

THE WORD MADE FLESH

John 1

Remind the children of Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites, since it was that attitude among the people which finally necessitated the Lord's coming. The Christmas stories should be mentioned and the fact noted that no actual account of the external circumstances of the Lord's birth is given in the Gospel of John. The first verse of the chapter may be used in all classes as the basis on which to build the lesson.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord came into the world as divine truth. Jesus Christ was God Himself incarnate.

The Lord's life on earth was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures.

We become "sons of God" as we make His truth the director of our thought and conduct. We receive the truth only when we want to obey it.

The Lord's love can come into our hearts only as we obey His truth.

Notes for Parents

We should realize how closely the Old Testament and the New Testament are connected and how impossible it is to understand the New without knowing the Old. The attitude of Jonah toward the people of Nineveh continued to be the attitude of the religious leaders. They were proud of themselves and despised others and wanted to keep as a bit of personal property the inspired Scriptures which had been entrusted to them to teach to all the world. During the hundreds of years which followed the time of Jonah, the priests and scribes added to the Scriptures a great body of rules and regulations designed to minister to their own importance, so that finally not only the Gentiles but even the simple good people among the

Jews could no longer find out what the Scriptures really taught. The world had come into spiritual darkness. This was why the Lord Himself finally had to come into the world to live out the divine truth which was in the Word and bring light to the souls of men. Those who did not want to change their lives rejected Him, but those who really wanted to know how to live received Him gladly.

The Gospel of John is different from the other three Gospels because it tells us less of the outer story of the Lord's life and more of its deeper meaning. For instance, in this chapter instead of the familiar Christmas story we are told that it was God Himself who came into the world in Jesus Christ, the same God who made the world, and the same God who dwells within the inspired Scriptures, which He dictated. John the Baptist in our chapter calls Jesus "the Son of God" and while He was living in the human body He took on through Mary, He was often called the Son of God and He referred to God as His Father. But as little by little He put off the assumed humanity through overcoming its evils, He began to speak of Himself as one with the Father. He said, "I and my Father are one," and, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" And when Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," Jesus answered, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." This is what John is telling us in our chapter. Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth.



Primary

After the introduction and the reading of the lesson an attempt should be made to show why we call the Bible "the Word," and what the first verse means. Impress upon them that Jesus Christ was God Himself come into the world. You will also be able to show them why we think of the Word on the altar in the church as the presence of the Lord with us, and why the minister opens it at the beginning of the service and closes it at the end.

Do you remember the story of Jonah? How did Jonah feel about people like the Assyrians who were not of his own nation? The religious leaders after Jonah's time went right on feeling the same way. They were the only people in the world who had the Scriptures, and the Lord had told them over and over again to teach the people around them, but they would not.

In time most of the people did not know what the Scriptures really said, because most of them could not read, and the learned men—the scribes and Pharisees—taught them instead a great many rules which they had made up themselves. So the Lord could no longer reach people here in this world through the Scriptures. He had to come into the world Himself to correct the false teachings of the scribes and Pharisees and show the people by His example just how they ought to live.

You know the stories about the Lord's birth in Bethlehem and about the Wise Men and the shepherds.

The Gospel of John tells us something still greater.

Let us read the first verse of our chapter.

This tells us two things: It tells us that the Bible is the Lord Himself speaking to us; and it tells us that the Lord Jesus was God Himself come into the world to live out the truth that is in the Bible, so that men can see it and always be sure what it is and what it means.

How did the Lord show John the Baptist that Jesus was the promised Messiah?

When you say something, you yourself are in the words you say. Speaking is the way you let other people know what you think and how you feel. So the Bible is the Lord speaking to us, telling us His thoughts and feelings, and we call it the Lord's Word. When the Lord came into the world, He came to show people the same things He had taught in the Word.

