

WHO IS JESUS?

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Who Is Jesus?

Christians have made the Gospel about so many things - things rather than Christ.

But Jesus Christ is the gravitational pull that brings things together and gives them meaning. Without Him, all things lose their value.

It is all too possible to emphasize a spiritual truth, value, virtue or gift, yet miss Christ, Who is Himself all that makes us lovely and loveable.

*Leonard Sweet
Jesus Manifesto*

Tonight begins a several-month series on the Life, Ministry and Meaning of the Christ (Messiah), led by Pastor Dan Betzer at First Assembly of God Church in Fort Myers, Florida.

WELCOME TO THIS FIRST OF TWENTY CLASSES WHICH EXPLORE THE
PRIMARY QUESTION:

WHO IS JESUS?

For the past nearly 32 years, I have prepared 34 series from Holy Scripture for our Wednesday night Bible studies. I have stated from the pulpit many times how vital these mid-week studies in the Word are and have prepared a total about 3,000 pages of notes still available on the Internet or videos.

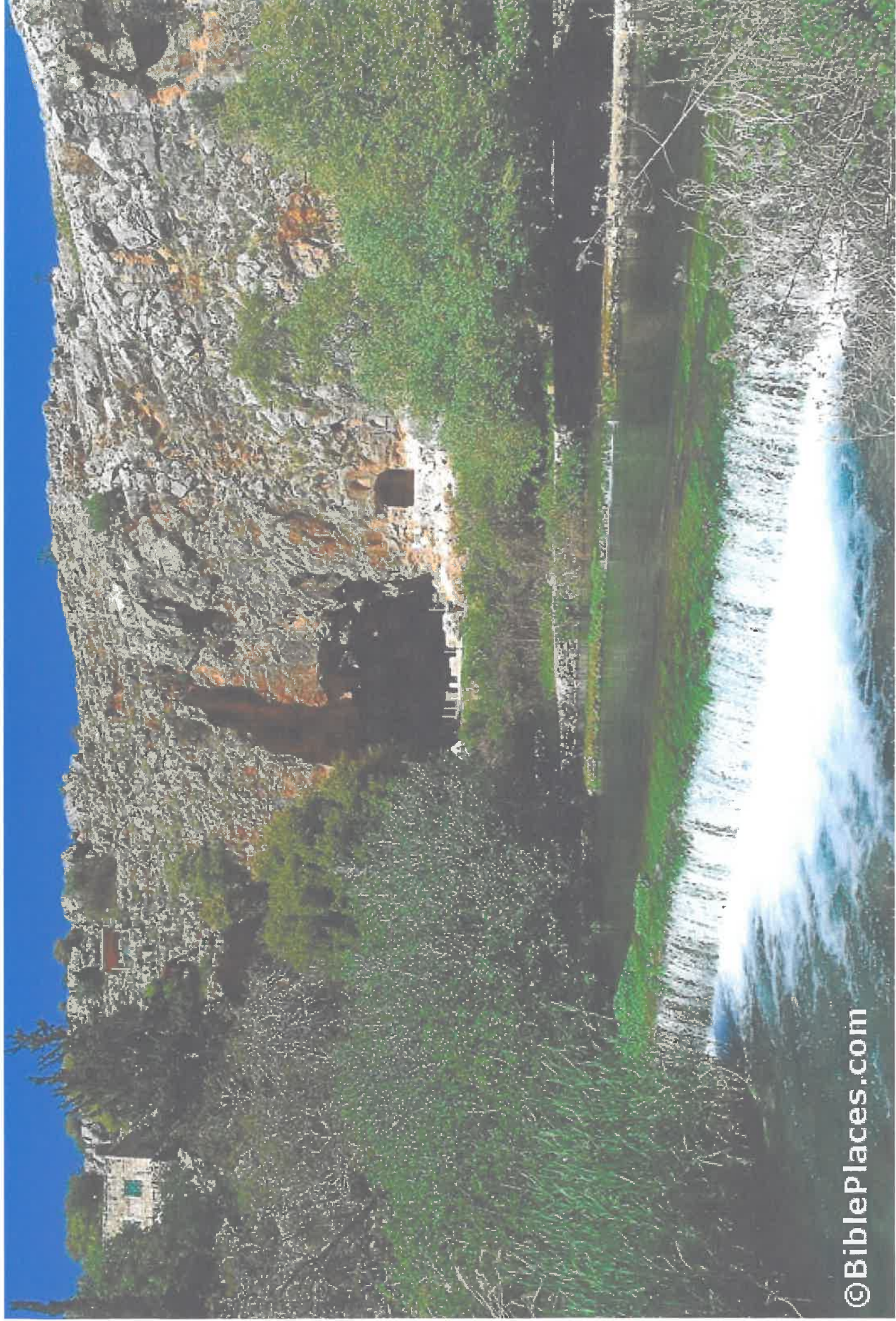
While each of them has been of eternal importance because they are from Scripture, (2 Tim. 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*) never have I felt such an intense, even passionate, need for a study as I feel for this one. Note carefully the title: WHO IS JESUS, not who *was* Jesus. He is alive and relevant right now! Today! This moment!

