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# Word Made Flesh

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## Origin Stories.

For some reason, I've been thinking about beginnings a lot lately. As a big fan of comics and comic book movies, I think an origin story for anyone's favorite character is really important. How did they start? How did they get these powers? What drives them to keep doing good?

Today we get John's origin story for Jesus. John is fairly poetic in the way he approaches this, but still, he wants us to know exactly where this story starts. He wants us to know how this thing begins.

And so, on a day of new beginnings, it felt particularly important to have an origin story to kick things off!

### **Scripture: John 1:1-14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his

own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

### **Where you start from matters.**

A few years ago, some friends and I were biking from Pittsburgh to Washington D.C., and it wasn't going great. One of our teammates had broken his luggage rack on his bike, and so we needed to get to a bike shop to have it fixed. In the meantime, it meant that the other two of us with working bike racks had to take all of that weight ourselves. Not only that, but it had been raining the whole trip, which made the trail horribly muddy.

Needless to say, nobody was in a good mood.

The night before, we had gathered around at a restaurant to re-group and look at a map. We saw that there was a shop in nearby Shepherdstown, only 14 miles away. Not too bad, we could absolutely make that happen. So the whole next day, through the misery of rain and mud and extra heavy bikes, I was counting down the miles.

Fourteen...thirteen...twelve...eleven...

When I made it to zero though, instead of the bustling metropolis of Shepherdstown, we were in a big open field next to an RV park. It turned out that we had screwed up the math

of how many miles we had to go, because we were counting from the wrong starting place on the map. And it turned out, while we were standing, soaking wet, muddy, and miserable in a wide-open field, we still had another 14 miles to go.

When I tell others this story, I usually at this point say “That’s the part where my soul left my body...”

Where you start from matters. Especially when it comes to faith and religion, where we start from really matters. So, where shall we start together for this journey? We should probably start in the beginning.

### **The Logos.**

In our passage from John’s Gospel, the word...” Word” here is the Greek word *logos*. It is most often translated “word,” but there’s a bit more going on under the hood here. This is where we get our English word “logic.”

If I have a particular logic about me, it would explain how I see the world, right? According to J’s logic, coffee is to be prioritized first thing in the morning. According to J’s logic, the Penguins should be up 3-1 in this series. According to J’s logic, one should always keep the bike tires inflated, because who knows when you might have time for a ride!

In fact, we have all kinds of logics out there. Political logic, yinzer logic, Christian logic. But, if we translated this passage just a bit differently, we’d hear something interesting. “In the beginning was the Logic, and the Logic was with God, and the Logic was God.” Which leads us to ask the question: What is God’s logic?

John points to a couple things:

For starters, creation is oozing with this logic of God. We read in John 1:3 that “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” So, if you have ever found yourself connecting with God when you are out enjoying nature, taking a walk in the woods, or listening to the birds sing, maybe even watching a thunderstorm roll in, what you are actually doing is in some way experiencing the logic of God. You’re participating in what God wants for the world in that moment.

There is a warning here though. Both the creation itself and we as the people who are observing it are fallen. There’s a bit of brokenness at the moment in the creation, and a bit of brokenness in how we as humans interact with that creation. So, we get a glimpse of the Logic of God, but not quite a clean shot.

However, John would tell us not to lose heart at that brokenness, or at the darkness. He says in verse 5 that “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.” There are times when it feels like the darkness in the world is getting the better of us, aren’t there? There are wars and rumors of wars. There are folks living in abject poverty just down the road from us. There are political divisions that are breaking up families. There are hockey teams that fail to live up to their potential (ok, still not over it...)

But there’s this reminder in John’s gospel that no matter how dark it gets, the light prevails. If you’ve ever been in a completely dark room, you know that just the smallest flicker of light is enough to dispel the darkness. Even just the slightest bit of light from the Logic of God can push back on the

darkness of our world, and no matter how hopeless it seems the darkness can't overcome it. Because we're champions of hope after all.

Still, it can be tricky to see that light in all that darkness. In all of this brokenness, how can we see a clear picture of the Logic of God?

### **The Word Made Flesh.**

John tells us in verse 14. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." Actually, I love Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this in *The Message*: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." The reason that Peterson can be so poetic with this paraphrase is the Greek word here, *eskenosen*, which literally means "tabernacled."

In the Hebrew Bible, the Tabernacle was an interesting concept. This was the space where God's presence rested with the people of Israel. But, at least in the beginning, the people of Israel were rather nomadic, following Charlton Heston through the wilderness for 40 years. So the tabernacle had to be able to move with them. It was set up to be portable, with instructions on how the presence of God could follow the people from place to place to place.

So John tells us that the Logic of God tabernacled. The Logic of God, the way God sees the world, takes on flesh and blood and moves into the neighborhood to be *with us*. Of course, that Logic of God, the Word Made Flesh, is Jesus Christ. This is so brilliant on God's part! Because sometimes the Logic of God, the way God sees the world, it can be rather hard to sort out.

