

# MAN IN THE MANGER

## JOHN 1:14

John 1:14 **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.**

What does 7-11, Frontier Airlines, Choice Hotels, Marco's Pizza, the city of Cincinnati, Norwegian Cruise Lines, NASCAR, Subway, and Mack Trucks all have in common? The CEO of each of these organizations has participated in an episode of **Undercover Boss**.

Undercover Boss is a TV show that stars the CEO of a given company. He or she dresses incognito. Some disguises are a major transformation. The boss goes from designer suits to work overalls - from occupying the corner office to driving a delivery truck. He usually takes an entry level position in the company he created and works alongside folks he ultimately manages. The goal is for the Boss to gain a ground level perspective.

The Undercover Boss begins to see what it's really like to work for his own company - what the organization *truly* values and how it *actually* treats its employees and customers. The show first aired on CBS in 2010. In 2022 it completed its 11th season.

But the very first episode of Undercover Boss actually goes back a lot further than 2010. *How about 4 BC in the fields outside Bethlehem!* The first Christmas could've been the pilot episode for Undercover Boss. The CEO of the universe took an entry level position in His creation. The Almighty God came to earth, *a baby*.

And the transformation this Boss underwent was far more stunning than anything the TV show has ever dreamed up. God left His palatial mansion in heaven to dress in the likeness of a mortal man. **The eternal Spirit became flesh, and bone, and blood.**

And of all humans Jesus took the form of the smallest, most vulnerable, most defenseless. The Boss of creation came as an infant. Here's a unique truth, **our God has a birthday! The boss became a babe.**

It's easy for me to imagine God appearing as a **thunderbolt**, slicing a stormy sky with a violent zap, demanding the world's attention... Or coming to earth as a **celestial fireball** spinning, and filling the heavens with glory and humanity with fear... Or showing up in the night sky as a **mysterious moonbeam**, an eerie light piercing the darkness, arousing our curiosity.

We can all conceptualize God coming to earth in some sizzling, extravagant, eye-catching, awe-inspiring demonstration of nature... **but in swaddling clothes?**

*Who would've thunk it? God became human.* He came to Earth incognito. The Almighty, our Creator and Sustainer, walked our streets dressed as one of us. The Undercover Boss was laid in a Bethlehem manger!

In John 1:14 the apostle speaks of Jesus as the <sup>1:14</sup> "the Word" - or in the original language, "the Logos." The word "logos" was a technical term used by Greek philosophers to define ultimate truth and meaning.

The Greeks noticed the order and symmetry in nature. They concluded there had to be a master plan. There had to be a logic behind the natural universe - *a Logos behind the cosmos - a reason behind reality.*

It reminds me of the frustrated fellow who made the comment, "Life must go on, I just forgot why!" The Greeks realized there had to be a purpose - *they just had no idea what it was.* They assumed the Logos was an impersonal force - *the why was a what.* But John surprises his readers, *the why is not a what, but a Who.* "The Logos" is a person... **Jesus is the Word!**

And realize the implication! Jesus is not only *the reason for the season*, He is the reason behind all of life! There's no meaning or purpose apart from Jesus.

In the first chapter of his Gospel, the Apostle John astonishes his readers by referring to Jesus as <sup>1:14</sup> "the Word," but then he makes an even more provocative statement that has baffled philosophers for centuries. In verse 14 he writes, <sup>1:14</sup> "And the Word became flesh."

**God's logos** - His revelation - became a man. *The Unified theory of physics - the ultimate end-all - the rationale behind all reality - the logic behind our living - the answer to every question - came to us as a baby.*

Imagine this... **the logos played with legos!**

We, Christians, use a Latin expression to describe what happened. "In carne" means "*in the flesh.*" Just this past week Kathy made an excellent bowl of "Chili con carne" - literally "*chili that contains meat or flesh.*" Jesus is "God incarnate," that is, "*God in human skin.*"

In Jesus, God joined the human family. *He became fully human* - and in doing so, subjected Himself to the full range of human emotions and experiences.