On the following page you will find a picture of one of my favorite places in all Israel, Caesarea Philippi (or Baniyas, as it's also called). This scene is located on the early slopes of Mount Hermon, the 10,000 ft mountain that serves as the boundary among Israel, Syria and Lebanon. This place, a feast for peaceful and historic scripture study, contains headwaters for the legendary Jordan. It was here that Jesus brought His disciples, just days short of His divinely-set appointment with the cross a hundred miles south of here in Jerusalem. Gathering His men around Him, Jesus confronted them with this challenge:

Mark 8:27-29

And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? [28] **And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. [29] And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. (Messiah)**

The question directed at the disciples is the same one we all must answer. Who is Jesus? This story, upon which you and I embark for the next several months, will take us down many paths - historic, eternal, personal, sociological, scriptural – all so critical! It is my fervent prayer that all within hearing or perhaps reading this study will come to the conclusion, if not already reached, that Jesus truly is the Son of the Living God, the Messiah, the Savior, the soon-returning King, the central personality in all history, and the One Whose death at Calvary and subsequent resurrection open the gates of Heaven for those who receive Him. So – let's begin what famed author Fulton Oursler so aptly called, THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD.



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CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Who Is Jesus

Part One / Wednesday, December 5, 2018

In The Fulness of Time

1 Galatians 4:4

2 *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a*
3 *woman, made under the law,*

4
5 March of 1971 was my first trip into Bethlehem. It was a cold early-spring morning and
6 there were wisps of snow scattered on those rugged hills of the town. At the village's
7 highest point stands the Church of the Nativity. Beneath the nave (platform) of the
8 sanctuary is a cave which most scholars believe was once the famed stable where the
9 Christ was born. It certainly no longer resembles a cave as the rock walls are covered
10 with tapestries and from the roof hang icons conducive to the worship of the Greek
11 Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Armenian faiths who "own" the place.

12
13 To the east of the town is a deep natural "bowl," an enormous indentation of the
14 topography, where in centuries past the lovely Moabite maiden Ruth worked in the fields
15 of Boaz (whom she would marry and become the ancestress of King David and Jesus
16 Christ.) Some years later, young David would patrol the sheep assigned to him and
17 would write magnificent lyrics we know and love as the Psalms.

18
19 On that fateful night, well down in the hollow, shepherds were settling in for the night.
20 Luke 2:8-14 **And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field,**
21 **keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon**
22 **them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.**
23 **[10] And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of**
24 **great joy, which shall be to all people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city**
25 **of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. [12] And this shall be a sign unto you;**
26 **Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. [13] And**
27 **suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God,**
28 **and saying, [14] Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward**
29 **men.**

30
31 Peace? There was not much peace in that country. On the throne of Rome sat Caesar
32 Augustus who certainly was in no mood for a Messiah to be born.

1 WHO WAS AUGUSTUS?
2

3 Nearly fifty years before the birth of Jesus, a major event took place in the northern part
4 of Italy. A brilliant and fierce warrior named Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River
5 (49 BC), which meant war! Within five years, he had made himself the leader/ruler of
6 Rome and in 45 BC declared himself “dictator for life.” Sixty members of the Roman
7 Senate conspired to get rid of him and on March 15, 44 BC, Caesar was stabbed at least
8 27 times by the conspirators and died on the Senate floor.
9

10 The battle for leadership was primarily between two men: Marc Antony and Octavian.
11 Antony made the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra his romantic consort. But the duel could
12 not withstand the overwhelming strength of Octavian and in 27 BC the battle was over
13 with both Antony and Cleopatra dead. Octavian was now the undisputed emperor over
14 the Roman Empire at which time he became known as Caesar AUGUSTUS.
15

