

# An Exegetical Study of John 1:1-5, 10-14: "The Word Became Flesh"

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"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." It is utterly impossible to explain the unexplainable; our finite minds are not capable of comprehending the infinite. Therefore, the Apostle Paul correctly calls the natures of Christ the mystery of mysteries. Yet sin has compelled the human race to reject the mystery of Christology as nonsense. The sad part is that we are surrounded with many unexplainable mysteries, beginning with our very own existence. Life declares the glory of the Word.

Since our finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite, we simply observe and recognize this supernatural phenomenon called Christ as revealed to us in the gospel of John. The goal of this paper is to take the "What does this mean?" approach that Martin Luther took with the Small Catechism, humbly recognizing the significance of Christology for us and all people. In accomplishing our goal we will plum out of John's Gospel the beautiful attributes of Jesus Christ's natures and the communication of those natures.

## **The Battle is Waged**

A battle is supposed to have clear sides. On one hand you have the attacker and on the other hand you have the defender. Both sides have a clear objective: Win the battle. However, there is a phenomenon in war called, "the fog of war." When the fog of war sets into the minds of soldiers the once clear objectives are no longer clear. The enemy is now nothing more than a nebulous figure in the soldier's vision. The soldiers then are suddenly on default mode. They rely on pragmatic survival instincts and chaos then ensues on the battleground. This is when tragedy strikes, tragedies such as the death of Pat Tillman at the hands of his fellow soldiers.

There is a far greater battle being waged with far surpassing consequences. The battle is over souls: your soul, my soul, and the souls of all people. Fog of war in this case is sin and the devil. Their mission objective is to hide and destroy salvation offered to all people by attacking the key piece to salvation—Jesus Christ.

In theology; the manifestos, creeds, and theses fit in one of two categories: it's either polemical or apologetic. The second Article of the Apostles' Creed was created in defense of the truth, Christ Jesus. The early Christians' faith was under attack by the Gnostics. So the disciples of the true Christ constructed the Apostles' Creed (*Symbolum Apostolorum*) as a symbol of faith and trust in Christ Jesus, the key of salvation.

The Gnostics were agreed that the orthodox Christians were wrong in supposing that God had taken human nature or a human body. Some of them distinguished between Christ, whom they acknowledged to be in some sense divine, and the man Jesus, who was at most an instrument through whom the Christ spoke. They held that the man Jesus didn't become the bearer or instrument of the Christ until the Spirit descended upon him at his baptism, and that the Spirit left him before the crucifixion, so that the Spirit had only a brief and tenuous association with matter and humanity. Others affirmed that there was never a man Jesus at all, but only the appearance of a man, through which appearance wise teachings were given to the first disciples. Against this the orthodox Christians affirmed that Jesus was conceived through the action of the Holy Spirit (thus denying the Gnostic position that the Spirit had nothing to do with Jesus until his Baptism), that he was born (which meant

that he had a real physical body, and not just an appearance) of a virgin (which implied that he had been special from the first moment of his life, and not just from his baptism on).

The battle today has not slowed down or become less significant since the Gnostics. Our loving Savior has told us, "All these are the beginning of birth pains... For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:8,21,22).

Therefore, on the battlefield may we always hold high the banner of truth to lead us through the fog of war to the victory already won for us with the blood of Christ.

### Divinity of Christ

1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.  
2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"

The koine Greek in the gospel of John is very straightforward with vocabulary usage and simple subject, verb, and modifier constructions. So when I was assigned this text I thought Pastor David Rutschow and Pastor Philip Schupmann were right in saying, "the Chicago conference are a good group of guys," but when I read the assignment sheet further I began to question the source of that assessment. With that said let's move forward.

#### vv. 1-2

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ... "In the beginning" hauntingly takes us back to the beginning of time, to the first chapter of Genesis, to the beginning of creation. John's ἐν ἀρχῇ is far more reaching than the beginning of time, because the Word was already there. "In the beginning" describes God as being someone so far beyond us and our existence. Without God there is no beginning, without the Word there is no "life" as demonstrated in verse 4. In the beginning the Word is *in principio* of all that is.

