

# In the Beginning Was the Word

## Unveiling the Mystery of John's Prologue

*A Journey Through John 1:1–18 in the Light of the Holy Fathers*

John's Prologue is not merely an introduction to a Gospel — it is the theological foundation of the entire Christian faith. In 18 verses, the Apostle John reveals who Christ is, where He came from, why He entered creation, and what His coming means for every human soul. The Orthodox Church has meditated on these verses for two millennia, and the Church Fathers devoted entire treatises to unpacking their depth. Over the next slides, we will walk through this passage verse by verse, guided by their wisdom.



# In the beginning was the Word

*Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος*

— John 1:1a

John deliberately echoes Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning, God created...”). But notice the difference: Genesis says God created — an action with a starting point. John says the Word was — already existing, without origin. The Greek word “ἦν” (*ēn*) is imperfect tense, meaning continuous, unbroken existence. The Word did not come into being at the beginning — the Word already was when the beginning began.

† St. John Chrysostom (*Homilies on John*, Homily 2): “Where is the beginning? He took the first place above all. The word was indicates no commencement; it shows a prior existence.”

✝ Think of it like this — when you open a book to page one, the author already existed before writing it. The ‘beginning’ of the story is not the beginning of the author. John is telling us: before anything was created, the Word was already there. Not born, not made — simply was.



# AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD

καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν — John 1:1b

The Greek preposition “πρὸς” (*pros*) is crucial — it does not mean merely “beside” or “near.” It implies face-to-face relationship, active communion, and dynamic presence. The Word was not passively next to God; the Word was in eternal, intimate, relational communion with the Father.

This verse establishes that the Word (the Son) is a distinct person from the Father — not the same person wearing a different mask (which would be the heresy of Modalism), but a separate hypostasis (person) in eternal relationship.

**T** St. Gregory the Theologian (*Oration 29*): “The Son is other than the Father in the sense of personhood, not in the sense of nature or divinity.”

**P** **ractical Section:** A parent and child share the same human nature — both are fully human. Yet the parent is not the child, and the child is not the parent. They are distinct persons who share one nature. In a far more perfect and eternal way, the Father and the Son share one divine nature while being distinct persons — and they have always been in loving communion.



# And the Word was God

καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος

— John 1:1c

This is the verse that defines Christian orthodoxy. The Word is not a god (lowercase). The Word is not less than God. The Word IS God — fully, completely, without qualification.

In Greek, “Θεός” (Theos) appears without the definite article, which some have misused to argue the Word is a lesser deity. But Orthodox and mainstream biblical scholarship unanimously rejects this reading. The anarthrous construction indicates nature and quality — John is saying the Word possesses the full divine nature.

## Heresies Addressed

- **Arianism (4th c., Arius of Alexandria):** Claimed the Son was created — “there was a time when He was not.” Condemned at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). The Nicene Creed responds: “God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father.”
- **Jehovah’s Witnesses (modern Arianism):** Translate as “the Word was a god” — grammatically and theologically indefensible, rejected by virtually all Greek scholars.



**St. Athanasius (*On the Incarnation*):** “He was not first human and then became God; He was first God and then became human — so that He might make us gods.”



“He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”

— John 1:2–3

### John's Explicit Teaching

John now makes explicit what verse 1 implied: the Word is the agent of all creation. Everything that exists — visible and invisible, material and spiritual, from galaxies to atoms — was made through (*διὰ, dia*) the Word. Nothing in the created order exists independently of Him. The Father creates through the Son by the Holy Spirit. Orthodox theology understands creation as a Trinitarian act: the Father wills, the Son executes, the Spirit gives life.

**Key Point:** If all created things were made through the Word, then the Word Himself cannot be a created thing. This is the logical foundation that destroys Arianism. You cannot be both the maker of everything that was made and also something that was made. The Word stands on the Creator side of the Creator/creation divide — permanently, absolutely.

#### Patristic Insight:

St. Basil the Great (*Hexameron*, Homily 1): “The Father is the primordial cause, the Son is the creative cause, the Spirit is the perfecting cause.”