16 It was only natural that the new ruler wanted to know the true strength of his domain and
17 so: Luke 2:1-3 **And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree**
18 **from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. [2] (And this taxing was**
19 **first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) [3] And all went to be taxed,**
20 **every one into his own city.**
21

22 Silent Night? Hardly!
23

24 We love to lift our voices at Christmas time to sing Silent Night (written in 1818 by Franz
25 Xaver Gruber near Salzburg, Austria). But indeed how silent was the world? Henry
26 Barraclough was much more historically accurate when in 1915 he wrote,

27 *Out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe*
28 *Only His great eternal love made my Savior go.*
29

30 Only a short few months following Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, the brutal tyrant Herod the
31 Great died in Jericho after decades of rulership. The historian Josephus reported that a
32 long and extravagant funeral process proceeded from Jericho to the Herodium, one of
33 Herod’s palaces a few miles east of Bethlehem, where the vicious old man was laid to rest
34 on the side of the hill. (I have often stood at the site of his grave and explored his coffin
35 when it was on display at the Israeli museum - Herod’s body long since stolen and
36 disposed of.)
37

38 Silent night? Quite the contrary. Herod’s death in 4 BC was a signal for the eruption
39 of all the anger that had accumulated during his reign. He had ruled over quite an
40 expanse of humanity - all the area now covered by Israel, Jordan and the regions south of

1 Damascus. In his will, Herod had designated his son Archelaus (awful choice!) as heir
2 to the title of king and ruler of Judea, the area we know today as the Negev (that spans the
3 vast area between Israel and Egypt) and southern Syria. He bequeathed the rest of his
4 empire to other offspring. As you might imagine there were inter-family quarrels.
5 Besides, the now-old Emperor Augustus did very little to quell the arguments as they
6 seemed to systematically break up Herod's influence. There was also great economic
7 damage around Jerusalem when Herod died in which the great public works spawned by
8 him disappeared with him at the helm.

9
10 Now Rome sent in a succession of governors (procurators) to rule Judea who varied from
11 mediocre to downright criminal. It was said of Sabinus (one of Rome's governors) that
12 "he came as a poor man to a rich province and left a poor province as a rich man." That
13 seemed to be the make-up of all the rulers sent to Israel by Augustus. Now revolts
14 sprang up all over the Near East. *Silent night....holy night....all is calm....*but not for
15 long after the Son of God was born as a human child in Bethlehem.

16
17 **H. G. Wells, a famous historian (who died in 1946) and author of "The War Of
The Worlds" remarked, *I am a historian. I am not a believer, but I must confess
as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very
center of history. Jesus Christ is the most dominant figure in all history.***

18
19 The Prince of Peace, so designated by His Father God, entered by human birth into a
20 wicked, rugged and unpeaceful world. Isaiah 7:14 **Therefore the Lord himself shall
21 give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his
22 name Immanuel.** Isaiah 9:6 **For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and
23 the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful,
24 Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.** Jesus
25 came to bring peace and those who have made Him Lord of their lives have experienced
26 peace in varying degrees (depending upon their personal commitment to Him).

27
28 "For all of Jesus' 33 years of earthly life, revolt and rumors of revolt filled the air.
29 Many were looking for a Messiah. *Every Hebrew prophet had taught that someday God
30 would install His kingdom on earth and that is why rumors about the 'Son of David' so
31 inflamed Jewish hopes. God would prove in person that He had not forsaken them. He
32 would, as Isaiah had cried (Isaiah 64:1), rend the heavens and come down, that the
33 mountains would tremble before you! Come down to cause the nations to quake before
34 You!* But let us be honest. When the One John pointed to arrived on the scene, neither
35 the mountains trembled nor the nations quaked. The opposite happened: within a
36 generation Roman soldiers razed Jerusalem to the ground. (Philip Yancey)

1 So why would God send His Son to this planet at “such a time?” I repeat Paul’s classic
2 line in Galatians 4:4, **But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his**
3 **Son...**

4 5 The Fulness of Time

6
7 I am indebted to my friend and co-laborer here, Dr. Joe Mulvihill, who has taught
8 university and seminary courses on the Intertestamental Period. He mentioned that some
9 students had questioned why God didn’t send Jesus at some other period in history.
10 Fascinating question with lots of strong answers.