Since John writes in a very simply koine Greek, we take caution not to press the tenses of his verbs for more than he intends to communicate. In my estimation, it makes the best sense to translate ἦν as "continually was" in order to demonstrate the continuous or "ongoing" force with John's use of the imperfect tense and later the perfect tense in the beginning verses. At any rate the verbs here do not denote a completed state or coming into being (γίνομαι).

ὁ λόγος reminds me of "I AM" in the sense of simplicity and profundity to reveal God. Jesus used "I AM" to reveal his eternal presence (John 8:58). A man's word reveals what he's thinking; however, if you were to ask my wife she may not agree with you. The point, though, is that "the Word" reveals the truth of God's very nature. He reveals himself. But he reveals himself as he chooses (Is. 55: 11). The Word is not a static background only to impart knowledge like a PowerPoint screen (good ol' Seminary). To know God is life eternal (17:3). The Word is life. The Word is more than a characteristic or even an act of God. John shows the Word as coming to earth in the person of Jesus (v. 14) as well as the intimacy of God, "The Word was God." However, I don't want to jump ahead with the thoughts of Jesus, because there's nothing to link God and Jesus until verse 14 in our text. I can't help but think of Jesus when reading verses 1 thru 5.

"The Word was with God" is the translation we are familiar with and what we've read many times on Christmas Day. However, the Greek expression is a difficult one here. A wooden translation is "The Word was toward God." I have always looked at basic prepositions in one of two ways—spatiality (e.g., in the sphere of) or direction (e.g., place to which-accusative). I think here it can be both. If you look at πρὸς spatially, it means

"in the presence of" or "in company with." Or when you can look at **πρὸς** directionally, it means literally the whole essence of the Word was "faced toward" God. This prepositional use is no accident; John repeats the same Greek expression in verse 2. John emphatically tells us there are two persons here. He has established the personal existence of the Word and of God the Father. The Word was not only "in the beginning," but exists with God. John shows us that the Word wasn't just an emanation from God. Now the mystery grows deeper. Even the Word was with God and also was God, they are not two Gods. John uses the singular **θεὸς** consistently throughout his prologue when he speaks about Logos and God.

It is appropriate now to take a closer look at the persons, the Word and God the Father as John does in verses 3-5. From here out the words used to discuss the features of the persons and later the natures of Christ were painstakingly developed from the Lutheran Orthodoxy. Martin Chemnitz and the Lutheran Theologians in the late 16th century to the early 17th century solidify Lutheran orthodoxy because of the constant attacks by the heresies of the Calvinist, Arians, and Zwinglians on the deity of Christ. The term "hypostasis" (**ὑποστάσις**) is used to speak about the persons of the Godhead. Hypostasis or person designates a singular thing which possesses the total and perfect substance of the same species. It subsists of itself. There are certain characteristics and personal attributes limited to the hypostasis. Thus it is numerically separate but not essentially distinct from other individuals of the same nature.

Attributes (**ἰδιώματα**) are essential, accidental, or personal. And of the essential attributes some are constitutive of nature, such as the case in the divinity of Christ. Constitutive attributes or essential properties of the divine nature (**ἰδιώματα συστατικά φύσεων**) are not distinct or different from God. God is not made up of a bunch of parts like a body (for example: flesh, and blood); rather the essential properties are to be almighty, eternal, infinite, and to be according to the property of its nature and its natural essence.

3 πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν 4 ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων· 5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Now that John has established the relationship of the Word and of God the Father, he further defines the hypostasis of the Godhead. When I read verses 3-5 I think of pointillism. Pointillism are paintings made up of tiny dots, up close all you can see are the different colors of paint and the proximity of dots. But when you step back a ways you see a beautiful masterpiece. This is what John does for us. In verses 1 and 2, he took us up close for the intimate details of God. And in verses 3-5, John takes us back several steps to look at how all these points create such a beautiful masterpiece.