Junior

The Juniors are old enough to be given some explanation of this chapter, and an effort has been made in their notes to bring it within their mental reach, even though the ideas are in themselves abstract. Be sure the class looks up all the Bible references in their notes. It is a good exercise for them and will also help their understanding of the lesson.

With today's lesson we begin studying the Gospel of John. John was the brother of James and one of the first four disciples called by the Lord to follow Him. He was called "the beloved disciple," because he was always close to the Lord. He was also the one who in his old age was given the wonderful visions recorded in the book of Revelation.

The first chapter of John treats of the Lord's birth into the world, but in a very different way from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, from which our Christmas lessons are always taken. You know that in the New Church we usually speak of the inspired books of the Bible as "the Word," and many other people use the expression "the Word of God" in connection with it. Have you ever wondered why this is so? We all use a great many words every day. Our words are our means of letting other people know what we are thinking and feeling. So really we are within our words. The Lord spoke the Word by means of His prophets. It is divine truth in a form adapted to our understanding. Within it is the Lord Himself. That is why we always have the Word on the altar in the very center of the chancel in our churches, and why the minister opens it at the beginning of the service and closes it at the end. We think of it as the Lord's presence with us.

We know that God is love—perfect, unselfish love—but we know also that He is wisdom—perfect wisdom. That is why the first verse of our chapter says that the Word was in the beginning, that it was with God, and that it was God. It was divine wisdom or truth which was given to the world in the Word. It was divine wisdom which created everything. But within everything divine wisdom does is divine love. If we think a little, we can understand this from our own experience. Whenever you make something, it is your knowledge which plans it and which directs your hands in making it, but behind your knowledge is the desire you have to make it. When John says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," he is telling us that just as divine wisdom or truth came down into the form of human language in the written Word so, when men could no longer understand the written Word

(see Matthew 15:1-6), divine wisdom came down into a human body, through which the Lord could show men what the written Word meant and how they ought to live. The Gospels, which became part of the written Word, are the record of His life, preserved so that we can know what He did and said; and, again because they are the Lord speaking to us, He is within them.

The John of whom our chapter speaks is not the apostle John but John the Baptist, of whom we learned so much last year in the Gospel of Mark.

Where did John baptize?

What did he say when he saw Jesus coming?

How was John shown that this was the “Son of God”?

We should know that while Jesus was in the world, He was called the “Son of God,” and spoke of God as His Father, but He also said, “I and the Father are one,” and, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” Read His words to Philip in John 14:7-9. The divine truth which showed itself to the world is called the Son, and the divine love which was within Him and could be seen only by means of divine truth is called the Father. The Philip mentioned in John 14 is the same Philip who is called to follow the Lord in our chapter.

Do you remember how many apostles there were?

Which ones are mentioned in our chapter?

Nathanael is not mentioned by this name in any of the lists of the twelve apostles, but it is generally believed that he was the same person as Bartholomew, who always comes directly after Philip in the lists. *Bartholomew* means “the son of Tolmai”; so he may very well have had a name of his own, too.

Have you noticed how often in this chapter people are told to, “Come and see”? Read verses 9 to 12 to see if you can find out why. Read what the Lord said to Nicodemus in John 3:19-21. These verses help us to understand why some people believed in the Lord and some did not. Those who knew they needed to live better lives and wanted to find out the truth—like those whom the Lord called in our chapter—were eager to “come and see” the Lord

and readily accepted what He said. But those who were selfish and self-satisfied did not want to hear or believe Him. The same thing is true today.

Intermediate

A few basic correspondences have been given, but this lesson must be mainly taken up by the effort to explain how the Lord was the “Word made flesh.” This is one of our best opportunities to give the young people the doctrine of the Lord. Encourage questions from the class.

We are now studying the life of the Lord as it is recorded in the Gospel of John. We remember that John was one of the first four disciples called by the Lord and one of the three who were allowed to witness the transfiguration of the Lord and who were often singled out from the others for special instruction. The twelve apostles represent all the faculties in us which are called to follow the Lord and meant to be used in the Lord’s service. The three most important—Peter, James, and John—represent faith, charity, and the works of charity. John is also said to represent the “good of charity.” He was called “the beloved disciple,” and in his old age was given the wonderful visions recorded in the book of Revelation.

