

# **Christmas And Eternal Life**

**1 John 1:1-4**

**Pastor John Miller**

In 1 John 1:1-4, John says, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled...”—or “examined”—“...concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.”

Yes, it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Everywhere you go you see lights up, people decorating, the mall is crowded with people shopping, freaking out on Black Friday buying their gifts, baking cookies and meeting together at Christmas parties.

But let's not forget that the reason for the season is Jesus Christ. Christmas is to keep Christ at the center of our celebration; worshipping He who came from heaven. The theme of this message is that He came to bring us eternal life.

Biblically, there are many reasons why Jesus came. He came to forgive our sins, to destroy the work of the devil, to sit on the throne of David so that one day He would bring in His kingdom as King of kings and Lord of lords and He would be the Redeemer of mankind and the earth.

But the Bible says that He also came to give us eternal life. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”—that's Christmas—“...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” “Everlasting life” is the same as “eternal life.” So Jesus came to give us life. Verse 2 of our text says, “The life was manifested.” The eternal life, the Word of life, “was manifested.” That is Christmas. John said that they had seen it, heard it and “bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life...was with the Father and was manifested to us.”

In 1 John 5:11-12, he says, “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” So Jesus came to bring us eternal life.

Now we must ask the question, “What is eternal life?” Eternal life is not just living forever. It's not eternal existence. It's not quantity of life. Eternal life is a new kind of life. It's life in a new sphere; it's spiritual life. Eternal life is a new quality of life.

The moment you are born again through faith in Jesus Christ, you have not only the Holy Spirit, but you are born into God's kingdom and are given eternal life. Eternal life is best described as the life of God in the soul of man. One of the best descriptions of a true Christian is that they have the life of God in their soul. So a true Christian has eternal life, and eternal life is found no

other place than in the person of Jesus Christ.

There are three truths about eternal life in this text. Number one, the source of eternal life is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. Verse 1 says, "That which was from the beginning..." John traces Jesus Christ all the way back to eternity past. This is what's called the "eternality" of Christ; He is the eternal Son of God.

There are three "beginning" verses in the Bible. The first is Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

I am not an evolutionist. I don't believe in macro evolution. I believe there are changes and variations within species, but I don't believe that all life came from a single cell or started in the primordial "mud," and it went from "the goo to the zoo to you." I don't believe that. I believe that this complex culture in this world, this cosmos we live in, was actually a creation of God. Theologians call it "God's fiat"; He could speak from nothing and create everything. So time, space and matter were created by God.

Genesis 1:1, one of the greatest verses in the Bible, is a reference to Jesus Christ, who created all things. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." It also tells us that in Colossians 2. So Jesus is "the beginning" there.

It also tells us in John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 1—same author as this epistle—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God..."—face to face with God the Father, so we have God the Father and God the Son—"...and the Word was God." "In the beginning was the Word" means He is eternal. He was with the Father; that is, He is personal. And He is divine; that is, He is God. So these last two verses are both describing Jesus Christ.

Then we have our text, 1 John 1, which says, "from the beginning." What we learn from our text, "from the beginning," is that the baby born in the manger in Bethlehem was none other than the eternal Son of God. Jesus is eternal and Jesus is pre-existent. Before the Virgin Mary conceived Christ in her womb, He already existed.

Before I was conceived by my father and mother, I didn't exist, and you didn't exist before your conception. We were just a twinkle in our parents' eyes. At your conception, God knew you and numbered your days. God had all of your life planned out.

But Jesus pre-existed Bethlehem. Jesus is eternal. That is an attribute of deity. Have your kids ever asked you, "Mom, Dad, who made God?" That's one of the great kid questions. I just say, "Go away, kid. You're bothering me." No. There really is no other answer than "No one made God," because God is eternal. No one created God. Who would create the guy who made the guy, who made the guy, who made the guy, who made the guy who created God? Where did it all start?

Either you believe in an eternal, personal, all-powerful God, or you believe that in eternity past, there has always been matter. Where the matter came from, where the explosion came from,

how evolution started—scientists cannot even discover how life started. How can life start all by itself without any Creator? There is a Creator and a creation—only common sense tells us that. So Jesus is the Creator. He is the eternal God.

I say all this because when you celebrate Christmas, remember that babe born in the manger was “our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.” He was actually the almighty God, the Creator of the universe. He came in dependence upon His parents, and He grew up as a man, the only sinless human being. Theologians call this the “hypostatic union,” fully God and fully man in one Person, Jesus Christ.

Let me give you some other verses. In Micah 5:2, the prophet Micah said, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” So this verse speaks of Jesus’ eternity.

In John 17:5, when Jesus was praying His high priestly prayer, He said, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” There again we see Jesus’ eternal nature.