### v. 3

**πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο** John asserts that all created things were brought into existence through him. He does not say that all was made "by" him, but "through" him. This is important; the relation of the first two hypostasis of the Godhead performed different parts in the work of creation (*opera ad extra*). Creation wasn't a solitary act of either. The Father created, but did it "through" the Word.

The verb **ἐγένετο** (aorist) "were made," pictures a completed creation, but the verb **γέγονεν** "has been made" (perfect) conveys the thought of continuing existence of created things. We are reminded of God's providence here. When we look around us, what we see didn't come into existence apart from the Word any more than what was on the first day of creation.

#### v. 4

There is a variant in the Greek text for the punctuation problem at the end of verse 3 and beginning of verse 4. Punctuation isn't divinely inspired (the original text didn't use it). But it's good for us to take a closer look so that we can get a full sense of what John is saying here. Does the punctuation belong after ΟΥΔὲ ἔν. or after γέγονεν. It is possible to take the last words of verse 3 with the opening words of verse 4, "what has been made was life in him." But to go with this translation doesn't make any sense. It would be saying that everything made is a source of life in him, the exact opposite of what John has said.

It has already been mentioned that we cannot explain life. So when you walk into Wartburg, the boys' dormitory at Luther Preparatory, and see some maggots on left-over fruit behind the garbage pail in a room, you know that the particular student didn't create new life, but rather he helped promulgate existing life from dirty habits. Louis Pasteur, the creator of pasteurized milk, demonstrated long ago that life does not come into existence spontaneously. It is only because there is life in the Word that there is life in anything on earth at all. So the better translation is the punctuation after "has been made" (ὃ γέγονεν.) The translation would be "without him not one thing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men."

ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων "Life was the light of men" I don't know if John uses life and light synonymously here, but he clearly links the two words. "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3) is how the work of creation began. The Word is the source of light and life, for example: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light" (Ps. 36:9). In other words, the Word is life himself and is also the "light of men." John introduces this thought now in order to develop it more in the Gospel, that Jesus is the life-bringer and light bearer.

#### v.5

καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." A hot air mass system plus a cold air mass system creates a storm. Light plus darkness creates a storm into the life of a Christian. You see the light is Christ and the darkness is sin and the devil. The new and old Adam creates the storm and drama in our lives. Apostle Paul tells us of this struggle, "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do---I keep on doing" (Ro. 7:19). But John reminds us that the darkness will not overcome the light. The function of light is to shine in darkness, to dispel darkness, which is a major theme throughout this Gospel. Notice how John has used exclusively the past tenses (imperfect, aorist, and perfect) until now "the light 'shines' in the darkness." According to NIV the darkness "has not understood it." The Greek verb has far more reaching meaning. It means to "lay hold with the mind" and thus "comprehend" or "apprehend."

### **Humanity of Jesus**

John 1:10-13

10 ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. 11 εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. 12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 13 οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who

believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

#### v. 10

John has a paratactic pattern of " καὶ ὁ κόσμος," each καὶ clause emphasizing Jesus' humanity. With this pattern, John demonstrates omnipotence given over to blood. He says three things. First, "the Word was in the world." The imperfect tense conveys an on-going force. Jesus lived on this earth and did things common to humanity that had ongoing ramification (active obedience). The second point is the reminder that the world exists because of "the Word." "The world was made through him," notice the same vocabulary and phrasing from verse 3. The third point deals with the rejection of the Word by the world. This was heightened by the simple fact that the world "did not recognize" him. The use of the aorist tense here indicates that the world missed this once in a lifetime opportunity to come to know the Word when the Word was in its very midst. The World's reaction to the Word is one of contrast—light and darkness.

