

# THE LOOKOUT

DECEMBER 2023

## Unit: Gospel of John (Part 1)

### Theme: Light and Life

**Overview:** Life cannot exist without light, water, and food. That is true both scientifically and theologically. First in the order of creation was the creation of light (Genesis 1:3). Second was the separation of the waters (Genesis 1:6). Finally, God made food (Genesis 1:30). Everyone needs light to see (John 8:12). Everyone needs life, which God alone can provide (John 10:10). Everyone needs food (John 6:48). For three months we will study the Gospel of John, the “spiritual Gospel,” as an early Christian theologian called it. In Part 1, students will learn about the themes of light and life from John the Baptist, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the apostle John, and Jesus himself.

## HOW TO USE

Each week has a lesson aim, lesson text, and supplemental text.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: Study, Application, and Discovery.

Use the Discovery questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF DECEMBER 24, 2023**

**LESSON AIM:** Celebrate Jesus' birth  
and revel in the wonder  
of his world-changing  
glorious arrival.

**UNIT:** Gospel of John (Part 1)

**THEME:** Light and Life

**LESSON TEXT:** John 1:1-18

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Luke 2:4-12; John 8:12-18

## THE TRUE LIGHT ENTERS THE WORLD

BY MARK SCOTT

Prologues involve introductions. But sometimes prologues/introductions go way back, as is the case with this one. William Shakespeare said, “The past is prologue.” That is very true for the Christmas story. The true light that was entering the world began in eternity past. The simple vocabulary and theological profundity of the prologue to John’s Gospel are unmatched in the Bible.

The passage concerns the *Word* (which translates the Greek word *logos* and occurs four times in this prologue). In Greek thought it meant highest reason. In Hebrew thought it went back to God’s powerful word that created the universe—*dabar* (Psalm 33:6) and brought about the fulfillment of prophecies through historical events (2 Chronicles 36:21-22; Jeremiah 1:11-12; 39:16). For John the Word was a person: Jesus. John was writing in Greek, but he probably was thinking in Hebrew. By God identifying himself as the Word, we understand his interpersonal capacity. He both speaks and acts.

### Before There Was Light, There Was the Word

John 1:1-5

The first recorded words of God in the creation account were, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). But John affirms that before there was light there was the Word. We are clearly dealing with the pre-existence of the Word. Before there was anything, there was the Word. Whoever this Word was, *he was with God*, and more stunningly, *he was God*.

The Word not only accompanied God in the beginning, the Word assisted God in creation. He actually made things. As Co-Creator, he brought life into being, and *that life was the light* (knowledge, reason, and moral excellence) *of all mankind*. This *light shines in the darkness* as literal light did in creation (Genesis 1:3-5). The darkness does not stand a chance against the light. It can neither understand it nor overcome it.

### Before There Was Jesus, There Was John the Baptist

John 1:6-8, 15

This same text was covered in the first lesson of this unit. God *sent* (a major word in John’s Gospel) the Word into the world, and he also sent the Word’s predecessor, John the Baptist, into the world. The latter John was the lesser light giving testimony to the greater light. John knew his place—i.e., he was *not the light*. He simply shone his light on the true light. Later, John would say, “He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30). John’s humility is clearly demonstrated in verse 15. Jesus *surpassed* John because he pre-existed before John. And the purpose of

John’s witness was to help people *believe* in Jesus. This was the intention of his whole Gospel (John 20:30-31).

### Before There Was Reception, There Was Rejection

John 1:9-13

Jesus was coming into the world—that is the essence of the Christmas story. It could be argued that Jesus was already in the world by his unseen presence. He is, after all, omnipresent. While the Creator should have been known by his creation, the sad truth was that *the world did not recognize him* (i.e., know him).

Verse 11 is perhaps the saddest verse in the Bible. Jesus came to his own (the nation of Israel—particularly the religious leaders), but they *did not receive him*. This is the united testimony of the Gospels. But then came one of the Bible’s gladdest verses. To all who did *receive him* (i.e., welcome him into their lives) by believing in him, he *gave the right* (authority) *to become the children of God*. What a glorious privilege that is (1 John 3:1-3)! That a Jew wrote the next line (v. 13) was nothing short of revolutionary. The way into the messianic family was not through having the proper lineage, or by the will of the flesh, or by *a husband’s will*, but by being *born* again through God.

### Before There Was Grace, There Was Law

John 1:14-18

This Word entered our world. The word commonly used to refer to his entrance is *incarnation*, meaning “in flesh.” The Word became *flesh*, which literally means that he “tabernacled” among people. Once on earth, he manifested God’s *glory* (his weighty presence and shining brilliance). This true glory of God was full of grace and truth and always balanced the two. The *fullness* of that grace blessed the apostle John and his first-century readers, and it continues to bless *all* since that time who have chosen to believe in Jesus’ name (v. 12).