Jesus walked our streets, and ate our food, and wore our clothes, and learned our customs. Our Lord Jesus lived life in the trenches. Jesus became a human being to the same degree that you and I are human beings.

1:14 “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Author, Max Lucado, describes practically what this must've included: “God was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys, and a spleen. He stretched against the walls and floated in the amniotic fluids of his mother. *God came near...* Mary changed His diapers. The Almighty learned to walk. Children played in the street with Him. Jesus may have had pimples. He may have been tone-deaf. Perhaps a girl down the street had a crush on Him... It could be that His knees were bony...

He felt weak. He grew weary. He was tempted. He got colds, burped, and had body odor. He snored, blew His nose, and hit His thumb with His hammer. His feelings got hurt. His feet got tired. His head ached. For 33 years He would feel everything you and I have ever felt.” *And by the look I see on some of your faces I'm not sure you agree...* I know the feeling. It sounds a little irreverent for us to say, “*God blew His nose.*”

We don't often picture the Lord of glory going to the bathroom, or His feet swelling, or His nose bleeding, or His body sweating, or Him getting hungry and thirsty.

Our theology is somehow reluctant to account for the fact that the Son of God *soiled his diapers*. Yet that's precisely the Jesus the New Testament portrays. The Messiah in the manger of Bethlehem was **totally divine** - but equally so, He was **fully human**.

If you still doubt this picture of Jesus, let me reel off a few Scriptures you can jot down and chew on later...

In **John 4:6**, Jesus got tired.

In **Matthew 4:2**, Jesus was hungry.

**John 19:28**, He grew thirsty.

**Matthew 8:24**, He slept.

**Hebrews 2:18**, He was tempted.

**Mark 3:5**, He got angry.

**Luke 22:44**, He perspired.

And in **John 11:35**, Jesus even wept.

There were also people in the first century who were uncomfortable with the concept of a truly human Jesus.

They *twisted their theology* because they couldn't *handle His humanity*. Some people taught that Jesus didn't really have a human body - *his body was an illusion*. He was a phantom, a ghost, an apparition. These folks told fanciful tales of Jesus walking on the beach, and yet leaving no footprints in the sand.

Others said that the **divine Christ** came upon the **human Jesus** at His baptism, and yet departed just before His crucifixion - *but the two were not the same*.

A fifth century heretic, ultimately excommunicated from the Church, a man name Nestorius, couldn't accept our Lord's humanity. Nestorius infamously said, "I could not call a baby two or three months old God."

Much of the New Testament was written to confront and correct the heresies that watered-down Jesus' humanness... John, who lived 3 1/2 years with Jesus, began his letter by saying, <sup>1</sup> John 1:1 "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, concerning the Word of life..."

John wanted everyone to know He and his friends had touched Jesus. He had grabbed Jesus' arm to lead Him through the crowd. Like any group of guys, I'm sure the disciples and Jesus tussled by the campfire.

*The disciples saw smoke come out of His mouth on a cold day. They saw sweat under His robe after a long walk. When Jesus held out his hand to lift a lame man His hand was obviously something that could be gripped. Don't tell Peter a ghost rescued him from drowning in the lake, the hand that grabbed him was strong and real.* In fact, don't tell any of the disciples that Jesus' body was an illusion. They all had literally touched Jesus, and Jesus had literally touched them! Jesus was no phantom. There was meat on His bones.

Peter also addresses this vital doctrine in 1 Peter 3:18 where he states Jesus was <sup>3:18</sup> "put to death in the flesh." The *divine Christ* didn't somehow split from the *human Jesus*. It was *God incarnate* who died on a Roman cross. Messiah's *divinity and humanity* are two characteristics of one person - not two different people.

It's mind-boggling to contemplate, but the man who died on Calvary's cross was the God who created **the wood** from which the crossbeams were carved... and **the iron** from which the nails were forged... and even **the men** who viciously hammered in those nails.

