer. The Jews wanted him to be a **national hero**. **But** he didn't come to meet their temporal expectations by taking a throne and defeating Rome.

Jesus is **King**. **But** because he is also God, his kingdom is not of this world. He is said to be a **man of love**. **But** this love is otherworldly and belongs to a different age and a different place, even though it intrudes upon us here and now by the Holy Spirit. Jesus isn't here just to teach you or to make you well or to make you feel good about yourself. He came to show what true love is, and to make it possible that you could be freed from the shackles of sin and death through his own death and taking on your sin at the cross. Anyone who hears these words, by God's grace, will be saved and will respond to them in faith. Have you?

It says, “**God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son.**” We've seen this only-begotten today. And

we've just talked about love. And because the Son is loved perfectly by the Father, he knows what perfect love is. But the context of this love is **his death on the cross**. The verses immediately before it are rarely quoted. “**As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life**” (**John 3:14-15**). You see? “**This is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins**” (**1Jn 4:10**).

What do all wrong views of who Jesus is do? They do two things simultaneously. They **belittle him** and **raise us up** in our own minds. They attack his true Person, either making him less God or less human. And in so doing, they either bring him down to our level only or make him so unlike us that he really couldn't do the things it says he did, which we will look at much more when we come to the “What” question.

For now, my prayer is that you are able to see more of who Jesus is. He is the only beloved and begotten son of the heavenly Father. Utterly unique in eternity past, he is very God of very God. In this, he has perfect glory in heaven. Speaking of his own impending death and resurrection, him

himself prays concerning “the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5). For this alone, Jesus is to be worshiped and adored.

But Jesus entered space and time. Speaking all things into existence (next week), he then breathed life into a man and spoke with him, giving him law, giving him a helpmate, giving them clothing after they had sinned. In the days of Abram, he came to this man in a foreign land and led him to a promised land where he made a people to be his own treasured possession. They knew him. They saw him. They talked to him. They believed upon him.

And then the unthinkable, the impossible happened. He became one of us. The Lord Jesus took on human flesh and added a new nature to himself. Our nature. And in so doing, he became the perfect mediator, the perfect intercessor, the perfect everything that we needed to be made right with God. This is who Jesus Christ is. I pray you will see him for who he is and not who you want him to be; and that your faith might be put solely in him, for he is the only way to the Father because he is the only one who is the perfect image of God and he is the only one who is able to send the Holy Spirit to give you life.

May these words about who Jesus is be the beginning of much new life for all his people.