#### Practical Understanding

When an architect designs a building, the design exists in the architect's mind before the building exists. The building is made through the design. But the design is not one of the building's rooms — it is the source of all of them. The Word is not one creature among many. He is the divine Reason through whom all creatures exist.



In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

— John 1:4-5

Two foundational metaphors now enter: life and light. The Word is not simply alive — He is the source of life itself. Every living thing derives its existence from Him. And this life radiates outward as light — illumination, truth, knowledge, goodness. Orthodox theology calls this the “uncreated light” (ἄκτιστον φῶς) — the divine energy of God that penetrates creation without being part of creation.

The darkness — sin, ignorance, death, evil — attempts to extinguish or comprehend (κατέλαβεν can mean both “overcome” and “comprehend”) this light. It fails on both counts. The darkness cannot defeat the light, and it cannot understand it. This is not a battle between equals. Light does not struggle against darkness — it simply shines, and darkness ceases to exist wherever light reaches.

**Patristic Block** St. Gregory Palamas (*Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts*): The uncreated light experienced by the apostles at the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor is the same divine light John speaks of — God’s own energy, accessible to believers through prayer and sacrament.

**Practical Block** When you walk into a dark room and flip the light switch, you never see the darkness fighting back. It simply vanishes. That is the nature of Christ’s light — it does not negotiate with evil, it displaces it. Our role is to remain in that light.



“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”

— John 1:6–8

John the Evangelist pauses the cosmic theology to introduce a human figure: John the Baptist. Notice the deliberate contrast in Greek — for the Word, John uses ἦν (was, continuous existence). For the Baptist, he uses ἐγένετο (came into being, a created event). The Baptist had a beginning. The Word did not.

The Baptist’s role is clearly defined and clearly limited: he is a witness, not the source. A witness points beyond himself. A mirror reflects light but does not generate it. This is the model for every preacher, teacher, and believer — we do not create truth, we point to the One who is Truth.

### Orthodox pastoral application

In the Orthodox tradition, this is why icons of John the Baptist always show him pointing toward Christ — his entire identity is oriented away from himself and toward the Lamb of God. Every Christian’s calling is the same: to be a witness who directs others toward the Light, never claiming to be the light ourselves.



The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

— *John 1:9–11*

Here is the great tragedy of the Prologue. The Creator enters His own creation — and creation does not recognize its Maker. The One through whom the world was made walks through that world as a stranger. “His own” (τὰ ἴδια) refers specifically to Israel — the people God chose, prepared through centuries of prophecy, covenant, and revelation — and they rejected Him.

This is not a failure of God’s plan but a revelation of humanity’s condition. Orthodox theology calls this the depth of the Fall — sin has so distorted human perception that we cannot recognize our own Creator standing in front of us. It is not that the light was dim; it is that our eyes were diseased.

St. Cyril of Alexandria (*Commentary on John*, Book 1):

“He came to those who were His own by right of creation and by right of covenant, and they turned away from their own salvation.”

Have you ever failed to recognize someone you know well because you encountered them in an unexpected context?

Christ came not as a conquering king with armies but as a humble carpenter’s son from Nazareth. Israel expected a political messiah and missed the divine one. We must ask ourselves: in what ways might we also be failing to recognize Christ — in the poor, in the suffering, in the sacraments, in one another?



But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

— John 1:12–13

## Rejection & Divine Gift

After the tragedy of rejection comes the astounding gift: those who do receive Christ are given the “right” (ἐξουσίαν — authority, power, privilege) to become children of God. This is not a natural birthright or a human achievement — it is a gift. You cannot earn it through bloodline (“not of blood”), physical effort (“not of the will of the flesh”), or human authority (“not of the will of man”). It comes from God alone.

### Key Orthodox Concept — Theosis (θέωσις):

This verse is foundational to the Orthodox doctrine of theosis — divinization. To become “children of God” is not merely a legal status or metaphor. Orthodox theology teaches that through Christ, humans are invited to participate in the divine nature itself (2 Peter 1:4). We do not become God by essence — that is impossible. But we become “gods by grace” — sharing in God’s life, His holiness, His love, His immortality. This is the ultimate purpose of human existence.