In John 8:58, it says, “Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’” Before Abraham ever was on earth, I AM was there.

In Colossians 1:17, where Paul is speaking of Christ, he said, “And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” So He is the source of all creation, He is the sustainer of all creation and He is the goal of all creation.

In 1 John 5:20, we have a direct reference to Jesus Christ, the true God and eternal life. “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

Now notice what John says about “that which was from the beginning,” verse 1. He says about Jesus, “We have heard...we have seen with our eyes...we have looked upon, and our hands have handled...the Word of life.” The reason John made this statement was because a false teaching, known as “Gnosticism,” which was a heresy and not orthodox Christianity, had arisen at this time. The gnostics believed that matter was evil; everything physical was evil. So your body, trees, birds, your pets—everything was evil. Only spirit was good. So they were very mystical. Their belief was a combination of eastern mysticism, Greek philosophy and Jewish legalism all combined in the name of Christianity. Because they believed that matter was evil and only spirit is good, God could not be incarnate. So they denied either the humanity of Christ, which was heresy, or they denied the deity of Christ.

These gnostics are not dead. There are people today who say that Jesus isn’t really God or that Jesus wasn’t really a human; He was just a phantom or a spirit being. They say He wasn’t God in the flesh. That’s not orthodox Christianity.

So John is writing these words to say that they had actually seen Him with their eyes, they had actually heard Him with their ears, they had actually looked upon Him and studied Him and they had actually touched Him and felt Him. This “eternal” God, this “Word of life...was manifested,” verse 2.

So Christmas is about God coming to earth. That’s the next point, in verse 2: the manifestation of eternal life. In verse 1 we have the deity of Jesus, and in verse 2 we have the humanity of Jesus. In verse 1 we have His eternality, His pre-existence, and in verse 2 we have His Incarnation and His humanity. The manifestation of eternal life is the Christmas message, verse 2. “The life was manifested” is the Christmas story.

John said three times, “We have seen,” and he said, “bear witness, and declare to you.” So he was a credible witness of the Incarnation. He said, “...that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.”

In the Greek of verses 1-3, it is one, long sentence. One of the challenges in interpreting 1 John is its complexity, structurally, in the Greek text. It’s so hard to follow, because it’s so deep and theological and doctrinal, and its structure is very challenging.

What John does, in verse 2, is that he puts in a parenthesis. It is a parenthetical expression; it starts with a dash and ends with a dash. What it means is that verse 2 is an explanation of verse 1: the eternal God, “which was from the beginning,” that they “have heard...have seen...have looked upon...have handled.” It was that this life was manifested, verse 2, and that’s the Christmas story.

Now what does John mean by “manifested”? You say, “I thought it was an Incarnation.” It is. It starts with “Incarnation,” which is a Latin word. “Incarnate” literally means “becoming flesh.” Because God became flesh—He was here on earth—He manifested Himself for those 33 years of His life on earth. So the word “manifestation” is the fruit of the Incarnation, and it started when He was born and continued until His death, His Resurrection and His Ascension. It all involves the fact of the Incarnation. First He was God incarnate, then He lived on earth and was manifested.

In John 1:14, he said, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Or He pitched His tent among us. These are all the same expressions for the Incarnation and manifestation.

So Jesus Christ was God incarnate, manifesting God on the earth. Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” He wasn’t the Father, but He displayed the Father or manifested the Father to us. So it was Christ’s Incarnation which resulted in God’s manifestation in the flesh.

1 Timothy 3:16 says, “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.” So the manifestation comes as the fruit or the result or the outgrowth of His Incarnation. So Christmas is God incarnate, manifested in the flesh.

In verse 1, we see His deity and in verse 2, we see His humanity. Jesus is the God-man. He's called "Emanuel," which means "God with us." What a marvelous truth that is.

In verse 1, He was manifested when the disciples "heard" Him, saw Him, "looked upon" Him and their "hands have handled" Him.

"We have heard" Him speaks of His voice. In the Greek, it actually means that they heard Him and are still hearing Him. It's in the Greek present tense. That means they heard Him in the past, it has implications in the present and will carry on into the future. I imagine that even when Jesus ascended back into heaven, they could still hear His voice.

Was there ever anyone you loved who died and went to heaven, but even years later, you could still remember his or her voice? My mom's been in heaven for many years, but every once in a while I could still hear her voice calling me "John" in my head.

So the words Jesus spoke were ringing in their ears. They were hearing them over and over again. I wish they had recorders in those days. Hearing God incarnate actually speak must have been mind-blowing!

Secondly, verse 1 says that when Jesus came, they saw Him. John says, "We have seen [Him] with our eyes." How else do you see Him? Why would John add "with our eyes"? That's because he was trying to say it wasn't a mystic, philosophical, spiritual sighting. It wasn't a "third-eye" kind of sighting. It was a literal sighting. So they saw Him in His physical essence.

