

Wrapping an Idea in a Person

Greg Albrecht

Gerard van Honthorst - Adoration of the Shepherds (1622)

The best way to announce, send and share a vision is to encase and enfold that dream in a person. That's what happened when God became a man. Mary "...wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger" (Luke 2:7 KJV).

Sending a message, wrapped up in a person, is at the heart and core of the meaning and significance of the birth of Jesus, and of the celebration of his birth we call Christmas.

Jesus was God in human flesh—the God-man. He brought incredibly profound and wonderful news to our world—

we call it the gospel—and that gospel was wrapped up in his person.

Jesus is the box—he is the wrapping paper, the bow on top, the human container—that envelops the gospel—the gospel of grace and truth.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" Out of his fullness we

have received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:14-17).

There is no greater marvel and mystery—no greater majesty—than the incredible story of how God, in the person of Jesus, out of his unending love for each of us, descended out of eternity into our world and our lives. He became one of us, bringing us the gospel of grace and truth.

The Word—Logos—Dwells With Us

The first verses of the Gospel of John tell us that Jesus was the Word. *Logos* is the Greek term

for “Word.” It means Jesus was and is the force and the reason and the core of all meaning, relevance and power that sustains and holds everything together.

Jesus, the Word—the *Logos*—is the answer to the questions that confound us. Who made us, who made the earth, who made our solar system, our cosmos and our universe—and how does it keep working? How is it all held together—how do all the eco-systems work in such symmetry and harmony? It’s not random!

When John 1:14 says that the Word—the *Logos*—this unifying, eternal divine Being became flesh, and “made his dwelling among us,” the Apostle John used the Greek word for “pitching a tent”—or more literally “tabernacle.”

In the old covenant, God was thought to exist in a holy place like the tabernacle. Their holy place was actually a tent that the nation of Israel folded up and took with them on their travels. Later God was thought to preside in the temple in Jerusalem—a stone building on a piece of real estate.

Jesus transformed the belief that God is present only within a particular building or piece of holy real estate. He embodied this truth and reality in his person as he pitched his divine tent with humanity. As Jesus walked, talked, moved and ministered, he revealed the glory of our heavenly Father.

Among other great realities, the new covenant is a proclamation that God is not limited to any place—God is not somewhere at the expense of

being somewhere else. God is everywhere, by the Spirit, in the person of Jesus.

God is not just for one exclusive group of people. He is for everyone—rich and poor, weak and strong, young and old, male or female, and black, white or brown.

In fact, later on in the New Testament, we read that the new covenant is a covenant wherein God is *not* confined to buildings made by human hands, but that in Christ, God is with us now and forevermore. And more than that, *Christ is in us*. He actually lives within us, so that we Christ-followers are the temple of God—we are his church, his spiritual body.

“The law was given through Moses...” The law was the law God gave—it was not a law that Moses dreamed up one night while he was taking care of sheep in the wilderness of Sinai. The law was God’s law—but God designed the law to only go so far. The law was God’s law, but it was not the full and final purpose of God, nor was it the personification of God.

We read that God is love—we do not read that God is law.

Grace and truth are much closer to the revelation of God’s nature than the law is.

God’s law, given through Moses, had a limited purpose—it could only guide and point us to Jesus, God in the flesh.

“Grace and truth” is God’s central idea, unifying message and core mission, all wrapped up in Jesus.

Full of Grace and Truth

John 1:14 says that Jesus came from Father God, *“full of grace and truth.”*

“Grace and truth” is God’s central idea, unifying message and core mission, all wrapped up in Jesus. John 1:17 tells us, *“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*

John 1:15 contrasts the Old Testament prophet John the Baptist with Jesus and then verse 17 introduces Moses. While John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets who were commissioned to bring a message, Moses was the one God used to articulate the law.

To this very day, there are people who cannot imagine that there is any greater expression, purpose or definition of God than his law. They say things like “if you break God’s law, he will break you.”

We must understand the law is not the be-all and end-all of God’s message, his proclamation or his good news to you and me.

Of course, God is not lawless—but he is *more* than law. *God is love*. That is the message that came gift-wrapped in the person of Jesus.

Note carefully the contrast between Moses and Jesus. The law was given through Moses. So the law was like a letter delivered by the mail carrier—or “postie” as

they are called in Australia. The law was a package—in a box—it was delivered by Moses.

But, when God sent the gospel, he didn't stuff it in an envelope or squeeze it into a box. He didn't send the gospel as an attachment in an email, nor did the post the gospel on a website.

When God sent the gospel—his eternal grace and truth—he did not entrust its delivery to any third-party human messenger.

When God sent grace and truth, he wrapped it up in himself. He personified the gospel himself in the person of Jesus, the God-man, who revealed

Will we receive God, who took human form, and came to dwell among us as one of us, with us and for us? Will we receive Jesus, who was and is the gospel personified? Will we receive the all-embracing, inclusive message of Jesus, who came not just for one race, gender or denomination, but for us *all*?

Will we receive the little baby—a tiny impoverished alien child—a baby deemed “illegitimate,” a baby born among animals—a dependent baby needing his mother's milk, whose first bed was a feeding trough where animals feed?

When God sent grace and truth, he wrapped it in himself.

all of God's love, his grace and his truth. And we call that message, wrapped up in Jesus, the gospel.

In order to deliver and send us the fullness of the gospel, the fullness of his grace and truth, God in Christ came to us, and he became one of us. He delivered grace and truth personally. Grace and truth were wrapped in those swaddling clothes in the manger and grace and truth poured himself out on the Cross for you and me.

So, which *is* more important—the law or grace and truth? Moses or Jesus? Surely the grace and truth God wrapped in his own person were far more important than the law he sent through Moses.

There is no doubt that this baby is the Prince of peace. There is no doubt that the gospel of grace and truth blankets, surrounds and “swaddles” all that he was and is.

Behold—our Lord and Savior, our Prince of peace—our suffering Servant, who brings us grace and truth. O come let us adore him, O come let us receive him. O come let us embrace him and his wonderful, life-changing gospel, filled with grace and truth, perfectly embodied and personified in him. □

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THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

Every year around Christmas we see and hear the cliché, “Jesus is the reason for the season.” While the statement is accurate in recognizing the historical connection between Jesus' birth and the socio-cultural celebration of the Christmas season, and the phrase is an attempt to remind people “the issue is Jesus,” it fails to direct people's attention to the reality of the incarnation of the God-man. Even the predominant religious emphasis on the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem with the accoutrements of the manger, the Magi, the angels, the star, and Herod the villain diverts the attention of the listening public to the sentimental details of an infant's birth, rather than proclaiming the cosmic supernatural reality of the Son of God becoming a man to redeem and restore mankind with the presence of his life in receptive individuals.

When Christians hang banners and send Christmas cards with the phrase “Happy Birthday Jesus,” they perpetuate the misemphasis on a baby's birth and infancy without directing any attention to the divine life vested in the Christ-child who would grow up to give his life for mankind on the cross of Calvary as “the one mediator between God and man” (1 Timothy 2:5), thereby making his divine-human *Life* available to all persons.

Jesus did not come to establish a season of celebration and to be “the reason for the season.” Jesus did not come so we could remember his birth and infancy, and sing “Happy Birthday Jesus” at the end of the calendar year. Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the *LIFE*