### Patristic Insight

St. Athanasius (*On the Incarnation*, §54): “God became man so that man might become god.” — Perhaps the single most important sentence in Orthodox theology.

### Practical Analogy

Think of an iron rod placed in a fire. Over time, the rod glows with the fire’s heat and light. The rod does not become fire — it remains iron. But it participates so fully in the fire’s energy that it radiates heat and light as if it were fire itself. This is theosis: we remain human, but we are so filled with God’s grace that His life radiates through us.



# And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us

*Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν*

— John 1:14a

This is the most important verse in the Prologue — arguably in the entire New Testament. The eternal, uncreated, divine Word — the One who made galaxies and sustains all existence — “became flesh.” Not appeared as flesh, not pretended to have flesh, not temporarily wore flesh like a costume. Became. The Greek “*ἐγένετο*” indicates a real, permanent, irreversible event. God took on full human nature — body, soul, mind, will — without ceasing to be fully God.

“Dwelt” (*ἐσκήνωσεν*) literally means “pitched His tent” or “tabernacled.” This recalls the Old Testament Tabernacle where God’s glory dwelled among Israel (Exodus 40:34–35). The portable tent of meeting has now become a human body. God no longer dwells in a building — He dwells in human flesh.

## Heresies This Verse Refutes:

- **Docetism:** Christ only appeared human → **Refuted.** He became flesh.
- **Apollinarianism:** Christ had a divine mind replacing the human mind → **Refuted.** “Flesh” means complete human nature.
- **Nestorianism:** Divine and human natures loosely joined → **Refuted.** The one Word became flesh — one person, two natures united.

**The Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD):** Christ is one person in two natures — fully divine and fully human — “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”

**St. Maximus the Confessor (*Ambigua*):** “The Incarnation is the ultimate purpose of creation. God always intended to unite Himself with humanity — the Fall made it a rescue mission, but union was always the plan.”



We have seen His glory, glory as of the only  
Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

— John 1:14b

### The Witness of the Apostles

John shifts from theology to testimony — “we have seen.” This is eyewitness language. John is not theorizing; he is reporting what he experienced firsthand. The “glory” (δόξα, *doxa*) he witnessed is the visible manifestation of God’s presence — the same glory that filled the Temple in Solomon’s day (1 Kings 8:10–11), the same glory Moses saw on Sinai (Exodus 33:18–23).

### The Unique Son

“Only Son” (μονογενοῦς) means “unique, one-of-a-kind” — not “only-created.” The Son’s relationship to the Father is entirely unlike any other relationship in existence. He is not the best of the created beings. He is the unique, eternal, uncreated Son who shares the Father’s nature completely.

### The Fullness of Revelation

“Full of grace and truth” (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας) echoes Exodus 34:6 — where God reveals Himself to Moses as “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” John is saying: the God who revealed Himself partially to Moses has now revealed Himself fully and permanently in Christ.

### ✠ Liturgical Connection ✠

This is why in every Orthodox Divine Liturgy, the congregation sings “We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith.” The Liturgy is a participation in the same glory John describes.



*John bore witness about Him, and cried out, “This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.” For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”*

— John 1:15–16

**T**he Baptist provides another testimony — paradoxical by human logic. Christ comes after the Baptist chronologically (born six months later, began ministry later) yet ranks before him and existed before him. This only makes sense if Christ is eternally pre-existent. The Baptist understood what many missed: the carpenter from Nazareth walking toward the Jordan River existed before Abraham, before Moses, before creation itself.

“Grace upon grace” (χάρις ἀντὶ χάριτος) — the preposition “ἀντὶ” means “in place of” or “upon.” The Church Fathers interpret this as the new grace of the Gospel succeeding and surpassing the old grace of the Law. Not that the Law was bad — it was genuine grace — but Christ brings a fuller, deeper, inexhaustible grace that replaces the old covenant with the new.