But...now we can look to Jesus, and we can understand God's logic, God's way of seeing the world that God made.

There are a few ways we can do this. For one thing, the Logic of God was quite a good teacher. There's this great story where a religious leader comes up to Jesus and says "Hey, what's the greatest commandment?" And the Logic of God Made Flesh says "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Love God, and love your neighbor. That's the Logic of God in it's purest form.

But apparently that's too simple for us, so Jesus broke it down even further. The Logic of God says that it's the peacemakers who will be called children of God. The Logic of God says that we ought to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. The Logic of God says that we probably shouldn't judge other people as much as we do. The Logic of God says that God is ultimately in the forgiveness business, looking to reconcile us back to loving relationship with God. If you want to know how God sees the world, look at how Jesus taught.

But even that doesn't quite get at the heart of it, does it? God could have just sent down a rule book if that's what God wanted for us. Instead, in addition to looking at his teachings, we get to look at how Jesus lived to understand how God sees the world.

Because I wonder, if God's Logic became flesh and blood, how would he spend his time? The Logic of God spent his time restoring the sight of blind folks. The Logic of God spent his time curing lepers, who the rest of society wouldn't even get near. The Logic of God invites paralytics to pick up their mats and walk again. The Logic of God brings life back to death people.

How interesting, when we want to know what God is like, such a substantial part of God's job description is to provide healing to those who are in distress! For that matter, how dare anyone out there suggest that God is vengeful or wrathful or out to throw lightning bolts at us if we get out of line! Because that's just not what God showed us when the Logic became flesh. A God who behaved like that would actually be illogical. But not only should we take a look at how the Logic of God taught or how he spent his time, we should take a look at who he spent his time with. In one of the stories where Jesus is meeting Peter for the first time, they have this interesting exchange. Jesus has just caused this miraculous catch of fish, which impresses the heck out of these fishermen from Galilee. As soon as he sees what's going on, Peter says "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" These disciples weren't like, the most wholesome, well put together people. In fact, they were "sinners." People who had wandered and strayed from God's good intentions. People who were outside the bounds of the logic of God.

It turns out, Jesus had a soft spot for people like that. In Luke 15:2, the Pharisees and scribes are grumbling to themselves and saying "this fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." In Luke 7:33-34, Jesus says that "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" In John's

gospel, when he's speaking to a woman caught in the act of adultery, he says "I don't condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

In fact, Jesus, the Logic of God, saved some of his most biting criticism for those who thought they *were* in line with the Logic of God, the religious leaders of the day like the scribes and the Pharisees.

But then comes the most shocking twist in all of this, the way the Logic of God showed us what love looks like. Apparently, the Logic of God is all about self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. The Logic of God left all that Godly power and glory to come down here and be with us. The Logic of God suffered the normal sufferings of this life. (God probably got a cold every now and again, did you know that?) The Logic of God willingly suffered death at the hands of the Roman Authorities to beat death at death's own game. The Logic of God was buried in a borrowed tomb because he didn't have one of his own.

In Greek, this kind of love that sacrifices for the benefit of others is called *agape* love. And it's the same kind of love that Jesus, the very Logic of God, invites us to share with one another.

### **Where you start matters.**

I spent some time as a religious studies major at IUP, so I got to study all the world's religions and philosophies. While this is really simplistic, the one through-line I see in so many of those religions is that they are all about what we do to get closer to God, however that religion understands God. If you say all these prayers the right way, you'll get closer to God. If you

behave in all these ways, you'll get closer to God. If you go to Church enough, you'll get closer to God. Truth be told, there's a version of Christianity floating around out there that sounds a lot like that, isn't there?

But, that's starting the story at the wrong place. The story doesn't start with us trying to get closer to God. The story starts with God coming to get closer to us! It starts with the Logic of God being made flesh in Jesus Christ. It starts with stories of God healing us. It starts with stories of God teaching us the right way to go about things. It starts with stories about God hanging out with sinners. It starts with the stories of God's agape love. To be sure, we have a response to make to all of that, but that comes later. For now, we have to start the story in the right place.

Because you see we're still in the season of Easter. We're still celebrating that great story of Jesus' resurrection, where he busts out of that borrowed tomb and returns to life. We say to each other in this season that Christ *is* risen. Not *has*, or *was*, but *is* risen. That Logic of God made flesh is still alive, and disciples for centuries have claimed to have seen him at work in the world still. They've seen him as we heard last week on Emmaus Roads. They've seen him in upper rooms, making room for their questions. They've seen him in places like City Mission, or Homewood, or Haiti, working with our friends and partners. They've even seen him in places like grocery stores, or dance recitals, or open fields that should be bike shops when you are too tired to press on, but you do it anyway. Christ, the Logic of God, is risen. Which means he could be anywhere around us.

So, may you have an encounter with the Logic of God this week. May you come to see that God is all about healing,

about bringing life out of death, about making room for the most notorious sinners. And may you come to see that the way God sees the world is all about *agape* love for you, for me, and for the whole world.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: AMEN.





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