

John 1:1-14 – The Last Gospel

The Gospel of John opens with an invitation to experience the Incarnation through the renewal of the divine creation. This opening establishes the theological horizon of the entire Gospel. The use of the Last Gospel in the Anglo-Catholic tradition reflects a profoundly Johannine conviction that the Eucharist cannot be separated from the mystery of the Incarnation. Having encountered Christ sacramentally, the faithful hear once more that the eternal Logos became flesh and dwelt among humanity. The liturgy thus concludes by returning to the theological heart of John's Gospel: the revelation of divine glory, through the Word, made flesh.

John invites us into the Last Gospel¹, as into the first moment of renewed creation. Where the eternal Word steps toward humanity, and the light that once called the world into being, begins its descent into human flesh. In these verses, John opens the Gospel by revealing the movement of divine life coming into the world. A descent that will become flesh, a communion that is both relational, and revelatory, with the indwelling that will shape the entire Gospel. The Last Gospel invites us to contemplate the mystery of a God who does not remain distant but enters creation so that His life may be shared, received, and lived. What follows in the Gospel is the unfolding of this descent, as the Word who was with God, and is God, gives Himself to humanity, in order to draw all things back into the light.

John's Gospel opens² with the Word, the Divine Logos. John's clear scriptural use of the unity of the Logos with God; where the Word who is both with God,

¹ John 1:1-14

² John 1:1-5

John 1:1-14 – The Last Gospel

and is God, is central to the message of the Gospel. Christ, the Word, was with God, and of God at the beginning of all things, before the world, beyond space and time, and outside our ability to perceive or comprehend. All creation comes through the Word; the divine act of bringing the world into being is expressed through the Logos. John recalls Genesis, where it is written: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”*³ John reminds us that creation unfolds through the divine speech of God; the ‘Word’ is the mode of God’s creative action, the eternal Christ through whom all things come to be.

The Word was the *“light of all mankind,”*⁴ the very spark of God’s Divine Love entering the world, shining as a beacon into the darkness of human estrangement. This darkness is not the chaos of pre-creation, but the condition of a world turned from God, marked by the shadow of sin, corruption, and the wounds of human failure. Into this darkness the Logos shines as the eternal light; a light the darkness cannot overcome, cannot extinguish, and cannot comprehend, for it is a light so powerful, and so glorious that it transcends every attempt to grasp, or understand it. In the Word’s radiant presence, creation is touched once more by the God who formed it, and the first movement of divine life begins to take shape within the world.

The light that first shone at God’s command in Genesis, and the light promised through Isaiah⁵, as the hope of those who walk in darkness, now enters the

³ Genesis 1:1-3

⁴ John 1:4

⁵ Isaiah 9:2

John 1:1-14 – The Last Gospel

world in its fullness. John the Baptist is introduced⁶ as the witness⁷ to this light; not as the light himself, but as the one who recognises its arrival, and prepares the world to receive it. In him, the prophetic⁸ expectation of divine illumination meets the Johannine revelation of the Word, and the Gospel's movement shifts from the metaphysical to the historical; from an account of who God is to the events that will shape the world: the eternal light has stepped into time, and a witness has been raised to proclaim it.

As John extends the opening of his Gospel, his exploration of the nature, and being of God, in the Son, is shaped by the intimacy he (John, the Beloved Disciple), shared with Christ. He writes not from abstraction, but from encounter, interpreting the descent of the Word, through the lived relationship he experienced with the Divine, made flesh.

John the Baptist stands as the first vocational witness in the adult life of Jesus, the one who recognises the light, and points beyond himself to the Word who has come into the world. Yet the pattern of vocation begins earlier, in the mystery of the Incarnation. In Mary, the Blessed Virgin, we see the first human response⁹ to the descent of the Word: a vocation of absolute commitment, in which she receives, bears, and nurtures the Christ within the Divine Love, He embodies. Her assent (fiat) becomes the first moment in which human life opens itself to the indwelling of the Word, preparing the way for every vocation that will follow.

⁶ John 1:6-8

⁷ John 1:29, John 1:32-34

⁸ John 1:15

⁹ Luke 1:38

John 1:1-14 – The Last Gospel

To seek to understand God is to begin to appreciate and accept the Incarnation. John transitions¹⁰ from the nature of the eternal Word to the world's response to Divine Love. The wider world would fail to recognise the Word made flesh in their presence. The Word, coming into the world, would be heralded by John the Baptist, yet destined for a world that would fail to recognise Him as the one who made them, the source of life itself, the creating Logos from whom all creation flowed. The loving description of Christ, by the one whom Jesus loved, is offered as a reflection of devotion from one who encountered the Divine intimately. Here John tells us that although Christ came into the world, His own people would not receive Him. And yet, John tells us that Christ would go on to those who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, giving them the right to become the children of God. John reflects that this new birth is not of natural descent, nor human decision, nor a husband's will, but is a birth from God. Through the living Christ, John tells us that all who believe will experience new birth, being born of God; the Divine Origin, by the power of the Word, the living Divine Love.

Finally, John carries us to the culmination of the Last Gospel: the proclamation of the truth behind divine revelation. That the "*Word became flesh and lived among us*"¹¹, and that through this eternal truth, we who believe in Him have seen His glory, the glory of the Father, and of His only Son, full of grace and truth. John's revelation is given for us, that we may know, that we may learn,

¹⁰ John 1:9-13

¹¹ John 1:14

John 1:1-14 – The Last Gospel

and that we may love. For only through the Divine Love made present in the Incarnate Son, can we truly know, and love God.

