

## John 1:14 The Word became flesh

*The Word became flesh* (John 1:14). We call this the Incarnation, which means, *being in flesh*. A carnivore is a flesh eating animal; a carnival is fleshly entertainment; carnage is a slaughter of people. The Incarnation is the Word, the Logos, the Memra or manifestation of God becoming a flesh and blood human being like us, and yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). If you are talking to someone who doubts the divinity of Christ John 1:14 is the place to turn to.

The Incarnation is not reincarnation. Reincarnation is the Hindu idea that life can start again in a different physical body after your biological death. For example, if you have led a bad life, you may be reincarnated as an animal. If you have lived a good life, you may be reincarnated as a man or a priest. These are not biblical ideas at all. The Christian idea of Incarnation means the unique event which was the life of Jesus Christ who lived about 2000 years ago on this earth for about 33 years.

John tells us, *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world; He was in the world* (John 1:9-10a). Matthew and Luke fill us in on the details. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary; his birth was surrounded by miraculous events and prophecy; there was no room at the inn; he was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger; shepherds and Magi came to visit him; *the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned* (Matthew 4:16). But John just says, *The true Light ... was in the world ... and the Word became flesh*. These are the incredibly simple yet deeply insightful words of the Apostle John.

The Incarnation was God's initiative in sending His Son to be our Saviour (John 3:16). This plan was in God's mind before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). This is why in the Hebrew Scriptures we see Jesus again and again in types, in manifestations, in pictures and in prophecy. John makes reference to this in 1:14, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. Literally this means he *tabernacled* among us. This pun on words is supposed to take our mind back to the Tabernacle, the place of worship in the Israelite community as they wandered in the desert. We read about it's construction in the second half of the book of the Exodus. The Israelites have escaped Egypt through the Red Sea miracle, and they have received the Torah at Sinai. Then God tells Moses, *Make this Tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you* (Exodus 25:9). The Tabernacle was a portable tent-like structure with furniture in it. It served as the sanctuary during the wilderness wanderings. See attached diagram.

The Tabernacle was divided into three sections: the outer courtyard, the holy place and the holy of holies. The different items of 'furniture' included (from right to left): 1. The Altar of Sacrifice, where daily sacrifices were made; 2. The Laver or Basin, where priests washed themselves; 3. The Table of Shewbread, also called the Bread of the Presence, representing God's presence; 4. The Menorah, a seven branched lampstand, representing the light of God's presence; 5. The Altar of Incense, where specially formulated incense was burned daily at the morning and evening sacrifices; 6. The Ark of the Covenant, an ornamented wooden box which contained the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod and a pot of manna; 7. The Mercy Seat, a golden lid for the Ark, with two hammered cherubim (angels) at either end. We read right at the end of Exodus that the glory of God filled the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35). Later, when the Temple was built, during Solomon's reign, likewise at the dedication the Temple was filled with God's glory (1Kings 8:10-11).

The reason Moses was to make the Tabernacle exactly as instructed was because this earthly Tabernacle was to reflect the heavenly throne room: *a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about*

to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:5). So, there are two Tabernacles, an earthly Tabernacle and a heavenly Tabernacle. The earthly reflects the heavenly. When John says the Word *tabernacled* among us, he is drawing out attention to how the earthly Tabernacle pointed to Christ who had now come into the world.

We see many similarities between the Tabernacle and the life of Jesus in John's gospel, which are on the next sheet.

So the Tabernacle points to Christ. But not only is Christ the Tabernacle, He is also the High Priest who entered into the holy of holies once a year (on Yom Kipper or Day of Atonement): *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption* (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Some people believe there is a progression in John's gospel that mirrors the items in the Tabernacle, walking through it from right to left. This progression is marked on the diagram of the Tabernacle, with the numbers 1-7, which are linked to the verses in John. This sequence is quite convincing even if it's not quite perfect!

Thus John's gospel reveals to us the glory of Christ, and the ways in which the symbolism of the Tabernacle and the furniture are fulfilled in Jesus Christ: *and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). In John 2 Jesus actually refers to Himself as the Temple: *Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up* (John 2:19). This causes confusion, but John clarifies things for us, *But he was speaking about His body* (John 2:21).

Therefore Jesus is:

