

HOLIDAY MESSAGES 2020

STUDY ONE

Let's Start Before the Beginning

John 1:1–5, 14; Philippians 2:5–8

Jesus, the original Designer and Creator of all things, now comes as the Servant to give Himself for us. God, while remaining God, now becomes truly human. True humanity but undiminished deity.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE Christmas story, which we celebrate every year, did not start when Mary gave birth in Bethlehem or even before that when the angel visited her. Contrary to common thought, the story actually began *before* the beginning. Even before time existed.

To envision this part of eternity-past, allow your God-given imagination to provide the fuel while Scripture provides the map. For no human except Christ Himself has been there, and this eternal tale can be told by no one else.

A Christmas postcard cannot adequately portray the start of it all—infinity's abode. A Christmas pageant cannot possibly capture the immensity of eternity past. Even a Christmas movie, using the latest computer technology, cannot fully express the wonder of what happened way back then.

While pictures, plays, and videos just don't cut it, one thing gets us close: words. We have inspired words that pull back the curtain of time to give us a peek inside one of the most remarkable conversations ever to occur . . . the conversation between the three persons of the Godhead at the Counsel of Divine Decrees.

There, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit agreed in splendid harmony to enact the most splendid plan. In this study, we'll gain a deeper appreciation of that plan by journeying back *before* the beginning.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Let's Start Before the Beginning

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Studying the Bible is more than a mental exercise. It's spiritual. If you treat your study as only mental, it's like reading a biography about your favorite hero of the past. But if you engage your study spiritually, it's like sitting down with your hero to enjoy a luxurious dinner together.

A posture of prayer makes Bible study spiritual. Of course, some components of study challenge the mind, which might keep your time from feeling spiritual. That challenge is normal. Embrace it . . . but also remember to embrace God. Take on that spiritual posture now with help from Pastor Chuck's prayer below.

Thank You, Father, for this sweet story. More than sweet, thank You for this profound story of Your love for us, in giving us Your one and only Son. Thank You for the plan that defies imagination. Take us now to a time which we can hardly comprehend. Give us hearts to take in all that You would teach us and give us a willingness to respond in love to Your love as You have given us Your one and only. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The New Testament authors wrote astonishing statements about the divinity of Jesus. For example, look at what the author of the book of Hebrews wrote:

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. (Hebrews 1:1–3)

What does the passage above claim about Jesus' divine identity?



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John, too, made many astonishing statements like that. For example, John wrote, “In the beginning was the *Word*.” (John 1:1 NASB, emphasis added). Here, John used the word *logos*. It’s a Greek term with numerous meanings.¹ It could mean “word,” “utterance,” “assertion,” “presentation,” “reason,” “matter,” or “account.”

John used *logos* to refer to God’s perfect self-expression in human form: Jesus—fully God and fully man. God’s perfect portrait of Himself. John could have used the Greek words the author of Hebrews used. But he didn’t. John used *logos*. He did so to emphasize God’s purposes, not His person.

It’s as if John is saying, “In Jesus, we not only have the cause of it all but also the reason behind it all.” Let’s explore that “reason behind it all.”



Observation: The Infinity of Eternity Past

All good Bible study starts with observation. We take in the words of the author. We want our thoughts to mirror the author’s thoughts. We want to make the same logical connections the author makes. We keep from imposing our thoughts upon the author’s words.² We read slowly and repetitively and reflectively.

Observe *John 1:1–14*. Don’t rush. Ponder, wonder, and imagine. Note the key claims John, the author, made about Jesus’ divine identity, purposes, and activity.

<p>Identity 1:1–3, 6–8</p>	
<p>Purposes 1:9, 12–13</p>	
<p>Activity 1:4–5, 10–11</p>	



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Right out of the chute, we read that Logos is deity. “He existed in the beginning with God.” In fact, “God created everything through Him.” Most people don’t know that. We think of the Father as the creator, when in fact it was the second member of the Trinity who was given that responsibility in the Council of Divine Decrees. There was no alien creation. There was no surprising event. All planned, all carried out through the limitless power of the second member of the Trinity. Logos gave life to everything. Think of it. In creating these creatures and these living things—plants, animals, fish, or whatever—there is the existence of life because He gave life to each. Apart from Him there is no life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: A Shocking Descent

The apostle Paul also wrote exalted hymns about the eternal purposes of God in Christ. Perhaps you didn’t realize it, but that is exactly what we find in Philippians 2:6–11 when Paul elucidated the humility of Jesus. Sometimes, the greatness of God cannot be appreciated except through song. For now, however, we’ll slowly explore the hymn so we can better grasp its deep truths.

