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SESSION ONE

John 1:1-18

Learner Session Guide

Focus Statement

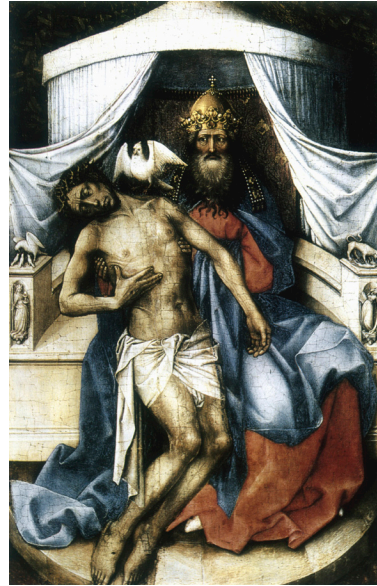
We see and experience God through Jesus, the Incarnate Word, one with God even before creation.

Key Verse

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. [John 1:14](#)

What Is Jesus' Relationship with God?

Focus Image



The Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Ghost as a dove). Left wing of a triptych. Robert Campin (1378-1444). © Image Asset Mgmt Ltd. / SuperStock

Gather

Check-in

Take time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group.

Pray

God of love,

You sent your son Jesus into the world. He is your Word to us, now and for all time. Thank you for speaking to us through him, and also through Scripture and through one another. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Focus Activity

Discuss the meaning of the phrase “actions speak louder than words.” Tell how you have experienced this in your life. Have words ever been louder than actions?

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Open Scripture

Read John 1:1-18.

- What verse did you most connect with as the text was read?
- What are the key images?
- What did you find intriguing or confusing?

Join the Conversation

Historical Context

The earliest Christians came from the Jewish faith and still clung to their Jewish identity. They believed Jesus was the promised Messiah and, therefore, he continued the history and faith of Israel. There is evidence, however, that tensions between Jewish Christians and Jewish religious leaders increased after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. There may have been a formal decree that eventually expelled the Jewish followers of Jesus from the synagogue, the Jewish place of worship. It does appear that tensions were high when John's Gospel was written. Keep this in mind as you study the Gospel.

1. Where in the session Scripture text do you see any kind of conflict? Is it a conflict in values, belief, decisions, or actions? Who is involved?
2. What evidence do you see in the text that the Christians of John's community saw themselves in line with the history and faith of Israel?

Literary Context

1. The Gospel of John doesn't begin with a story about Mary, Joseph, Bethlehem, shepherds, a star, or Wise Men. It begins instead with a "prologue" or introduction in John 1:1-18. This introduction (which is also the session Scripture text) raises themes that will continue to be important throughout the Gospel.

- List key words and themes that appear in the text.
- How is the Word's relationship to God described?
- If you were writing a book about Jesus, where or how would you begin?

2. The books in the New Testament were originally written in Greek. The Greek term for "word" is *logos* (LOW-gohs), derived from the plan giving order to the universe in Greek thought, as well as divine Wisdom in Judaism. Many scholars see a correlation between Wisdom personified in the Old Testament and the Deuterocanon/Apocrypha (books not included in the Jewish or Protestant canon or "accepted list" of biblical books) and the Word made flesh or Incarnate Word in John's prologue. Wisdom and the Word are both said to be present at creation, although only in John is the Word equated with God.

Read Proverbs 8:22-36 and the following passage from a deuterocanonical book written in praise of Wisdom:

For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. Wisdom of Solomon 7:25

- What do these passages say about Wisdom?
- Compare this to what John 1:1-18 says about the Word.

Lutheran Context

1. Using the Lutheran principle of Scripture interprets Scripture, look at other Bible passages that help interpret the session Scripture text. Read Genesis 1:1—2:4 and Colossians 1:15-23, then discuss the questions.

- How is God's Word present and active in the Genesis story?
- List themes that you find in both texts.



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2. The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) states that the Word of God speaks to us in three ways:

2.02.a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.

b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

- Compare these three statements with John 1:1-18 and list the similarities.

Devotional Context

1. God's Word speaks through Jesus Christ, through believers, and through the Bible.

- Give an example of the Word speaking to you or your congregation in one of these ways.
- God's Word can speak through you. What do you think about that?

2. Look back at the Focus Image at the start of the session. This is one artist's picture of the relationship between God and Jesus (and the Holy Spirit as well).

- Draw a picture or describe how you see the relationship between God and Jesus.
- How have you seen Jesus "in the flesh" in your life? How does God speak to you through the people you encounter each day?

Wrap-up

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session.

Pray

O Loving God, we thank you that you concretely spoke and showed us the depth of your love for us by sending your Son Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, to live and dwell among us. We give you thanks that through him we can come to know your truth and grace more fully and participate in a deeper relationship with you. Help us to live our lives in celebration of the Word made flesh by sharing your word, love, and grace with friends, family, and strangers alike. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Extending the Conversation**Homework**

1. Read the Scripture text for the next session: John 3:1-21. If time permits, read all of John 1:1—3:21 (see page 9 for a daily reading plan).
2. During the course of the week, meditate on John 1:1-18. If you develop any new insights or thoughts, jot them down to share next week.
3. Use John 1:1-18 as inspiration for writing a hymn. Start by picking a favorite hymn tune and then write lyrics to fit the music.
4. Take photographs or capture images and then create your own visual presentation on the meaning of John 1:1-18.

Enrichment

1. If you want a daily plan for reading through the Gospel of John during this unit, read the following sections this week:
 - Day 1: John 1:1-18
 - Day 2: John 1:19-28
 - Day 3: John 1:29-34
 - Day 4: John 1:35-51
 - Day 5: John 2:1-11
 - Day 6: John 2:12-25
 - Day 7: John 3:1-21
2. Visit www.textweek.com and explore links related to this week's focus verse.
3. Watch the movie *Sister Act* (Touchstone/Disney, 1992) and reflect upon how the nuns live out an incarnational ministry in their neighborhood. How does this ministry change people?



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A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for students to take notes during the session.

For Further Reading

Available from www.augsburgfortress.org/store:

Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John by Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh (Fortress Press, 1998). Describes the values, conflicts, and traditions of the ancient world.

Incarnation by Alister E. McGrath (Fortress Press, 2005). Provides art, poetry, prayer, and reflection on the Word made flesh.