11
12 1. THE PAX ROMANA When Rome ruled the known world, its leaders imposed
13 “The Roman Peace” - general lack of wars which made it at least somewhat easier for the
14 spread of the Gospel of Christ.

15
16 2. THE ROAD SYSTEM There are several issues here: Rome was the first empire to
17 establish paved or stone roads. Philippi (named in honor of King Philip, father of
18 Alexander the Great) in northern Greece, for example, was built astride a major Roman
19 road that connected Rome on the west to Istanbul on the east. Remnants of that ancient
20 highway still exist, although they are not drive-able. Added to this massive construction,
21 Rome made travel much safer than ever before, protecting travelers and building road
22 houses or way stations. Think of how this helped the first Christians to “spread the
23 Word.”

24
25 3. LANGUAGE Although the world was under Roman rule when Jesus was born,
26 much of the culture was Greek, including the common language - Greek. Rome
27 continued that culture although Latin was included.

28
29 4. MAIL This was the first secure system of sending messages via mail.

30
31 5. PAGAN WORSHIP which was so prevalent in Old Testament culture was becoming
32 less dominant among the nations, simply because it could not satisfy the human craving
33 for God.

34
35 6. ROME’S LEGAL SYSTEM sometimes (not always, to be sure) protected Christians’
36 rights (although several of the Roman emperors thrived on persecuting the believers).

37
38 Dr. Mulvihill continued, “The Population Reference Bureau estimates that the number of
39 people who have lived on this planet is about 105 BILLION people. Only 2% of them
40 were born PRIOR to the advent (birth) of Christ.

1 God chose the exact time and place for Jesus to come. Quoting William Lane Craig,
2 “The Bible says in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, and when Christ came, the
3 nation of Israel had been prepared. The Roman peace dominated the Mediterranean
4 world; it was an age of literacy and learning. I think in God’s providential plan for
5 human history, we see His wisdom in orchestrating the development of human life and
6 then in bringing Christ into the world *in the fulness of time.*”

7 8 **BEFORE TIME BEGAN - THE PRE-INCARNATE CHRIST**

9
10 The reality of the Christ did not begin with the Bethlehem-Christmas story. The Apostle
11 John made that so abundantly clear in John 1:1: **In the beginning was the Word, and**
12 **the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** Let us dwell on that line for a few
13 moments before we go on.

14
15 John 1:1-18

16 **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was**
17 **God. [2] The same was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made by him;**
18 **and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life; and the**
19 **life was the light of men. [5] And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness**
20 **comprehended it not.**

21 **[6] There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.** (This speaks of John
22 the Baptist) **[7] The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all**
23 **men through him might believe. [8] He (John the Baptist) was not that Light, but was**
24 **sent to bear witness of that Light. [9] That was the true Light, which lighteth every**
25 **man that cometh into the world (this speaks clearly of Jesus, the Christ). [10] He was**
26 **in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. [11] He**
27 **came unto his own (the Jewish nation), and his own received him not. [12] But as**
28 **many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to**
29 **them that believe on his name: [13] Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of**
30 **the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. [14] And the Word (Jesus!) was made**
31 **flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten**
32 **of the Father,) full of grace and truth.** (Theologians speak of this as the “Incarnation”
33 - that is, God became a man. Much more about this later.)

34 **[15] John (the Baptist) bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom**
35 **I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. [16]**
36 **And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. [17] For the law was**
37 **given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. [18] No man hath seen**
38 **God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath**
39 **declared him.**

1 “In the beginning was the Word....” What was John trying to teach us here? Pastor
2 John (for, indeed, he pastored the great church in Ephesus, Turkey, for years and was
3 truly the Bishop of all the western part of Turkey until he died in his mid-to-late 80's)
4 lived in a Greek culture and had done so for decades. Though himself a Jew, he was well
5 versed in the Hellenistic (Greek) world. How, then, could he adequately pen thoughts
6 that would be understandable in his world?

7
8 To a Jew, a word was far more than just a “sound.” To a Hebrew, a word was joyfully
9 alive, flying like a missile to its receiver. For that very reason, the Hebrew language did
10 not have all that many actual words. For example, in that day the Greek vocabulary
11 contained over 200,000 words, while the Hebrew had about 10,000.