1 John 4:2-3 concludes, <sup>4:2</sup> "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, <sup>4:3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God." The disciples, and the early Church, believed so strongly in the humanity of Jesus they made it the litmus test for an orthodox faith.

To early Christians it was as crucial to believe that Jesus was a *man* as it was to believe He was *God*. Not only was the baby in the manger God, He was a man.

And this doctrine of the dual-nature of Christ was settled once and for all at the Council of Chalcedon. In 451 AD a group of church leaders and Bible scholars

gathered in what is today, Istanbul, to work out a declaration on the nature of Christ. They issued a doctrinal statement which has never been improved...

"Following the holy fathers, we confess with one voice that the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man... He is of one substance with the Father as God, He is also of one substance with us as man. He is like us in all things except sin."

And I'm sure we would all agree with that statement of faith - we'd sign it - hopefully, we would fight for it. But for most of us we are still a lot more comfortable with the deity of Jesus than we are with His humanity.

There's something about keeping Jesus *divine* that keeps Him comfortably *distant*. *His royalty* seems far removed from our *reality*... Yet the more human we can see Jesus, the more relevant He becomes to our struggles. When it dawns on us, that Jesus walked in our shoes, and shared our predicament we can no longer dismiss His promises, or ignore His commands.

The Jesus who challenges us to love Him more than friends and family, and follow Him regardless of what it might cost us, is the same Jesus who kissed His mother goodbye in the door of a carpenter's shop, and left home to do the will of His Father in heaven.

The Jesus who said [Matthew 5:44](#) "*love your enemies*" is the Jesus who hung on a cross in excruciating pain, and prayed for God to forgive those who conspired against Him.

The Jesus who encourages us to lay up treasure in heaven is the very same Jesus who died wearing all that He owned, and was buried in a borrowed grave...

The Jesus who warned us it's a sin to even lust after a woman in our heart, was the same red-blooded man who lived into his thirties, and overcame the certain sexual temptations that were thrown at Him.

And the Jesus who instructs us to deny ourselves, and serve others - is the same man who laid aside the comforts of heaven to be born in a smelly stable.

The humanity of Jesus strips me of my excuses. It's impossible to take refuge in the assumption, "*God just doesn't understand*" or "*That's easy for Him to say*" when you realize Jesus was as human as we are.

If all you're after in a god is an icon to sit on the mantle of your life - a god to whom you can pay occasional homage - a god you can show-off to your friends to prove how religious you are - *a mascot rather than a Master* - then you don't want the incarnate God!

You want a *"way off, up there, somewhere kind of god."* You need a god you can keep at a distance - that can be worshipped amid the smell of incense and stained glass - yet remain removed from everyday life.

The God-man is too real. He's too close to home. He's too relevant. He's an invader you can't keep out of the privacy of real life. *He's been where you're at! He's felt what you feel! He's closer than you think!*

As one author writes, *"Let Christ be as human as He intended to be. Let Him into the mire and muck of our world - for only if we let Him in, can He pull us out."*

To those who understand Christ's humanity, as well as His deity, the *incarnate invader* becomes a comfort and a hope. What is an *encroachment* to some folks ends up an *encouragement* to others. The incarnation will scare you if you want to live life on your own - but if you're leaning on Jesus it'll be your greatest solace.

*When I realize Jesus has been where I'm at...* I can trust Him with *my feelings, my heart, my hurts, my hopes, my ambitions, my fears, my weaknesses, my frailties*. He's faced them all before. He's conquered my struggles already. **He can heal, because He has hurt!**

Jesus is the friend I can trust, because He knows what it's like to need a friend! He can untangle temptation because He's overcome it in His own life.

