

In the Name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit

One God Amen



The Gospel According to Saint John the Evangelist Chapter 1

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. **4** In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. **6** There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. **8** He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. **9** That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. **11** He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. **12** But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: **13** who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. **14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" **16** And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. **17** For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" **20** He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." **21** And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." **22** Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" **23** He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' ' as the prophet Isaiah said.'" **24** Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. **25** And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" **26** John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. **27** It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." **28** These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! **30** This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' **31** I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." **32** And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. **33** I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is

He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' **34** And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." **35** Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. **36** And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. **38** Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "**What do you seek?**" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?" **39** He said to them, "**Come and see.**" They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour). **40** One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. **41** He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). **42** And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "**You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas**" (which is translated, A Stone).

43 The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." **46** And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." **47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" **48** Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "**Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.**" **49** Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" **50** Jesus answered and said to him, "**Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.**" **51** And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

General Interpretation:

This chapter talks about the eternal birth of Jesus from the Father affirming His Lordship. St John asserts that Jesus is God who created the world and everything that is in it. He then states that God tried to speak to man, through various means, and was met with rejection. So, in the last days just before His appearance in the flesh, He sent His messenger, John the Baptist, to pave the way and call people to repentance to be worthy to accept the True Light.

St John goes on to explain that Jesus came to the Jews and they rejected Him. However, the Gentiles received Him and accepted His message and in turn, He made them His own children. No longer are the believers mere humans, but are holy and chosen to be His heirs as well.

St John gave a summary of John the Baptist's witness of Jesus. The Baptist made a comparison between what Moses handed down and what Jesus brought to the world. The Law had justice but lacked grace without which no one can fulfill God's justice. Jesus brought to man a far better deal than the Law, for through Him we are called children of God but through the Law we are called sinners for no one can fulfill the Law except Him who set forth the Law.

St John gives an elaborate testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus by telling an account of an encounter between him and the Jews' religious leadership. They asked several questions to which he recited the prophecy about himself "The voice of one crying in the wilderness ..." Then he told them explicitly that the One he has been bearing witness to is already born and among them but they have not recognized Him.

After this incident, Jesus came to John to receive baptism. At first, John did not know Him and it was revealed to Him that this man is the Son of God who would bear the sin of the world and told those standing "Behold the Lamb of God" referring to Jesus' sacrifice He was to offer on the cross.

Two of John's disciples, Andrew and John (the evangelist) left him for Jesus and that same day, Simon Peter joined them as well. Next day another two disciples, Phillip and Nathanael, followed Jesus bringing the total of disciples to five in less than two days!

Spiritual Interpretation:

The Lord God became man and left His Cherubic throne so that man can become His temple and throne. He took what we have and gave us what He has. He took our filthy and fallen nature and gave us His Spirit so that we can be His sons and heirs of His heavenly Kingdom.

He came to fulfill the Law, which man could not fulfill. He came to bestow grace on humanity so that man could be justified. Through His incarnation “Mercy and truth have met together: righteousness and peace have greeted each other. Truth has sprung out of the earth; and righteousness has looked down from heaven”

With humility, He accepted baptism from His creation. He who came to baptize with fire, was Himself baptized with water to wash the filth of the flesh. John the Baptist realized this and at first refused to baptize Jesus, but then allowed it after Jesus explained that “they” must fulfill all righteousness. Jesus allowed his creation to be part of fulfilling all righteousness and the water that was a symbol of God’s wrath now has become a necessity for rebirth.

During His baptism, God revealed Himself to man in the form of the three Hypostasis as if telling man that only through baptism God may dwell in the flesh. The human nature submerges in the water and after it rises, no longer is it driven by its own lusts, but rather it is driven by God who dwells in it.

Through John’s the Baptist’s eyes and ears the disciples saw the Trinity manifested and heard the voice from heaven, they submitted the rest of their senses to follow the One who can free their souls. They could not let go of Him even after seeing that he had no place to stay at. They knew that through Him, man could be reconciled to God again.

The words “come and see” were enough to attract Simon and Nathanael. What did they see that was so powerful to make them leave John the Baptist, their day to day life and follow Him? Was it His gentleness? Or was it His humbleness before the Baptist? Or was it His eyes full of purity and wisdom?

Word Meaning

Word (Logos) / Hypostasis:

The Greek translation of “word” is (λογος) logos can be used in two different ways:

- 1. The word that is born: Meaning the reason or the rationale the soul produces, and which through it, all works could be fulfilled. The second hypostasis of the Trinity is called the word as He is the reason or the mind of God through which He fulfills His works. And as no one can explain how we can think or how the soul creates the thought, though it is a certainty, no one can explain the eternal birth of the Word, the second hypostasis of the Trinity - the Orthodox Church calls it among other things¹ “The Mystery of the Holy Trinity.”*
- 2. The word that is spoken: Simply the words contained in our minds. This is also a suitable expression for the second hypostasis, our Lord Jesus by whom God had spoken to us in the last days (Heb 1:2). Jesus revealed to us what was in God’s mind, just as the words express what is in our minds.*

From these two points, we can understand why St John called Jesus, the Word of God. In addition to what is aforementioned, the Chaldee translation of the Old Testament calls the Messiah “Memra” meaning the word of

¹ The procession of the Holy Spirit “only” from the Father.
The Son sending the Holy Spirit

Jehovah. Moreover, the OT, in numerous verses, says that God's works are fulfilled according to His word, and not words. This shows that the Jews knew what it means to be the Word of God, and that it is God Himself.