### **Practical Application: The Continuous Flow of Grace**

Grace is not a single event but a continuous flow. Think of ocean waves — one wave of grace arrives, and before it recedes, another comes. God’s generosity does not run dry. Every sacrament, every act of repentance, every moment of prayer is a new wave from the inexhaustible ocean of God’s love. You are never too far gone for the next wave to reach you.



“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

— John 1:17

### A Necessary Preparation

This verse is not a rejection of Moses or the Law — Orthodox theology is emphatic about this. The Law was a gift from God, a genuine act of grace, and a necessary preparation. But the Law was given through (ἐδόθη διὰ) a servant; grace and truth came through (ἐγένετο διὰ) the Son. Moses was a mediator delivering someone else’s message. Christ is the message Himself — the grace and truth in person.

### The Key Distinction

The Law told Israel what God required. Christ shows Israel (and all humanity) who God is. Rules describe the standard; the Incarnation reveals the Lawgiver’s own heart. This is why Orthodoxy does not view the Old and New Testaments as opposed but as progressive revelation — the same God, the same love, but increasingly clear self-disclosure.

### Patristic Insight: St. Irenaeus

“The Law was a schoolmaster preparing humanity for Christ. The schoolmaster was not the enemy of the student but the servant of the same Father who sent the Son.”

### A Practical Analogy

Imagine receiving a letter from someone you love deeply but have never met. The letter tells you much about them — their values, expectations, character. Then one day, that person walks through your door and stands in front of you. The letter was true and precious — but the person is infinitely more. That is the relationship between the Law and Christ.



“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side,  
He has made Him known.” — John 1:18

The Prologue closes with a staggering claim. No human being — not Moses, not Elijah, not the greatest prophet — has ever seen God’s essence directly. What they saw were theophanies — manifestations, partial revelations. But the Son, who eternally dwells “at the Father’s side” (literally “in the bosom of the Father,” εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ Πατρὸς — language of deepest intimacy), has “made Him known” (ἐξηγήσατο — from which we get “exegesis”).

Christ is the exegesis of God. He is the interpretation, explanation, and visible expression of the invisible Father. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Christ. If you want to know how God treats sinners, look at Christ. If you want to know what God thinks about suffering, injustice, death — look at Christ. There is no hidden God behind Christ who is different from what Christ reveals.

St. John of Damascus (*Exact Exposition*, Book 1): “We do not know God in His essence — that remains forever beyond us. But we know God truly and fully in His Son, who is the perfect image of the Father.”

### Apophatic Theology

God in His essence (*ousia*) remains forever beyond human comprehension — no one has “seen” God in that sense, and no one ever will. But God in His energies (*energeiai*) — His love, grace, power, light — makes Himself genuinely known and accessible. Christ is the supreme, definitive, unsurpassable self-communication of God to creation.



# What John's Prologue Means for Your Life Today

## 1. Christ is eternal God, not a created being.

He was not promoted to divinity or adopted as God's Son. He is God from God, Light from Light — before all worlds, before all time. Your faith rests not on a good teacher but on the Creator of the universe.

## 2. The Incarnation is the most important event in human history.

God did not send a message, a prophet, or an angel. He came Himself. He took on your flesh, your hunger, your tears, your death — so that you could share in His life, His joy, His immortality.

## 3. You are invited into theosis — becoming like God by grace.

This is not arrogance; it is the entire point of Christianity according to the Fathers. Through the sacraments, through prayer, through a life of love and repentance, being transformed from glory to glory.

## 4. The light cannot be overcome.

Whatever darkness you face — grief, sin, doubt, fear, illness, injustice — it cannot extinguish the light of Christ. Darkness has never once defeated light. Not at Calvary. Not in your life.

## 5. Grace upon grace is your inheritance.

God's mercy is not a one-time offer. It is continuous, inexhaustible, and it reaches you exactly where you are right now — today, in this moment, in this seat.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
and we have seen His glory. — John 1:14