12 The Word

13
14
15 Again.... “in the beginning was the WORD.” John knew this from the Hebrew
16 Scriptures such as:

17
18 Psalm 33:6

19 **By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the**
20 **breath of his mouth.**

21 Psalm 107:20

22 **He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.**

23
24 In the Jewish scriptures (and even today when I receive correspondence from Jewish
25 friends) you may not find the word “God” actually written in full, but rather G-d. It was
26 a sign of irreverence to even spell out the Divine’s Name. To even say His name aloud
27 was disapproved. Here is an interesting sidebar:

28
29 The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament - a name by the way which is quite condescending
30 to our Jewish friends) was written in Hebrew, but most of the Jews of Jesus’ day did not
31 use that language. They spoke Aramaic. (In the film *The Passion of Christ*) English
32 was not used; the director had the actors speak in Aramaic, just as Jesus spoke. In the
33 synagogues, scriptures were read in the original Hebrew and then translated into Aramaic.
34 These translations were called *Targums*. For example, Exodus 19:17 reads: “Moses
35 brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God.” But the Targums informed
36 the people instead, “Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet *the word of God.*”
37 This is not an isolated example for there are 320 cases of this in the Pentateuch (Genesis,
38 Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.) To John, “word” also meant in its
39 capitalized form, GOD. So He wrote: *In the beginning was God.* Who was? Jesus!

1 Now...one more step in this:

2
3 When John wrote this precious Gospel, he was searching for a term that would be known
4 and acceptable to Greeks as he introduces Jesus. Alright - the WORD. But the Greek
5 word for WORD was LOGOS. LOGOS also meant REASON! How I love that! (At
6 least 93 times in Scripture, the Holy Spirit reaches out to us on the basis of REASON.
7 Isaiah 1:18 **Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins**
8 **be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they**
9 **shall be as wool.** Oh my friend, the Gospel is reasonable!

10
11

So John wrote, "In the beginning was THE WORD or LOGOS, the light, the reason for everything. Who is this? JESUS, THE CHRIST-MESSIAH. <i>Jesus, according to John's Gospel, was the principle of order under which the entire universe exists!</i>
--

12
13 John's brilliant and Spirit-revealed thesis is that Jesus is the power of God which created
14 the world and He is the reason (mentality) of God which sustains the world, who came to
15 earth in human, bodily form! The INCARNATION! Hallelujah!

16
17 CHRIST WAS BORN IN THE HILLS OF BETHLEHEM, HILLS HE DESIGNED AND
18 SPOKE INTO EXISTENCE IN THE BEGINNING.

19
20 As D. Henry Thiessen pointed out in his magnificent volume, *Lectures in Systematic*
21 *Theology*, "We are repeatedly told (in Scripture) that Christ had a part in creation."
22 Lectures / page 287 / Eerdman The Apostle John adds a strong emphasis to this in John 1:3
23 **All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was**
24 **made.** The Apostle Paul added his amen to it: 1 Cor. 8:6 **But to us there is but one**
25 **God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ,**
26 **by whom are all things, and we by him.** And again in Col. 1:16-17 **For by him**
27 **(Jesus) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and**
28 **invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all**
29 **things were created by him, and for him: [17] And he is before all things, and by him**
30 **all things consist.**

31
32 I love this line from Dr. Thiessen: *Particular attention may be called to the fact that*
33 *when God was about to create man there was first a counsel in the Godhead.* **Genesis**
34 **1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let**
35 **them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over**
36 **the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon**
37 **the earth.**

1 I almost cringe every time I hear someone talk about “the baby Jesus.” He was that, of
2 course, for a brief moment in time. But the Scriptures take us far, far beyond a manger
3 or crib in Bethlehem. The Scriptures teach that the PRE-EXISTENT Christ became
4 man. “The Word became flesh....” (John 1:14). Yes - “when the fulness of time had
5 come....” (Galatians 4:4) Or how about this magnificent verse: Philip. 2:6-7 **Who,**
6 **being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: [7] But made**
7 **himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in**
8 **the likeness of men:**

9
10 2,000 years ago the Man Christ Jesus appeared in Bethlehem. Why would He agree to
11 such a thing? Next Wednesday night, we inquire as to the reasons for

12 THE INCARNATION

13 and the wondrous true story of how it came to be!
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