To conclude this topic, it is important to note that the title "word" became coined with the second hypostasis in the New Testament to express His essence and the identity of God². It is the final stage of titles used in expressing God's quintessence to mankind³.

Spiritual life Applications

The main message of this chapter is to recognize Jesus and accept Him as our Savior. The Jews rejected Him and therefore excluded themselves from being the children of God. It is paradoxical that the holders and the keepers of the Law rejected the Lawgiver and the chosen ones became rebellious.

We on the other hand have been given the right not just to be the chosen people of God but to be His own children born of His Spirit. St John the evangelist, in this chapter, gave us very good example of how to follow Jesus. The disciples, upon hearing John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus, they immediately left after Jesus. Now, let's look into this in more detail. At that time, John the Baptist was famous, popular in all of Judah that even the King feared him. He was a pious man, son of a priest, considered a prophet and people flocked to hear him, ask for forgiveness and seek his advice. In contrast, Jesus had no one following Him, as He had not started His mission. The obvious choice for anyone wanting to be trained in religious matters is to choose the one with more esteem, fame and influence. However, the disciples followed Jesus instead with just hearing Baptist's testimony. Their goal was to follow the True shepherd who can offer them salvation without waiting to see Lazarus being raised from the dead. We also should follow suit. God's way is not necessarily popular or exotic among people, instead His way is narrow and full of afflictions.

Theological Aspects

St. John the evangelist presents Jesus as God, existing before the ages and the creator of the whole world and everything that is in it, and the whole Gospel deals with the divine nature of God the incarnate. In the first chapter he deals with the eternal birth of Jesus from the Father and then presents the Trinity during Jesus' baptism. So, what is the Trinity and how can three be one?

² *"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified"* Acts 20:32

³ In the Old Testament, the second hypostasis was presented as the act of God as in the story of creation ; God said let there be light. He was also presented as the Wisdom, then the Messiah. So, we see a gradual ascension in personifying the second person of the Holy Trinity till He appeared in flesh and communicated with man one on one and it was suitable to call Him the Word of God.

Here are some examples:

- In 1 Kings 4:34, the wisdom of God refers to Jesus: *"And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice."* Compare that with Acts 6:3, which talks about the qualifications of a deacon to be *"full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom"*. Stephen was full of God's wisdom that *"they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke"* Acts 6:10.
- The book of proverbs is full of references to Jesus as being the wisdom of God:
 - *"Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded"* (Pro 1:23,24). The foretelling of the Jews' rejection of Christ's crucifixion
 - *"Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. She has sent out her maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city"* (Pro 9:1 – 4). Reference to the seven sacraments, the Eucharist and the apostles.

The Christian trinity is not a new concept introduced in the New Testament. Rather, if we study the Old Testament closely, we will find numerous references to the aspect of the three hypostasis of God. Instead of proving the existence of the Trinity throughout the Bible, let us try to understand the concept:

We as Christians believe that the human being consists of:

- *Spirit,*
- *Soul, and*
- *Body*

The three form the human nature and without one of them, the human nature does not exist. For example, the animal is only soul and body and its nature is different than that of the human one.

When we talk about the soul, we identify its nature; whether it is a human soul or an animal soul. This is very important because the characteristics of the two are very different. In case of the human, the soul has a mind and the intellect, and this is not the case of the animal one.

As mentioned, the spirit, soul and body together form the human nature and when we talk about any of them we naturally refer to the human nature. The three are of the same essence (nature) or the same being. The three have different characteristics and functions but of the same being; the human being. Can we say that the body is more human than the soul or the spirit is more human than the body? Certainly not. As far as the human nature is concerned, the three are equal in terms of the human nature, or human essence.

The same is true of God's nature in terms of its "components", "ingredients", or "elements":

- *The Father,*
- *The Son,*
- *and the Holy Spirit*

The three form God's nature. When we refer to any of them, we speak about one aspect of God's nature. Theologically, when we speak about one of God's "elements", we speak of one of the hypostasis or one of the persons of the Holy Trinity. The three persons are equal because each, is of the same divine nature, or the same essence. Each hypostasis has a different role in God's nature in terms of the functions each perform.