We use the expression today, "I saw it with my own two eyes." You say that when you want to be very affirming about something.

Thirdly, they "looked upon" Him. This is interesting that they saw Him with their own eyes. It says they saw Him, in verses 1, 2 and verse 3. Then the next statement is that they "looked upon" Him. This is a different expression in the Greek language. This means that they stared at Him. It doesn't just mean that they saw Him; they actually gawked at Him. They were locked in on Him. They were just awestruck by Him.

You can imagine how awestruck they were when Jesus raised the dead, when He cleansed the leper, when He gave sight to the blind and when He calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. He said, "Peace, be still," and the waves and the wind stopped. They looked at Him then and said, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?!" I imagine the disciples found themselves just staring at Jesus sometimes. "Wow!"

Years ago, when I took a long ministry trip for three weeks, my daughter, Amy, didn't want me to go. She cried, "Daddy, please don't go!" But when I got back, it was late at night, so I went to bed and didn't get to see her until the next morning. When I woke up, she was standing next to the bed, inches from me, looking down on me with a big smile from ear to ear. I opened my eyes and I could see Amy's face. She said, "Daddy's home!" She was so thrilled to just stare at her daddy. He was here in the flesh! Here at home!

That's probably the way the disciples were staring at Jesus. Can you image Jesus waking up, laying on the mat in the Garden of Gethsemane and all the disciples were staring at Him? "The Word made flesh." It would have blown their minds; they couldn't comprehend it. So they just stared at Him.

Where it says, we "have looked upon" Him, is where we get our word "theater" from. So it means "to stare at" or "to gaze at." And it means "to look with understanding." It wouldn't be just a quick glance; it would be to stare at, to study, to look down upon and to look with understanding.

Fourth, because He was manifested, "our hands have handled." I like that. That doesn't mean that they just bumped Him or just tapped Him on the shoulder. It means they actually felt Him; He's tangible. He said, "Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." And Thomas said, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Someone said, "The eternal logos had been manifested, so we, in Christ, grasped ahold of reality." Just think: you're hearing the eternal God, you're seeing the eternal God!

"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;

Hail the incarnate Deity.

Pleased as man with men to dwell,

Jesus, our Emmanuel."

We touch Him. We're grasping Him. We have a reality of eternity.

Notice that we "bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father as was manifested to us" verse 2. I like those expressions of "bear witness" and "declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father." So you have God the Father and God the Son—at least the basis for the first two Persons of the Trinity.

So at Christmas, God wrapped His love in flesh and blood and sent Him down to man.

Number one, we have the source of eternal life, Jesus Christ, the eternal God. Number two, we have the manifestation of eternal life. Number three, in verses 3-4, we have the proclamation of eternal life. We proclaim it, as the Apostles did to others. "That...which we have heard, which we have seen." John repeats this from verse 1 in verse 2. Now what do they do? They "declare to you." They proclaim His Incarnation and our participation in eternal life. "We declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." They write to us so that we not only have eternal life, not only fellowship with the Father, but that we would have fullness of joy. Christmas brought us fullness of joy.

What we have “seen and heard we declare” verse 3. So they are bearing witness or showing, mentioned in verse 2. What is John’s declaration? What is he bearing witness to? Number one, that they can have fellowship, verse 3. That “fellowship” is the Greek word “koinonia.” It means “joint participation.” The same eternal life you have, I have. The same life of God in your soul is in my soul. That’s the basis of our fellowship; we have fellowship with God.

Fellowship isn’t just having coffee. Fellowship isn’t donuts and coffee. Fellowship isn’t just hangin’ out and talkin’ and watching football together on TV. Fellowship is spiritual; it’s in eternal life, it’s a koinonia.

Notice the three categories of fellowship that John mentions. First, he says, “with us,” verse 3. That’s the family of God, the church. Second, it is “with the Father,” God the Father, verse 3. And third, it is “with His Son Jesus Christ,” also verse 3. Note the fellowship on those three levels.

If you have eternal life, you are a member of the family of God or “with us.” And if you are a member of the family of God, that should be expressed by being a part of the church of Jesus Christ. One of the most needed things in the church today—I’ve never seen it so lacking in over 40 years of ministry—is a commitment to Christian fellowship. It’s a lack of commitment to the local church. It’s a take-it-or-leave-it kind of attitude. And with Covid-19 that has come upon us in the last few years, there are so many people who have not returned to church. There are many for health reasons who can’t do that, but if you are able to be in church, you should be in church.