Read *Philippians 2:6–11*. Notice its structure and how Paul unfolds the progression of Christ’s humility. Use Bible study *resources* like commentaries or dictionaries to help you interpret this passage.³ Based on 2:6–8, describe the different statements about Christ’s humility and explain their significance regarding God’s divine purpose.

This is probably the most important part of His incarnation. What does that mean? He certainly didn’t empty Himself of His deity for He’s stilling storms, healing the sick, raising the dead, and calming the waters. So what does it mean? Listen carefully. He willingly set aside the independent, voluntary use of His divine attributes and personal prerogatives while earthbound. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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According to Philippians 2:9–11, what was the outcome of Christ's humility? What additional information do we discover about God's purposes behind the incarnation.

Jesus' death did not come at random. His final breath did not thwart God's plan established at the Council of Divine Decrees. In fact, Jesus' death was not only part of the plan; it was central. It was central because God would not let death have the last say. By dying on the cross and then resurrecting, Jesus defeated death that He may give eternal life to all who would receive it.



Correlation: The Beginning

Paul wrote another hymn that further reveals God's purposes in Christ. Colossians 1:15–20 emphasizes God's creative action through Christ and Christ's sustaining work.

Read the *hymn*, which has two parallel parts. Part one portrays the current order of creation (Colossians 1:15–17). Part two portrays the new creation that Jesus began when He resurrected (1:18–20). Study each part. See the parallel literary constructions. Record three key points from each part and how they connect with each other.



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Key Points	Colossians 1:15–17	Colossians 1:18–20
One		
Two		
Three		

He existed before anything else. He holds all creation together. He is the head of the church which is His body. He's the beginning, the supreme over all who rise from the dead. He's first in everything, and it pleased the Father to reconcile everything to Himself as the Son comes to the cross. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Motive behind It All

A single verse captures the reason behind it all:

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)



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God loves us. The deeper one realizes that truth, the more transformed he or she will live. Begin application by reflecting on all the wondrous, eternal truths you explored in this study. Write a few words on what you especially appreciate about the miracle of Christmas.

Now think over how you can share that truth with your loved ones or close friends. What can you do to help them appreciate God's purposes in the way that you have come to see them? What can you do to help them celebrate God's purposes in a fresh way during this Christmas season?



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A FINAL PRAYER

End your devotional time by singing a Christmas hymn to God. It can be the hymn below or one of your favorites.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King:
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th’angelic hosts proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King”

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the Virgin’s womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th’incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.

Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King”

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.

Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King”³

ENDNOTES

1. Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 598–601.
2. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, visit the website [sts.insight.org](https://www.sts.insight.org) or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Pastor Chuck also uses *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*. It’s one of his favorite Bible study tools.
3. Charles Wesley, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” rev. George Whitefield, Hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/hark_the_herald_angels_sing_glory_to.

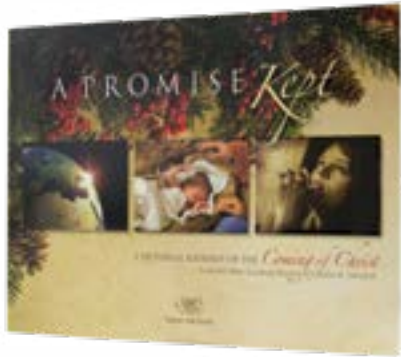


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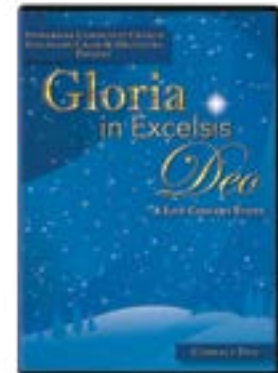
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Studies, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Pastor Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