We know that the Word of God was given through many men and took its literal form from the states of mind and heart in which those men were. John was of a different character from the other disciples, and his Gospel is very different from the other three. We shall find that it contains no declared parables and few miracles in comparison with the others, and that it is mainly concerned with the Lord’s ministry in Judea and His instructions to the apostles during the last week of His earthly life.

The difference between John’s Gospel and the others appears very clearly in our chapter for today. The first fourteen verses are an account of the Lord’s coming into the world, but they tell us nothing about Bethlehem, about Joseph and Mary, or about the shepherds and the Wise Men. Instead we are given teaching concerning the real nature and purpose of the Incarnation. The Lord

came as the Word made flesh to be the light of the world. In the New Church we regularly call the inspired Scriptures “the Word.” We need to understand why we do this. The practice grows naturally out of the frequent statement in the Prophets, “The word of the Lord came unto me, saying,” and out of this chapter of John, but of course there is a reason why this form of expression appears in these places. We are all of us constantly using words, because they are our means of expressing ourselves to others. We are in our words. Likewise the Word is the Lord’s expression of Himself to men, and He is in His Word as we are in ours. Every word we speak is an outward form of truth—or falsity. The written Word is an outward form of divine truth. It is our only means of learning what divine truth is and so of knowing the Lord.

The ancient Hebrews alone had the Old Testament Scriptures, and they had been told from time to time to teach them to the Gentiles. [E.g., Psalm 96:3.] But as we have learned in our lessons about Jonah, they despised the Gentiles and preferred to keep the Scriptures for themselves. In the hundreds of years which followed the return from captivity, this selfish arrogance had grown out of all bounds. There were still good people, humble and desirous of learning the truth and obeying it, but most of the people could not read and their teachers, the scribes and Pharisees, had so overlaid the Scriptures with additional laws and regulations of their own that the people did not know what was Scripture and what was not. The Lord shows this when He says to the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 15:6): “Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” So the Lord could no longer reach men through the written Word and He had to give the world His truth in a new form, by clothing Himself with a human body and so living among men and showing them the true way of life: “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” The Lord came not to destroy the Old Testament Scriptures, but to fulfill them. He came as the Word, the divine truth, which was in the beginning with God and was God.

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” Those

who had the written Word were the ones who rejected the Lord, because they did not want to know what it really taught. But there were a few who did want to know and so received Him. John the Baptist was one of these, and he bore witness fearlessly to the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the “Son of God,” which is another expression meaning the divine truth. The sign of the dove which was given to John the Baptist pictures “the Holy of faith,” the truths and goods of faith which were all in the Lord.

The rest of our chapter tells of the calling of the first disciples, again in a little different way from the other Gospels. Nathanael does not appear by that name in the lists of the twelve apostles, but it is generally believed that *Nathanael* was the given name of Bartholomew (which means “the son of Tolmai”) who appears after Philip in all the lists. He would be called *Nathanael Bartholomew*, just as Peter is called by the Lord in one place (Matthew 16:17) *Simon Barjona*, or Simon, son of Jonas. In John 21:15 the same Greek words are translated “Simon, son of Jonas.” We notice that Nathanael was called as he sat under a fig tree. Figs represent goods on the natural plane, which gives us an idea of Nathanael’s character. We should remember, as we read this account, that the Lord is saying to all of us, “Come and see,” and, “Follow me,” just as He said to these men of Galilee long ago.

Basic Correspondences

- John = the good or works of charity
- light = truth
- baptism = purification by the truth
- the dove = the Holy of faith, or the truths
and goods of faith
- figs = goods on the natural plane



Senior

In the Senior notes the effort has been made to cover the whole chapter in a balanced way. It is a strictly doctrinal lesson, but the Seniors should be studying doctrine seriously.