Theologian, Helmut Thelicke, wrote of our human plight, *"Man is told of a loving Father above the starry skies. He thinks of Him up there in some monumental headquarters, while he sits in a foxhole somewhere on this isolated front, somewhere on this trash heap, working at a stupid job that gives him misery..."*

*What does he get out of it when he's told, "There is a Supreme Intelligence that conceived the creation of the world, devised the law of cause and effect, and maneuvered the planets into their orbits?" All he can say to that is "Well, you don't say!" And then go on reading his newspaper, or turn on the television.*

*For that certainly is not a message by which he can live... But if someone says, "There is Someone who knows you... who grieves when you go your own way. And it cost Him something to be the star to which you can look - the staff by which you can walk - the spring from which you can drink."* When a man realizes this is true, really true, that Someone is interested in him and shares his lot, then this can suddenly revolutionize his life... The incarnation means that God has become man and that I am no longer in darkness."

In 1959 a northern journalist, John Griffin, decided to discover what it was like to be a black man living in the South. At first he thought of touring the region as an observer, but he knew that would limit his perspective.

Instead, he changed his skin color. He actually became black. Griffin took oral medications, used sun lamp treatments, dyed the pigment of his skin with various types of stains - and then he traveled across the South and tasted first hand the horrors of racial prejudice. He experienced up-close and personal the plight of African Americans at the time. John Griffin published his findings in a book called "[Black Like Me.](#)"

Well, Jesus became [a man like me.](#) He put on my skin. He dressed as a human like me, so He could understand firsthand my difficulties and hardships.

When you observe a person's plight from a distance you feel some sympathy. But *sympathy* isn't *empathy*.

True empathy is participation in that person's feelings. Empathy has been defined as, "[Your pain in my heart.](#)" To really feel what another person feels you have to get close. You have to get individually involved.

Recently, I read about "[The Age Man Suit.](#)" It's a suit designed to simulate the physical consequences of old age - *so the 20-something year old medical school students can develop genuine empathy for the 75 year old senior citizens they'll treat throughout their career?*

The Age Man Suit consists of ear-protectors that stifle hearing, a yellow visor that blurs eyesight and makes it hard to distinguish colors, a helmet that makes the head heavy and causes dizziness, knee and elbow pads which stiffen joints, a Kevlar jacket which presses uncomfortably against the chest, and padded gloves. The suit weighs a little over 20 pounds.

When a new student straps on the suit for the first time, Dr. Rachel Eckhardt says, "[Welcome to old age.](#)" She explains, "[My aim is to turn young energetic people into slow, creaking beings, temporarily at least. That way they will, I hope, develop a feeling for what it's like to be old.](#)" She believes there's a huge disconnect between large sections of the medical profession and their elderly patients. She says, "[Rather than a PowerPoint, this is the best way of giving them a real idea of what it's like to be old, and once we have their empathy we can begin to win students round to becoming interested in old people as patients.](#)"

*What a great idea!* And God had a similar idea when Jesus came to earth, but the Almighty took it one step further. Rather than a suit that *simulates* the human

condition, Jesus became human Himself. The timeless God took on human life from the ground up - as a baby, as a child, as an adolescent; then an adult.

Rabbi Eliot Kukla tells of a woman he met who would often fall on the floor. She had suffered a brain injury that caused her to lose her balance. Whenever it happened she said people would rush to help her up. They tried to get her to her feet before she was ready.

The woman told the rabbi, "I think people rush to help me up because they are so uncomfortable with seeing an adult lying on the floor. But what I really need is for someone to get down on the ground with me." This is what Jesus did. Before He tried to raise us back to our feet, He first joined us on the ground.

It reminds me too, of King Abdullah, the reigning monarch of the country of Jordan. Shortly after he was crowned he slipped out of the palace wearing a fake beard, tattered robes, and a traditional Jordanian head scarf. He visited a branch of his nation's Income Tax Department to see firsthand how common citizen's were being treated. Abdullah realized before he could improve his government's services he had to try them himself from ground level. *So the king got in line.*

This is what King Jesus did - *He got in line. He took a number.* He declined the special treatment most folks would've afforded Him. He rebuffed the privileges of royalty. He embraced the common man's starting point. Before Jesus stood us up, He joined us on the ground.