#### v. 11

John now highlights this tragedy of the rejection. The opening words could be translated "he came home." The Word came home. He came to Israel, where the people should have known him. It was Jesus' own who "did not receive" him. John emphasizes what should have been a close and intimate relationship but was a missed opportunity as indicated by the aorist tense.

#### v. 12

However, some did respond to the Word and now John turns his attention to them. There are four important words here.

- "Gave": the goal of the Word is not the tragedy of the rejection, but the gift of grace.
- "The right": John does not speak of inherit right, as in the sense of entitlement. His thought is that of status, status as God's children through Jesus Christ.
- "Children": when people receive the Word they are born again into the heavenly family.
- "Name": the name meant much more to the biblical people than it does to us. What's in a name? The name stood for the whole personality. The name in some way expressed the whole person. To believe "in the name" of the Word, then means to trust the person of the Word. It is to believe in him as he is. It is to believe that God is the God revealed in the Word and to put our trust in that God.

#### v. 13

The origin of the "children of God" is described three times negatively and once positively. The repeated negatives insist that birth into the family of God is entirely different from physical birth. This divine birth has nothing to do with nationality or culture. But spiritual birth depends on receiving the gift of God—Jesus Christ.

14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετ John takes us a few more steps back and shows us more of the picture of Jesus. Human nature has constitutive attributes or essential properties (συστατικοὶ τῶν φύσεω.) The constitutive attributes consist of body and soul that make up or form the human nature. The body is created with flesh, blood, bones, skin, nerve endings, with all parts systematically arranged in order. The soul is a created spirit, immortal, and essential to the human nature. This is essential for human nature, having 2 arms or having one or no arms isn't essential for human nature, but body and soul are essential properties. This orthodox and catholic teaching of the human nature of Jesus cannot be explained but it certainly can be confirmed in what "the Word" has revealed to us.

σὰρξ "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). Our flesh is sinful (σὰρξ itself isn't inherently "sin," but our flesh is sinful flesh). The Apostle Paul commonly uses flesh as a synonym for sinful nature. However, John's use of flesh is the exact opposite of how Paul used it. Jesus' flesh was conceived by the Holy Spirit without sin (Luke 1:35). Yet Jesus' flesh is not of a different substance or kind. Therefore, Jesus calls us brothers, because we are of one flesh (Heb. 2:14). He did not know sin, and was separated from sinners. He was like his brothers in every way except sin (Heb. 2:17). He assumed the seed of Abraham, not in heaven or in the air but in the womb of the Virgin Mary. With that said we come to the second type of attributes, (ἰδιοματὰ) accidental properties. Although Jesus was without sin, he took on the infirmities imposed on our human nature. These infirmities are a consequent penalty of sin. Our loving Savior took on the infirmities in order to take away from us the penalty that burden him. But the biggest significance for me is that he was now able to die.

Many times I think of my grade school teacher showing us a cartoon version of C.S. Lewis' story "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." It was explained to us that this was a story about Jesus. From this story I realized what it was my Savior did for me. I remember the pinnacle point where Aslan (the Lion—Jesus) lay on the table to be murdered by the witch (the devil). I remember screaming at Aslan to get up, you've got the power to get up, just get up. But there he lay and sacrificed himself for the sake of the children. Jesus possessed the μορφή Θεοῦ (the form of God). Yet, he did not make full use of it. Rather, he took on the μορφή δούλου (form of a servant). Jesus obeyed his Father, even to the point of death as his Father willed. This state of Jesus is referred to as exinanition, a self-emptying.

Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο "And the Word became flesh" In this verse John shows us the dual natures of Jesus. ἐγένετο "Became" (aorist) indicates action at a point of time. "Flesh" is a strong reference to the human nature. John doesn't say, "The Word became man," nor "the Word took a body." He chooses a form of expression which puts what he wants to say most bluntly. He is clear on the deity of the Word. But he is just as clear on the substances of his humanity. This is the first time that John indicates that the Word and Jesus are to be taken as the same. In one short, shattering expression John unveils the great idea at the heart of Christianity—that the very Word of God took flesh for our salvation.

