

**“The *Real* Beginning of Christmas”**  
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Sometimes it is hard to know when things begin, but it is very interesting to investigate! Do you believe in love at first sight? What do you think? E.g., I recall a person of authority on relationships was asked this, I believe he was a psychologist, and he said no, he did not believe love at first sight was possible. I personally am very skeptical at love at first sight. There may be infatuation at first sight, but I have a hard time believing love—a commitment of the will toward someone through thick and thin—is possible at first sight. The question then becomes, when did love begin in a relationship? Was it after the first date, second date, a month of dating, a year of dating? There are other things that are hard to know when they began—like the universe. For a while cosmologists believed in a static universe, one that was always there, and from what I understand the Hubble telescope helped to change all that and helped scientists see that the universe is actually expanding, and thus came in the Big Bang theory that is accepted, from what I understand, by most cosmologists today. The universe began about 14 billion years ago. When we look at Christmas and the birth of Jesus, we believe Christmas has a beginning like what we find in Matthew and Luke—with Mary’s conception by the Holy Spirit and then Jesus’ birth. John’s Gospel, however, takes us back even further.

READ John 1:1-14 (pp. 91-92)

**CONTEXT:** John's Gospel is usually dated around 90 AD, but it could be much earlier, and it seems to be written by John the son of Zebedee, or at least originating with him.

READ v 1. "John's gospel starts at the beginning of the universe, and echoes the very first verse of Genesis." It is noteworthy how the other gospels begin rather differently. Matthew starts with the genealogy. Mark starts with John the Baptist's ministry. Luke starts with the birth narrative of John the Baptist. For the early readers of John's gospel, they would have immediately thought of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. . ." Who was at the beginning of the universe? God! And with God was the Word. But who was the Word? I will explain the background for the Word in a minute, but for now it is important for us to recognize the identity of the Word. In the last phrase of v 1, there has been some controversy with its translation. The Jehovah's Witnesses translate it, "The Word was a god", which implies polytheism, which is theologically problematic for a gospel that adheres to monotheism. The better translation is, "The Word was God", because it follows Colwell's rule that the subject in a sentence with a copulative verb, such as "to be", will be the noun with the direct article, and in this sentence "the Word" has the article, with God without an article, indicating it is the predicate nominative, not anarthrous.

READ vv 2-5,10-13. "John tells his readers something with which every Jew would have been comfortable: the Word (*logos* in Greek, a loaded word which can mean such things as word, reason, grounds, teaching, and message), like Sophia (Wisdom) in Jewish thought, was responsible for creation and the Law. He was rejected by man of His own. But those who received Him were God's children. Thus, this Word was another way, a literary way, of talking about

God! Cf. Proverbs 8:22-31; Wisdom of Solomon 9:1-2; Sirach 24:1,23.” The Word/*Logos* and Wisdom/*Sophia* were synonymous in Wisdom of Solomon 9:1-2, and it is through them that God is said to have created the world. In Sirach 24:1,23 Wisdom is said to be the Law, the first five books of the Old Testament, which God gave His people. READ vv 2-4,10. This idea of Jesus’ preexistence and involvement with creation can be found in Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-17, which pre-date John’s gospel. This idea was consistent with the Old Testament, in Proverbs 8:22-31 where Wisdom is beside God as He creates the world. And our universe is remarkable. E.g., I recall once driving on I-10 toward New Orleans from Slidell and the sun was setting, and the sky was gorgeous. How can one think all this was just by chance, and our ability to discuss it and evaluate it are also products of pure chance? And this God came to His own, but they did not receive Him, but those who did became children of God. The Jews understood God as their Father in a certain sense, as in Exodus 4:22 where God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh that Israel is His firstborn son, and he is to let His son go! It is a special relationship we are called to have with God. E.g., I recall in seminary I knew a teenager in the youth group I led who was adopted, and I once asked her whether she ever wanted to find her real parents— putting my foot in my mouth!— and she said very sternly that she had her real parents— and I could tell it was special to her to be adopted into her family, whom she dearly loved. When we come to God and are born again, we become adopted into His family! Now, all of this the first century AD Jew would have found fine and dandy in believing. It is what comes next which would have been the shocker!

READ v 14. However, v 14 would have shocked the ancient Jew with the completely unexpected— this ‘Word’ became human?! Cf. John 20:27-28.” That Jesus is identified as God is clear from Thomas’ response to the resurrected Jesus in John 20:27-28; READ. The Creator of the Universe becomes part of His

creation as a person; the Word or Wisdom, the literary device, becomes a person, without undermining monotheism. E.g., I am reminded of the show “Undercover Boss”, where the boss or owner of the business becomes a co-worker with the others and evaluates how they work, and in the end he rewards them for their good work— like once where he vows to pay for the college education for one of his workers who has a dream to go to college. God becomes one of us, and because of this we can trust Him. E.g., I recall finding a lizard in the sanctuary once, and I tried to catch it but it fled from me, and I thought if I became a lizard he probably would be able to trust me. God is like that, and we can trust Him. As it says in Hebrews 4:15-16, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

“How should this message of Christmas transform not only human history, but also our individual lives?” For human history, the mystery of our existence has been revealed— we now know who we are and why we are here and where we are going— the core questions of our existence. For us individually, we have a Creator whom we can trust with our lives, who understands us and what our struggle are, and loves us still! Let us go to Him this week, and especially in the year ahead!