God gave the *law* through *Moses*. God also gave the balance of grace and truth through Jesus. Notice that *grace* is always mentioned first (vv. 14, 17). Jon Weece has said, “We lead with grace and land with truth.”

The Old Testament declared that no one had ever seen God. To see God was to die. But we can look at Jesus because he, *who is himself God*, has *made him known*. Those three words translate a Greek word from which we get the word *exegesis*. That word is usually applied to what a preacher or teacher does with God’s Word. How fitting that it should describe what the Word who became flesh did! ■

## APPLICATION

### DREAMING OF A 'RIGHT CHRISTMAS'

BY DAVID FAUST

As a college student, I heard Marshall Leggett preach a sermon called "I'm Dreaming of a *Right* Christmas." Years later, the title of his message still challenges me. What does a "right Christmas" look like?

Deep down, most of us don't long for more presents, bigger light shows, fancier holiday extravaganzas, and more TV ads featuring new cars adorned with red bows. We do yearn, however, for simplicity and mercy.

#### Simplicity

Why have we made the holidays so complicated? Why does the season generate so much financial pressure, excessive busyness, and relational stress? It's good to get together with family and friends, and Christmas provides unique opportunities to serve our neighbors and welcome seekers to our churches. Some of my favorite parts of the holiday, though, are the simple things, not the big productions. I enjoy listening to holiday music while driving my car, decorating the little Christmas tree I put in my office every year, and singing "Silent Night" with the congregation while we hold candles in the dark.

When I was a boy, our church didn't hold services on Christmas Eve. Apparently, our leaders thought it best for families to stay home together. One year my family chopped down a cedar tree and hauled it in from the woods, and the tree looked a lot larger in our living room than it looked outdoors.

Each December, Dad bought a large peppermint candy stick, laid it on the kitchen table, and smashed it with a hammer so we could eat the broken pieces. After all these years, watching Dad pound on that candy stick remains one of my favorite Christmas memories. Simple things create some of childhood's sweetest joys.

#### Mercy

I like the cheerful greeting, "Merry Christmas!" but changing one letter in the word *merry* improves my view

of the holiday. What if, at least part of the time, we switch the word "Merry" to "Mercy"?

Our neighbors need more than a casual wish that says, "Have a nice holiday!" Christ didn't come to earth merely to make us merry. He came "so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). The lost need salvation. The dying need hope. The lonely need companionship. The fearful need peace. Christ came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), for every generation needs his grace to forgive us and his truth to guide us.

It will be a "right Christmas" if this season enables us to fix our eyes more firmly on Jesus, and to help both the poor and the materially prosperous discover the true riches of God's grace. It will be a "right Christmas" if it helps skeptics learn there are compelling, logical reasons to believe in the Lord and his Word. It will be a "right Christmas" if we put God's love into action and serve our neighbors well. Christmas is "right" when it reminds us that we have a higher purpose than merely pursuing our own pleasure and entertainment.

All year long, the Lord's grace and truth should shape our decisions, guide our relationships, and direct our actions. The holiday serves a useful purpose if it makes us more grateful for God's undeserved gifts, more merciful toward others, and more determined to serve the Lord in the year ahead.

Merry Christmas!

**Personal Challenge:** Take time during the holiday season (maybe over a cup of coffee or hot chocolate) to pause and thank the Lord for his grace and truth. Ask him to help you, in the coming year, apply the teaching of Jesus, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7). ■

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## DISCOVERY

### BY DOUG REDFORD

1. Did you reach out to a “messy” person during the past week? How did your effort go? Is there any possibility of following up with this individual?
2. What is the earliest event in your life that you can remember? How old were you?  

Ask two people to read aloud **John 1:1-18** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.
3. Why is this text from John’s Gospel an appropriate one to read and study during the Christmas season?
4. List five truths about Jesus that you take from this passage.
5. John 1:10 says that Jesus “was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.” How do we see these words demonstrated during the Christmas season?
6. John 1:16 says, “Out of his [Jesus’] fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.” Look back over the past year and list some evidence of God’s grace in your life.
7. Thinking about our passage, John 1:1-18, which verse in this passage would you say is the . . . *most hopeful?* . . . *most humbling?* . . . *most troubling?* . . . *most profound?*
8. Mark Scott writes, “God gave the balance of grace and truth through Jesus.” Why is it important to keep these in balance? In other words:
  - What happens when grace is shown without respect for the truth?
  - What happens when truth is adhered to without a demonstration of grace?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
10. During each day of the coming week, take time to read John 1:1-18. Select one verse from that passage each day as your “verse of the day,” and repeat it whenever you have some spare time. Thank God each day that “the Word became flesh.”

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **John 6:25-40**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■