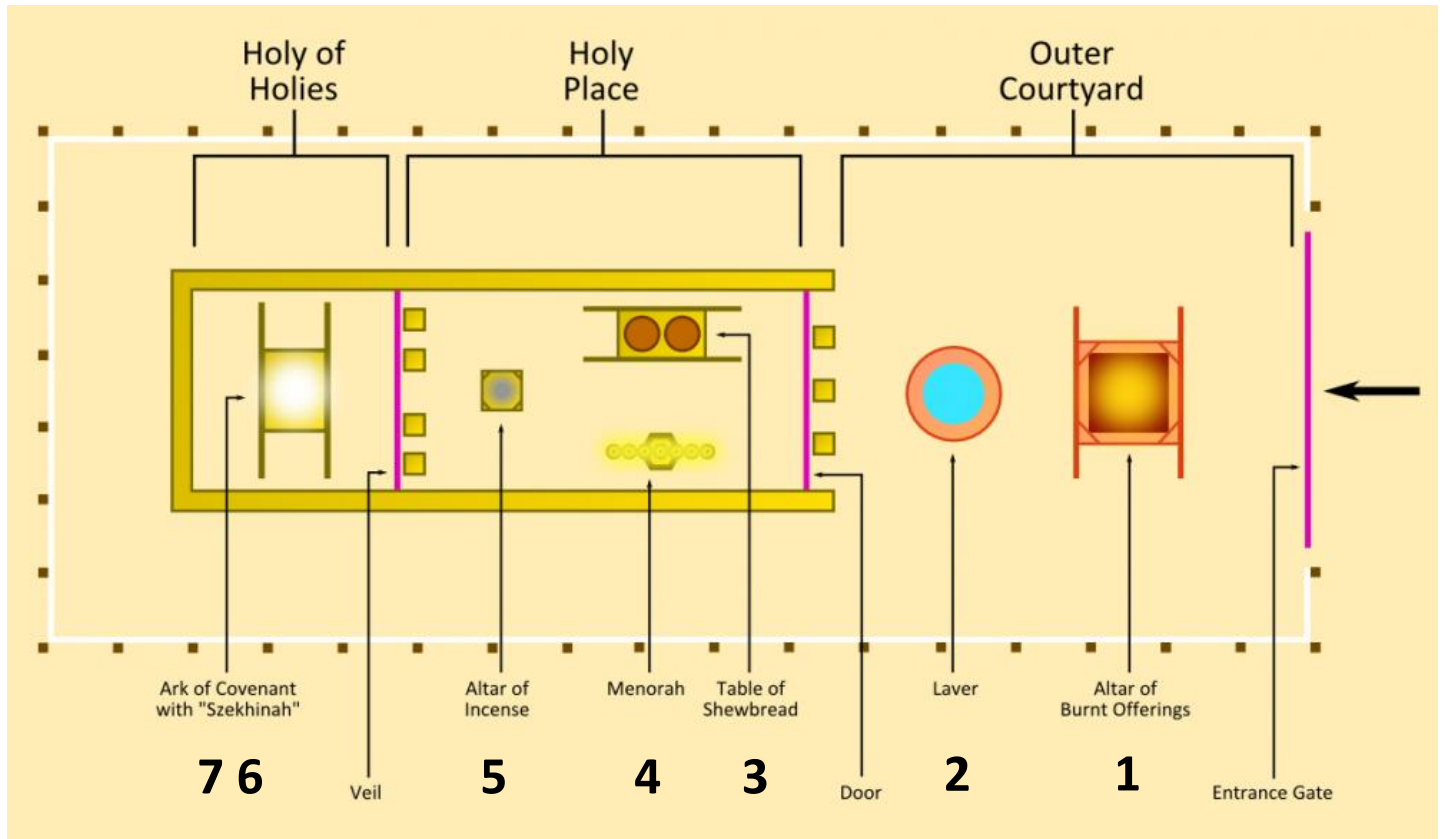
- the ultimate sacrifice for sins, once and for all, and the source of forgiveness;
- the Laver, who cleanses us and gives inner refreshment and satisfaction;
- The Bread of the Presence, who sustains us in Himself;
- The Light of God, by Whose Light we find the way to the Father;
- Our High Priest, who bears us on His heart and constantly intercedes for us in heaven;
- Our High Priest who ascended to go into the heavenly throne room, to sprinkle His atoning blood on the mercy seat

It is in Him that heaven and earth meet. Whatever we need, He is sufficient. He is our Perfect Tabernacle, filled with Glory, *glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*.

As the Tabernacle was the centre of the Israelite community of old, may He be the centre of our lives and at the heart of our community. May God be pleased to dwell with us.

## The Tabernacle

**John 1:14** The Word became flesh and dwelt/tabernacled among us



Similarities between the earthly Tabernacle and Jesus' life

| The Tabernacle                           | The Life of Jesus              | Reference        |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Temporary                             | Jesus lived just 33 years      | John 1:14        |
| 2. <sup>1</sup> Altar of Sacrifice       | Jesus the Lamb of God          | John 1:29        |
| 3. <sup>2</sup> Laver                    | Jesus gives living waters      | John 4:14        |
| 4. Place of true worship                 | Worship in spirit and truth    | John 4:24        |
| 5. <sup>3</sup> Shewbread                | Jesus the bread of life        | John 6:48        |
| 6. Humble/outwardly unattractive         | Jesus the unattractive servant | John 13:4        |
| 7. <sup>4</sup> The Menorah              | Jesus the light of the world   | John 9:5         |
| 8. The entrance to God's presence        | Jesus is the door              | John 10:7        |
| 9. <sup>5</sup> The Altar of Incense     | Jesus' high priestly prayer    | John 17          |
| 10. <sup>6</sup> The Ark of the Covenant | Jesus came to do God's will    | John 4:34, 19:18 |
| 11. <sup>7</sup> The mercy seat          | Christ's ascension             | John 21:17       |

The numbered items can be traced progressively through John's gospel, right to left in the diagram.