It wasn't enough for the Son of God to observe the human dilemma from His lofty perch in heaven. We're told in our text, [John 1:14](#) "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This word "*dwelt*" means "to pitch a tent." Jesus pitched His tent - God camped out among us.

I love how *The Message Paraphrase* renders verse 14, [John 1:14](#) "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." God came to the hood.

The Sovereign God got down on our level. He joined our predicament. God in Christ now shoulders our sufferings. He shares our plight, to lead us out. God stepped out of heaven and slipped into our shoes! As a result He understands our predicament in a new way.

Since the incarnation, God now cries and laughs with us - not just at us. *God weeps when we weep, and He smiles when we smile, and He bleeds when we bleed.*



Years ago my son, Nick, played in a big soccer game. His undefeated team played the league's other undefeated team. Nick lined up at goalie that game which meant the season was riding on his shoulders.

The pressure was on, and I literally, played that game alongside my son. *I squatted when he squatted. I lunged when he lunged.* You should've seen me on the sidelines, I was animated. I've been in competitive situations myself. I could feel exactly what Nick felt.

And this is how Jesus reacts today when He sees me under pressure. He's felt that same stress. He knows exactly what I'm feeling, and He's right there *mimicking my movements*. He's bending and moving and reacting with me as I work through my dilemma.

Hebrews 2 expresses this truth, <sup>2:17</sup> "In all things (Jesus) had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>2:18</sup> For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted..." The Greek word "*aid*" literally means "to run to the cry of a child."

When Jesus sees you hurt He races to your side. He's known the same pain. For Jesus to shoulder our burdens it first required He experience them Himself.

*How can someone who's never had a busy day help me through mine? How can someone who's never felt stress himself, help me cope? How can someone who's never lost a loved One console me in my grief?*

Understand the Christian's marching orders don't come from a heavenly bureaucrat who has never seen combat, but from a battle-scarred general fresh from the front. Jesus is a veteran whose experienced the enemy's fire, and knows well the keys to victory.

There's an Italian movie that opens with a helicopter ferrying a giant, concrete statue of Jesus to the city of Rome. The copter flies over the landscape as this giant Jesus hangs from a sleeve with His arms outstretched.

At one point a farmer spots the statue. He glances up into the sky, and shouts, "*Look, it's Jesus!*" He hops off his tractor and follows the statue across his field.

As the helicopter moves closer to the city of Rome it passes over a swimming pool full of bikini-clad girls. The copter pilot swoops lower to get a closer look.

The airborne, concrete Jesus just hangs from the helicopter over it all, unmoved and expressionless.

There are people who envision the real Jesus as this concrete Jesus. He's huge and heavy. He seems to lack empathy. He hovers over us without expression or emotion. Jesus appears to be on the outside looking in.

Jesus appears removed, judgmental, distant... *What does the God in heaven know about the trials I face?*

*But Christmas forever dispels these notions!* Jesus is no concrete Christ. He's one of us. He feels. He cares. It's been said, "[Jesus was love wrapped in skin.](#)"

John 1:17-18 tells us, [1:17 "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."](#) The humanity of Jesus revealed to mankind a side of God previously hidden from view!

In the OT people saw God at a distance. They had to squint over *a huge gulf called the Law*, and through *a thick fog called sin*. As a result, their view was blurred.

They saw God's character embodied in a standard of behavior, but due to their sin the standard was all they saw. They never saw past God's impeccable purity.

They concluded God was a staunch judge. He might be *willing to forgive* but He sure didn't *want our fellowship*. He was more into *rules* than *relationship*.

In the OT, man could see God was **immense**, but we concluded He was cold and impersonal... *Yet that was not the God Jesus revealed*. The God whose glory fills the universe is the man who let children play in His lap.

In the OT, the Hebrews could see that God was **powerful**, but they assumed He exercised that power in cruel and tyrannical ways. Again, *that was certainly not the God Jesus revealed*. The hands that hung the heavens, now healed the sick, and fed the hungry multitudes, and even washed His disciple's feet.