Church life Application

- *Part of this chapter (1- 14) is used on a daily basis during the Matins morning prayer. The Matins prayer is focused on light and receiving a new day. By reading verses 1-14 we are reminded that we are His creation and He is the light in our lives.*
- *Verses (18-34) is read during the liturgy celebrating the Epiphany Feast*
- *The first reconciliation prayer in the liturgy of St Gregory the Great (in the Coptic Church) adopts the concept notion of the first verse.*
- *Both the Apostolic and the Nicene creeds draw heavily on the first 4 verses. These two creeds profess the Christian faith in few sentences. The Nicene creed is used by the Orthodox Church in her liturgical services.*

- The term “αρχη” used by St John, meaning beginning, had been adopted by the Church for the title of the high priest (Αρχη επισκοπος) Archi-Episkopos or Archi-Araws, the first overseer or high priest.

In addition, St John presented Jesus as God appearing in the flesh and as the sacrifice that was kept since the beginning for reconciliation between God and man as John the Baptist testified: “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”. Jesus offered Himself on the cross as both the sacrifice and the High Priest. In the OT, God gave His people a symbol to His sacrifice that He also gave the NT Church⁴ which she celebrates during the Eucharist.

Early Christian Writers:

Following is just an example of how the early Christian Writers reflected and interpreted the Holy Bible. The following is just a sample of what John Chrysostom wrote regarding the first verse.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Why, when all the other Evangelists had begun with the Dispensation ; (for Matthew says, "The Book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David"; and Luke too relates to us in the beginning of his Gospel the events relating to Mary; and in like manner Mark dwells on the same narratives, from that point detailing to us the history of the Baptist;) why, when they began with these matters, did John briefly and in a later place hint at them, saying, "the Word was made flesh" (v. 14); and, passing by everything else, His conception, His birth, His bringing up, His growth, at once discourse to us concerning His Eternal Generation?

I will now tell you what the reason of this is. Because the other Evangelists had dwelt most on the accounts of His coming in the flesh, there was fear lest some, being of groveling minds, might for this reason rest in these doctrines alone. In order, therefore, to lead away from this fondness for earth those who were like to fall into it, and to draw them up towards heaven, with good reason he commences his narrative from above, and from the eternal subsistence. For while Matthew enters upon his relation from Herod the king, Luke from Tiberius Cesar, Mark from the Baptism of John, this Apostle, leaving alone all these things, ascends beyond all time or age. Thither darting forward the imagination of his hearers to the " was in the beginning," not allowing it to stay at any point, nor setting any limit, as they did in Herod, and Tiberius, and John.

And what we may mention besides as especially deserving our admiration is, that John, though he gave himself up to the higher doctrine, yet did not neglect the Dispensation; nor were the others, though intent upon the relation of this, silent as to the subsistence before the ages. With good cause; for One Spirit It was that moved the souls of all; and therefore they have shown great unanimity in their narrative. But you, beloved, when you have heard of "The Word," do not endure those who say, that He is a work; nor those even who think, that He is simply a word. For many are the words of God which angels execute, but of those words none is God; they all are prophecies or commands, (for in Scripture it is usual to call the laws of God His commands, and prophecies, words; wherefore in speaking of the angels, he says, "Mighty in strength, fulfilling His word"), but this Word is a Being with subsistence, proceeding without affection from the Father Himself. For this, as I before said, he has shown by the term "Word." As therefore the expression, "In the beginning was the Word," shows His Eternity, so "was in the beginning with God," has declared to us His Co-eternity. For that you may not, when you hear "In the beginning was the Word," suppose Him to be Eternal, and yet imagine the life of the Father to differ from His by some interval and longer duration, and so assign a beginning to the Only-Begotten,

⁴ “This is the offering of Aaron and his sons, which they shall offer to the Lord, beginning on the day when he is anointed: one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a daily grain offering, half of it in the morning and half of it at night.” Leviticus 6:20. It was not to be eaten but wholly burned for it was a foreshadow of what the Christ was about to do on the Cross. However, in the NT Christ gave His disciples and the Church the right to eat it for the symbol has been fulfilled and through grace we are allowed to participate in Christ’s sacrifice. In both the OT and the NT, the offering has to be offered by an anointed (Christ like) priest.

he adds, "was in the beginning with God"; so eternally even as the Father Himself, for the Father was never without the Word, but He was always God with God, yet Each in His proper Person.

How then, one says, does John assert that He was in the world, if He was with God? Because He was both with God and in the world also. For neither Father nor Son are limited in any way. Since, if "there is no end of His greatness", and if "of His wisdom there is no number", it is clear that there cannot be any beginning in time to His Essence. You have heard, that "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth"; what do you understand from this "beginning"? Clearly, that they were created before all visible things. So, respecting the Only-Begotten, when you hear that He was "in the beginning," conceive of him as before all intelligible things, and before the ages."

For more information on the early Christian Writers, please visit:

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2401.htm>

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701.htm>