The Gospel of John is quite different from the other Gospels. John among the apostles represents the good or works of charity. He was the fourth of the apostles to be called, the first three—Peter, Andrew, and James—representing faith, obedience, and charity. This is the order of regeneration. We must first learn and believe the truth, then obey it, then come to love it, and finally reach the state in which we act from charity in the heart instead of in mere obedience to the truth. It is this final state of unselfish love in the heart which is wisdom, and the Lord can flow into it with enlightenment. So John's Gospel is concerned with spiritual realities rather than with externals. Even the three Epistles of John (which do not have an inner meaning) are different from the rest of the Epistles in that they are throughout concerned with love. John was called "the beloved disciple."

Our chapter divides itself into three sections. The first is the spiritual story of the Incarnation, giving us not the external details of the Lord's birth but the statement of just who He was and why He came into the world. He was the Word made flesh, and the Word was in the beginning with God and was God. When we use words, we say we are "expressing ourselves."* We ourselves are in the words—our thoughts, and behind them our feelings. Swedenborg tells us that a person is his affections and thoughts. His body with all its activities is merely the form in which he expresses himself in the world. When we wish to communicate something to a friend, we either write to him or speak to him. The inspired Scriptures are the written expression of divine truth—the written Word. The Lord in His Incarnation was the expression of the same divine truth in a physical human form—the Word made flesh. The Lord said He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, and He did so by living out divine truth before the eyes of men.

And the Lord came to be the light of the world. The people of the world were living in spiritual darkness because the Old Testa-

*The translation of Phillips renders John 1:1, "At the beginning, God expressed himself." —*Ed.*

ment Scriptures, through which alone divine truth could be learned, had been so overlaid by the scribes and Pharisees with their own interpretations and additions that people no longer knew what was Scripture and what was not. The Lord Himself as divine truth had to come into the world to restore the Scriptures to their purity. A few received Him gladly—those who truly wanted to know what was right so that they might do it. The great majority rejected Him because they had no desire to give up their selfish ways. Read John 3:18-21.

The second section of our chapter is concerned with the testimony of John the Baptist. Again the actual baptism of the Lord is not mentioned, but the sign of the dove—which we know was given at the time of the Lord’s baptism by John—is included in John’s assurance that Jesus is the Son of God. Swedenborg tells us that while the Lord was in the world, His visible humanity was called the Son of God to distinguish it from the Father within, but that in general the Father signifies divine love, the Son the divine wisdom, and the Holy Spirit the divine proceeding or activity. Will, thought, and act in us are analogous to these.

The third section of our chapter tells of the calling of some of the disciples. Here, too, the account differs from those of the other Gospels. We are familiar with the account in the fourth chapter of Matthew of the Lord’s calling Peter and Andrew and James and John to leave their nets and follow Him. Here we learn that Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist and that he had talked with the Lord and had brought his brother Peter to Him before they were called to follow Him. Regeneration must be preceded by reformation, as the wilderness journey preceded the entrance into the Holy Land. In the Gospels this necessary stage of reformation is represented by the preaching of John the Baptist, whose cry was, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” So we can understand why Andrew—who represents obedience—was a disciple of John and was the first of the twelve apostles to recognize the Lord.

Nathanael, whom Philip brought to the Lord, does not appear

by that name in the various lists of the twelve, but he is assumed to be the one called Bartholomew who always comes after Philip in the lists. *Bartholomew* means “son of Tolmai,” *Bar* meaning “son.” Peter is called *Simon Barjona* in Matthew 16:17, and we find him also called Simon the son of Jona in verse 42 of our chapter. So the disciple next after Philip may well have been Nathanael the son of Tolmai.