The question is; what is the nature of the “Word made flesh?” How do we come to understand the very essence of the text? John, the *disciple whom Jesus loved*¹², brings us to the summit of human existence in relation to God. In the gift of the Son, we see the depth of the Father's love: “*God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.*”¹³ To redeem us from darkness, and draw us into light, God sends His light into the world; the living Word, the Logos, God Himself in human form, fully human and fully divine.

This is not divine vanity, but divine reverence for creation's potential. God will not leave us to our estrangement; rather, in mercy He draws us back into the light of pre-existence, into communion with Himself, through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the propitiation¹⁴ for our sins. God became man through the power of the Incarnation; a divine gift made possible by Mary's acceptance of God's invitation.

The mode of the Incarnation is Mary's: through her fiat she constituted the human openness the divine economy required, whereby the eternal Logos “*became flesh and dwelt among us.*” In freely receiving the Word she became the place in which God's self-giving love entered history, offering herself in faithful obedience to the incarnate mission of the Son.

¹² John 13:23

¹³ John 3:16

¹⁴ “Propitiation” (Greek: ἱλασμός [hilasmos]): the sacrifice that removes the barrier between a holy God and sinful humanity.

John 1:1-14 – The Last Gospel

Mary's role participates in the creation narrative: from God to the Son, and through Mary's bearing of the Son, into the world. It is not possible to hear John's Gospel without understanding that at the very heart of his theology is the Incarnation, made possible through the receptive dwelling-place through which the Logos entered the world.

The Greek word ἐσκήνωσεν (eskēnōsen), in John 1:14, "dwelt", evokes the tabernacle. This word places God's presence within His expressed dwelling-place in Israel, the Ark of the Covenant, and so draws on Old Testament imagery. In the Incarnation God no longer dwells merely within the sanctuary, but personally enters human existence in Christ, through Mary; the new Ark of the Covenant¹⁵.

In John's Gospel¹⁶ the Incarnation constitutes the definitive act of divine self-disclosure, whereby the invisible God becomes known in the visible humanity of Christ. This is purposeful: John intends the reader to understand that God Himself was present in the humanity of Christ, and that through a relationship with Christ, and only Christ, the revelation of Divine love is possible to humanity.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory."

The paradox of John's Gospel is that divine glory is revealed through apparent human weakness; culminating in the Cross. Whilst Christ's ministry and example was that of the gift of giving divine love, the revelation of God's glory is not possible without the Cross, and all the suffering surrounding it. John's witness to

¹⁵ Ratzinger, J. (1977) *Daughter of Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

¹⁶ John 1:14

John 1:1-14 – The Last Gospel

Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, grounds his description of God's glory as visible to humanity. Yet he holds this glory close to the Incarnation, and the very essence of the Divinity of Christ: God made man, and in that flesh the Father's love is finally visible.

The relationship and communion between God and humanity is such that, for John, the Word becomes flesh so that humanity may share in divine life: "*I came that they may have life.*¹⁷" This is implied within the Last Gospel directly in the Incarnation. John writes from the perspective of one who travelled with Christ on the journey to, and beyond the Cross; his Prologue (from which the Last Gospel is derived), is both theological claim, and lived testimony.

The Eucharist cannot be separated from the mystery of the Incarnation. The very substance at the heart of the Eucharist is the Incarnational truth that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. That His Body and Blood are in 'real presence', is central to the purpose and consecration of the Eucharist. Our communion with God is made present in the Eucharistic feast: we consume what is holy, mingling Divine love with our bodies, and so are conjoined to the life of God. God is the I AM; through our communion with Christ in the Eucharist, we take our place in both cosmic and earthly existence.

John's declaration that "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" reaches its sacramental fulfilment in the Eucharist. The movement from the Father to the Son, and from the Son into the world in the Incarnation, continues into the life of the Church through the Eucharistic gift. The movement is always

¹⁷ John 10:10

John 1:1-14 – The Last Gospel

one of divine self-offering: God gives Himself so that humanity might participate in His life. The Eucharist is therefore not an alternative to the Incarnation, but its enduring presence within the life of the faithful.

The journey of the Last Gospel takes us from the invocation of the world, through Gods Word, all things were made. Giving us a glimpse at the very nature of God Himself. Taking us onward into the historical path of revelation, through John the Baptists declaration as the witness to the 'coming' of the Son of Man¹⁸. John carries us to the understanding those, who through natural birth right or lineage, would not recognise Him, and would reject him, but those who loved and followed Him, would become the children of God¹⁹. The Last Gospel culminates with the Incarnation, the divine communion between God and man, with all the richness that this image creates. The connection between Creation, the Incarnation, and Revelation, is central to Johns Gospel. We, the created, can only experience God, mediated by the revelation of our personal encounter with Christ, made possible through the Incarnation. John introduces us, in the first 14 verses of his Gospel, to the very core of his deeply personal theological, and spiritual journey with Christ, God made man.

¹⁸ Greek expression: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (ho huios tou anthrōpou): "the Son of Man", used by Jesus in John 1:51.

¹⁹ Greek phrase: (τέκνα θεοῦ): "children/offspring of God." Core meaning: a divine, Spirit-wrought new birth and status