The Word "lived for a while among us" (ἐσκήνωσεν). Properly the verb signifies "to pitch one's tent." To Jewish ears the word might arouse other associations. The place of worship during the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, the place where God had vouchsafed his presence, was "the Tabernacle."

### **Hypostatic union/Communication of Attributes (communicatio idiomatum)**

Now comes the fun part of taking a few more steps back to see more of the picture John painted for us of this union of two natures in one person that make up Jesus Christ. Martin Chemnitz rightly reminds us that it is not sufficient to know and believe that in some way or other there are two natures in Christ, the divine and the

human. In addition to the divine and human nature is the intimate personal union. Thus there is one hypostasis or person consisting and subsisting (ΕΝΥΠΟΟΤΑΤΟΝ) in these two natures.

Scripture describes the union in several ways: "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:12); "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity" (Heb. 2:14); "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants" or better in the KJV "but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16); "Regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David" (Rom. 1:3); "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

It is clear from these passages of Scripture that these two natures in Christ have been united in one person. Paul cries out (1 Tim. 3:16) that not only is it a mystery, but the great mystery. "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3).

Lutheran Orthodoxy has formulated vocabulary (*locus classicus*) that will correctly and accurately include the efficient cause of the union, the composition (one person—hypostasis), communication between the two natures, and their attributes. All these points fit under three types of genera: genus idiomaticum, genus maiestaticum, and genus apotelesmaticum.

The first type, genus idiomaticum deals with the attributes that belong essentially to either nature or even described as belonging to the opposite nature in the person of Christ. This genus has 3 sub-types. The first is "alternatio" (e.g., Ph. 2:11), but don't be fooled by the English cognate of this word, otherwise you would miss the point. The two natures of Jesus do not alternate or take turns; rather "alternatio" describes the person of Christ possessing both the divine and human natures. The distinctive particles (*particulae distinctivae*) are described as belonging to the person of Christ and may indicate the nature in Christ to which this attribute belongs.

The second is "appropriatio" (Acts 20:28). This sub-type tells us that the human nature belongs to the divine nature as it is found in Christ. Human nature is the nature of "the Word." Chemnitz made a big point of this several times to refute the heresy of modalism. The human nature of Christ cannot subsist in itself and according to itself. It subsists in the hypostasis of "the Word."

The last sub-type of genus idiomaticum is "communicatio divinorum" (John 6:62). The divine nature is the nature of the Son of Man. Attributes of the divine nature are described as belonging to the human nature as it is found in Christ.

The second genus is genus maiestaticum. At the time of incarnation the divine nature gives divine perfections, attributes, idioms to the human nature as considered by itself. These perfections belong to the human nature as a gift, but to the divine nature it is not a gift, it is essential.

The third and last genus is genus apotelesmaticum (1 Co. 15:3). The two natures in the person of Christ each contributes to what is unique as in one undivided action that Jesus Christ carries out to the end of completion of the work of the Mediator. Nothing is accomplished by either of the natures that is done without the communion and cooperation of the other.

What does this all mean? The divine nature of Christ is completely perfect in itself. But his human nature retains its own natural or essential properties. However, from the hypostatic union with the deity it also receives above and beyond its own essential properties. These are gifts to the human nature. The divine nature actively indwells the human nature and the human nature passively exists in the divine nature both of which still retain each other's essential property. Furthermore, because Jesus Christ is true God and true man, he was able to fulfill everything prescribed by the will of God. Therefore, he kept God's law perfectly. He suffered and died on the cross in our stead. He rose from the dead and declared victory over sin, death, and the devil with grace, mercy, and peace we now enjoy.

From this exegetical study may we continue the good fight and continue to uphold the banner of truth found only in Christ. Laurence Housman, an English playwright and poet, beautifully sums up the significance

of this selected text in his poem:

"Light looked down and beheld Darkness.  
'Thither will I go,' said Light.  
So came Light and shone...  
And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."