We should notice also the last verse of our chapter. You remember Jacob’s dream of the ladder (Genesis 28:12) reaching from earth to heaven with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. This ladder represented the Word as our means of conjunction with the Lord and the angels. Now we find the Lord saying the same thing of Himself. So this verse sums up the teaching of the whole chapter that the Lord was the Word made flesh.

Adult

The teacher will decide which part of this lesson will be most helpful for discussion with his particular class. For adults who are familiar with the doctrine of the Lord, a brief treatment of the first fourteen verses would be sufficient, and time could be given to the rest of the chapter. For young adults and especially for newcomers the first part of the lesson is the essential topic.

The Gospels give us three accounts of the Lord’s Advent. Matthew and Luke are concerned principally with the external events which attended it and with its reception. John deals with its nature and significance. John’s whole Gospel is of a different character from the others. He could be inspired to write in this way because of his personal turn of mind. We can see his difference from the other apostles if we compare the Epistles of John with those of Peter, for example. John’s letters are full of love and are exhortations to love and trust. In making this comparison, however, we should also note how evident is the difference between the books with an inner sense and those without it. John’s Epistles are written in the first person throughout. It is John who speaks. But the writer of the Gospel is nowhere apparent as John, and although we

do find the first person occasionally in the book of Revelation, it is never to give us John's thoughts, but only by way of attesting the genuineness of the visions recorded.

The letter of the Word gives us a good many facts concerning the life of the apostle John. He was the son of Zebedee and Salome, and with his brother James was called by the Lord from fishing, immediately after the calling of Peter and Andrew. He was one of the three chosen to witness the transfiguration of the Lord and the miracle of the raising of the daughter of Jairus. He was the beloved disciple who leaned on the Lord's breast at the Last Supper, and the one to whom the Lord entrusted the future care of Mary at the time of the crucifixion. Other records tell us that he remained at Jerusalem for some years after the ascension and then went forth as a missionary, his work being particularly centered about Ephesus. In his extreme old age he was banished to the island of Patmos, where he was given the visions recorded in the book of Revelation. He is thought to have been about twenty-five when he was called, and to have lived to the age of ninety-five. He was perhaps the most devoted, zealous, and spiritual of the Lord's followers.

Much is said in the writings about the correspondence of the apostle John. Peter, James, and John represent "faith, charity, and the good of charity" (AC 2135). Elsewhere (AC 6073³) John is said to represent "the goods or works of charity," or (AE 821⁶) "the church as to good works," or simply (AC 3934^e) "good works." But we should note that by "good works" Swedenborg never means mere external benevolences. In AC 10087² the "good of charity" pictured by John is defined as "to do good from willing good," and in AE 45 we are told that John in the highest sense represents "the Lord as to doctrine." Thus it is evident that for works to be "good" they must be prompted by the Lord's love in the heart and directed by His truth in the mind.

The Gospel of John deals with the Lord's life in its divine rather than in its human aspect—with the coming to view in the world of divine love and wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ. It is largely concerned with the Lord's ministry in Judea, which represents the

high plane of the will, and it reports in detail the Lord's intimate teaching to His immediate followers, especially during the last week of His earthly life. We note that in John's Gospel the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is described in chapter 12, with six chapters between that and the crucifixion story. The Gospel of John records fewer of the miracles than any other and no formal parables, being for the most part a statement of principles applicable particularly to the inner life in its clear recognition of the Lord.

John's account of the Advent is summed up in the statement that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." In AR 200 Swedenborg says: "All thought, speech, and writing, derives its essence and life from him who thinks, speaks, and writes; the man with his quality is therein; but the Lord alone is in the Word." Our chapter first identifies the Word with God as the creator. This is because divine love creates everything by means of divine wisdom, just as we make and do the things we wish by means of our knowledge and thought. "All things have been created from Divine love by means of Divine wisdom." (DL 1) The Word is spoken of as a person because it is the very form of God, in which divine love is expressed. We can express our love, our desires, only by means of our thoughts, and we know that we *are* our affections and thoughts, and that our bodies are merely the clothing we wear in this world and the means by which we act here.