I would rather contract Covid, die and go to heaven rather than live without the body of Christ, without the fellowship of God’s people. If I’ve got the life of God in my soul, then I want the people of God to fellowship with. You’re my brothers and sisters in Christ. I may be your pastor, which is the Latin word for “shepherd,” but I’m also a sheep. I have sheep needs, and I’m a brother in Christ. I need your prayers and your love. You need my prayers and my love. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’” We all need one another.

One of the problems in the church today is that we’re suffering from a low view of the church. We have these “Lone Ranger” Christians, who have a take-it-or-leave-it kind of attitude, a nonchalant attitude toward the church.

Throughout the history of Christianity, people have literally died by persecution to be in fellowship. Christians in China at this time risk their lives and imprisonment for being in fellowship, for praying together, for reading the Word together and for serving one another.

You need to be committed; find yourselves a local church. If it’s not this one, find another one. Become a part of God’s family.

So you have koinonia in the life of eternity. Second, fellowship is with God the Father. You actually have koinonia with God the Father; you’re His child.

Third, you also have fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ.

All this is because of Christmas. Christmas means I have eternal life. Christmas means I'm a child of God. Christmas means I'm part of the family of God.

Then notice that after we have fellowship, we have fullness of joy, verse 4. "And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." So he's speaking about fullness of joy. Eternal life brings fellowship and fullness of joy. Someone said, "Fullness of joy comes from fellowship with the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit, with other believers in the family of God, the church." In John 15:11, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

God wants you to have fullness of joy. Let me explain what joy is. Joy is not happiness. When everything goes smoothly, when everything's going good, you're happy. But when things go bad or go wrong, you're bummed out. But joy is the fruit of the Spirit. It's like an artesian well. It doesn't depend on me having food, clothes, friends, fun and all these kinds of things. Joy comes from within. The world can't give joy, and the world can't take it away. It comes from God.

When Paul and Silas were beaten, arrested, falsely accused, thrown into prison and their feet and hands put in stocks, at midnight they sang praises to God, and the prisoners heard them. They had joy in the darkest of night in the deepest of dungeons.

So I don't care what you're going through, if you have eternal life, it will manifest in joy. The angel said to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born was, "I bring you good tidings of great joy." That's what Christmas is.

If you're getting all bogged down with food, parties and what to buy for gifts, you're missing Christmas. You're not experiencing His joy. Christmas was the birth of joy. Joy is the fruit of the Spirit.

There are some parallel verses to 1 John 1 that are also in 1 John 5. In 1 John 5:11-13, it says, "This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."

There are four things that we learn from these verses. Number one, eternal life is a gift from God. You can't earn it, you don't deserve it, you don't merit it; salvation is a gift from God. Number two, eternal life is found only in Jesus, verses 11-12. If you have the Son of God, you have life. If you don't have the Son of God, you don't have life. Number three, eternal life is received by faith. "These things I have written to you who believe..."—there's faith—"...in the name of the Son of God." Number four, verse 13, you can know that you have eternal life. Eternal life is a gift that is found only in Jesus Christ. It is received by faith, and you can know that you have eternal life.

Do you know that you have eternal life? You don't have eternal life by just going to church. You don't get eternal life by eating Christmas cookies. You don't have eternal life by just having intellectual knowledge that there is a God out there in the heavens. You get eternal life by putting your faith and trust in the Person and in the work of Jesus Christ. He is the God-man, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and died on the Cross a substitutionary death for me.

Jesus took your place on the Cross. He was buried and rose from the dead. But now you must open the door of your heart and let Him in. That gift of eternal life is received by faith. But the package it's wrapped in is Jesus. If you want the gift, you must take it in the package.

At Christmas, people just give us free gifts. We don't have to pay for them; they are freely given. You just say, "Oh, thank you" to the people who give you the gifts.

It's funny how little kids just rip into their packages. You don't say, "Oh, no! You shouldn't have!" They just rip it up. Then we get to be adults, we want to know what's in our packages but we want to act cool.

We carry that over into our relationship with God. "I'm too cool to trust Jesus. I can make it on my own. I know He paid for it and gave it to me as a free gift, but I don't need Him." But you must come to Jesus as a little child and receive His gift. The gift is in the package of Jesus Christ. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

So if you haven't been born again, you don't have eternal life. You don't have the life of God in your soul. How your start your Christmas is by letting Christ be born in you today.

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you're not sure you're a child of God—maybe you don't know that if you died today, you would go to heaven, you've never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior.

So as I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud, right where you are, after me. Make it from your heart, inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

"Dear Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sin. I pray that You'll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you all the days of my life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer and God will and does forgive your sins.

We'd like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

If you just prayed with Pastor John to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we are so excited for you, and we'd like to send you a Bible and some resources to get you started in your

relationship with the Lord. Simply click on the Contact link at the top of the page and tell us something like, "I prayed to accept Christ." We'll get your Bible and resources mailed out to you right away.

God bless you and welcome to the family of God.