The Jews also thought God was **too perfect to approach**. They thought that because God was sinless He'd want to condemn those who weren't. *But that was not the God Jesus revealed to us*. When the woman taken in adultery was thrown at Jesus' feet instead of handing down *a sentence* He gave her *a new start*.

Jesus put God in the 10X mirror, *and ladies you know what happens when you see yourself under 10X magnification?* Woe Nelly! Blemishes become glaring. You realize distance was your friend. What you see is really what you get. The real you gets blown up.

*But with God this is the perspective we need*. In Jesus we see God unobstructed by sin and legalism. We see Him in a fresh, new light. We see the heart of God... and what we see is *a God of grace and truth*.

The true God is not content to stay separated from sinners. He's ever-reaching across the aisle. He's stretching out over the canyon. God is pleading with us. He's willing to forgive, and wants fellowship with us.

Jesus reveals a God who cares not only about *holiness*, but *humans*. God would never allow *His law* to thwart *His love*. Jesus was the way God satisfied both. Grace is an expression of *His love*. Truth satisfied *God's Law*. And *Jesus was full of both grace and truth*.

The Incarnation proves forever, God is a touchable God. He wants to touch us, and He's made a way for us to touch Him. In Jesus, God is never out of reach!

Look at the two poles of the Messiah's life - *the crib and the cross*. How *low can love stoop* but a *crib*? How *far can love stretch* but a *cross*? At either end of Jesus' life, you find Him stooping and stretching to touch us.

Hey, we all need the stimulus of touch. Pediatricians report babies who are not cuddled and cradled in warm arms, don't grow healthy and psychologically whole.

It's proven that babies need their mother's touch. And likewise, we need to feel the touch of God...

The storm outside grew intense when the little girl's quivering voice called to her mom from the other room, "**Mommy, I'm scared.**" The mom walked into her room, and said, "**Don't worry, Honey, God will be with you.**"

To which the little girl replied, "**Okay, but you stay here with God, and I'll go in and sleep with Daddy!** *Sometimes we just need to be touched.* We need a God we can touch, and Jesus is a touchable God!

And while on earth our Lord Jesus did a lot of touching. Recall how often Jesus touched someone, or was touched by someone else. Matthew 14 sums up a typical day in Jesus' life, <sup>14:34</sup> "**They came to the land of Gennesaret.** <sup>14:35</sup> **And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick,** <sup>14:36</sup> **and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well.**"

On an occasion a **woman** who'd been hemorrhaging for years touched the hem of Jesus' robe and was healed... Jesus touched the eyes of a **blind man** and his eyes could miraculously see... He even *touched untouchables* and healed people inflicted with **leprosy**.

Remember the woman with a seedy reputation who came to Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee. She washed Jesus' feet with her hair and her tears.

The Pharisee frowned on her display. He looked down his nose at this sinner. In Luke 7 we read, <sup>7:39</sup> "(The Pharisee) spoke within himself, saying, 'This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner'." And the Pharisee was right. Jesus knew what *kind of a woman* was touching Him, but thank God, Jesus is willing to be touched by **that kind of a woman!**

**Our Lord is willing to be touched by sinners!**

When Mary laid her infant son in the manger, the soft pink skin of the newborn baby invited those around the crib to touch Him... The whispers and coos of the contented baby coaxed those around the manger to cuddle Him and hold Him... *And those invitations have never ceased. We're still invited to come touch Jesus.*

Today, reach out in faith and touch Jesus, and in doing so you'll find *peace* for a troubled soul - *healing* for a sick body - *cleansing* for a dirty mind - *love* for an abandoned life - *strength* for a fearful heart - and *hope* for an uncertain future... Touch Jesus, and let Him touch you, and you'll find everything you need!

Here's what Christmas is about - *God is touchable!*

Christmas could well have been the first episode of Undercover Boss. The Boss of all creation, took an entry level position, and occupied a lowly manger.

This Christmas look closely in the manger. God is in that manger - but just as amazing, *God is a man!*