Next we are told: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Divine love is life itself, and divine wisdom is the light of that love, just as the light of the natural world is from the natural sun, which is pure fire. So we are taught that the Lord is the source of all genuine enlightenment, that this light is meant for all, and that if people do not see it, it is only because they do not want to see. In John 3:19 the Lord tells Nicodemus: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The scribes and Pharisees had overlaid the Scriptures with a body of regulations calculated to exalt themselves, thus making the commandment of

God of none effect by their tradition (Matthew 15:6). They rejected the Lord because He swept away these traditions and lived and spoke the Word in its purity, condemning their selfishness, arrogance, and hypocrisy. We become “sons of God” when we receive Him, because He then becomes the source of all our affections and thoughts. If we do not receive Him, we live in darkness and are a part of that world which knew Him not although it was made by Him.

Our chapter carries us on to the witness of John the Baptist and the calling of the first disciples, but again in a different way from the other Gospels. The actual baptism of the Lord by John is not mentioned, but the sign of the dove is part of John’s testimony to the deity of the Lord. And in connection with this testimony we are given a fact recorded nowhere else—that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and was brought by him to recognize the Lord and that Peter was led to the Lord by Andrew, and this before they were both called from their nets to devote themselves to His service. Peter represents faith and Andrew obedience. John’s message of repentance leads to obedience and this in turn to recognition of the Lord and faith in Him.

The name Nathanael does not appear in any of the lists of the twelve apostles, but it is generally believed to have been the given name of Bartholomew—“the son of Tolmai”—who follows Philip in all the lists.

Note how the last verse of our chapter ties in with the first. It is a reminder of Jacob’s ladder, which as we recall is a picture of the Word, by means of which we have conjunction with the Lord. Here again the Lord is identified with the Word. Later the Lord said (John 14:6): “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” This was just before He told Philip: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?”



From the Writings of Swedenborg

Doctrine of the Holy Scripture, n. 100: “Few understand how the Lord is the Word, for they think that the Lord may indeed enlighten and teach men by means of the Word without His being on that account called the Word. Be it known however that every man is his own love, and consequently his own good and his own truth. It is solely from this that a man is a man, and there is nothing else in him that is man. It is from the fact that a man is his own good and his own truth that angels and spirits are men, for all the good and truth that proceeds from the Lord is in its form a man. And as the Lord is Divine good and Divine truth itself, He is *the Man*, from whom every man is a man.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Who was Jonah? *a prophet of Israel*
- J. Why did he try to run away from the Lord? *too proud to warn Nineveh*
- P. What happened to him? *swallowed by great fish*
- J. What prophecy did he make to the Ninevites? *doom in forty days*
- J. Why was it not fulfilled? *people repented*
- P. How did Jonah feel about it? *angry*
- J. What happened to him which pictured his state of heart and mind?
story of gourd
- J. What lesson did the Lord draw from it for him? *should love all people*
- J. When the Lord came into the world, what had the scribes and Pharisees done with the Word? *added their own ideas*
- J. Can you repeat the first verse of the Gospel of John?
- I. What do we mean when we call the inspired Scriptures the “Word of God”?
the written form of divine truth
- P. Why do we always have the Word on the altar in church and open it at the beginning of the service and close it at the end? *symbol of the Lord’s presence*
- J. How was the Word made flesh? *in the person of Jesus Christ*
- P. In our chapter who testified to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah?
John the Baptist
- P. What sign had he been given? *dove*
- J. Which of the apostles are named in this chapter? *Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael*
- J. By what other name is Nathanael elsewhere called? *Bartholomew*
- I. What is meant by saying that the Lord is the light of the world?
He enlightens men’s minds
- S. What is meant by “the Son of God”? *the Lord’s visible divine humanity*
- S. Why did everyone not receive the Lord? *some loved darkness*