

Incarnation as a Wonderful Gift: Theological Reflections on John 1:14 in the Context of Christmas

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the incarnation of Jesus Christ as an expression of Amazing Grace, focusing on John 1:14 in the context of Christmas celebrations. The main issue addressed is the tendency to reduce the meaning of Christmas to ritual, cultural, and sentimental events, thereby obscuring the theological dimension of the incarnation as God's grace that transforms life. This study uses a qualitative theological method with a biblical exegesis approach and a literature review of systematic theology and New Testament studies. The analysis is conducted through text observation, study of Greek terms, theological synthesis, and drawing practical implications. The research findings indicate that the incarnation is the most concrete revelation of God's grace, whereby the Word of God is present personally, historically, and transformatively in Jesus Christ. John 1:14 emphasizes that God's grace and truth are not only revealed doctrinally but are also lived out in relationships, the work of salvation, and the daily lives of believers. This article contributes by affirming that Christmas is not merely an annual celebration, but a rhythm of ongoing spiritual life, in which believers are called to be 'Christ's letters' that reflect the values of the incarnation in everyday faith practice

INTRODUCTION

Christmas celebrations in many contemporary contexts tend to experience a shift in meaning: religious elements (such as the acknowledgment of the incarnation and salvation) are often overshadowed by cultural practices, family rituals, and commercial sentimentality, such as the traditions of gift-giving, decorations, and entertainment events, so that the religious experience transforms into a socio-cultural and consumptive experience. Quantitative and qualitative research on consumer behavior during the Christmas season confirms that the motivations for buying and giving gifts (affective and social) also drive consumptive behavior that can marginalize theological reflection on the meaning of Christ's birth (Santos et al., 2021). In Indonesia itself, Christmas celebrations often no longer solely mark the event of Christ's birth, but rather transform into a cultural and social phenomenon dominated by elements of consumption and entertainment. A survey on consumer behavior during the Christmas season in Manado, a city with a significant Christian population, shows that psychological, social, and cultural factors have the greatest influence on buying and gift-giving decisions leading up to Christmas; this indicates that many Christians celebrate Christmas more as an opportunity to consume rather than as a moment of faith reflection (Waturandang et al., 2020). This study confirms that the traditions of exchanging gifts, Christmas decorations, and shopping habits are closely intertwined with the identity of the celebration, so that the religious-incarnation aspects, salvation, and grace are often sidelined. These findings highlight the urgency of revitalizing the theological dimension of Christmas so that the celebration does not merely become a social ritual and sentimental pastime.

In the modern era, the challenges to the depth of the meaning of Christmas have become increasingly complex. Besides the aforementioned commercialization, the process of secularization shifts some expressions of Christmas into the realm of popular culture, thereby reducing liturgical and doctrinal aspects. At the same time, digitalization changes the way people experience and mark the celebration; social media and digital marketing campaigns accelerate the spread of aesthetically pleasing but often shallow images of Christmas. From a practical theological perspective, doctrines of the incarnation, as in John 1:14, become a cornerstone for reaffirming that Christmas is not merely a cultural ritual, but a revelation of God's grace that demands a spiritual and ethical response. Therefore, the church and practical theology need to reformulate catechetical and liturgical strategies that present the incarnation as the central meaning of Christmas amidst the currents of secularization and digitalization (Nanthambwe, 2024). The development of Christmas practices increasingly framed by market logic and digital aesthetics is not just about rising consumption; it also changes how presence and spiritual meaning are experienced. Digital marketing that utilizes visual, audio, and virtual sensory experiences can reinforce impulsive behavior and the aestheticization of celebrations, thus creating a version of Christmas that is more representational than incarnational. From the perspective of practical theology, Nanthambwe emphasizes the importance of embodied grace—grace that is tangible and present—as a benchmark for assessing contemporary religious practices. If

incarnation requires the concrete presence of God in the world, then the virtualization of religious experiences risks reducing that presence to mere images or content. Therefore, the modern challenges of secularization, commercialization, and digitalization call for pastoral responses and theological formation that reaffirm incarnation as the center of Christmas: not merely a visual and ritual celebration, but a life that manifests grace tangibly in relationships and daily actions (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Nanthambwe, 2024)

Considering the shift in the meaning of Christmas due to cultural, economic, and technological factors, there is an urgent theological need to restore focus on the core of Christmas—the incarnation—as an event in which God's grace becomes historically and personally real. Contemporary theological studies emphasize that understanding the incarnation is not only about doctrinal formulas but also about practical implications. The incarnation requires pastoral engagement, acts of love, and tangible ethical transformation in daily life. In other words, restoring the understanding of the incarnation helps turn Christmas from a sentimental moment into a source of spiritual energy for a life that continually manifests grace (embodied grace) in the modern world (Mănăstireanu & Jemna, 2024).

Although there are quite a number of theological studies on the incarnation, research that directly interprets the incarnation as "Amazing Grace"—that is, God's grace embodied, present, and working transformatively—is still very limited, both in global literature and in the context of Asia and Indonesia. Some local studies touch on the incarnation as a concrete form of God's love and its implications for restoration and the work of salvation (Rahadian, 2023; Zai & Wijaya, 2024), but these studies tend to be historical, expository, or dogmatic. Only a few writings develop the concept of the incarnation as embodied grace explicitly linked to faith formation, pastoral theology, and contemporary Christian praxis. Yet, as highlighted by Nanthambwe, the incarnation contains the dimension of grace that becomes flesh, a gift that takes the form of real life and leads to transformation in relationships, actions, and spirituality. Therefore, there is an important research gap to be filled, namely formulating the incarnation as Amazing Grace not only as a Christological doctrine but also as a theological foundation that shapes daily spirituality and faith practices (Nanthambwe, 2024; Rahadian, 2023; Zai & Wijaya, 2024). Although John 1:14 is one of the most fundamental texts in Christology and the doctrine of the incarnation, studies that explicitly connect this verse with the formation of daily spirituality that views Christmas as a life rhythm rather than merely an annual celebration are still very limited. Aritonang emphasizes that true Christian spirituality grows precisely in daily life, when believers learn to encounter God through life practices oriented towards divine presence (J. Aritonang, 2023). However, these studies have not specifically linked these concepts to the theology of the incarnation in the Prologue of John. Similarly, the discourse on the renewal of church praxis in Indonesia highlights the need for a revitalization of spirituality that focuses more on the transformation of everyday life (Mamahit & Hauw, 2021). However, there have been few studies that use John 1:14 as a hermeneutical basis to develop a "daily Christmas" model

of living as a community that imitates the Word made flesh and embodies grace through concrete actions. Thus, there is a significant research gap in bridging the theological exposition of John 1:14 with an incarnational and contextual daily spirituality for the lives of contemporary believers (J. Aritonang, 2023; Mamahit & Hauw, 2021).

This article offers two main contributions: first, it provides a more focused and systematic theological reflection on the incarnation as a form of Amazing Grace, namely seeing "the Word becoming flesh" (John 1:14) not merely as a Christological dogma but as an incarnated grace that demands an ethical-pastoral response by combining a textual analysis of the Prologue of John with contemporary literature on embodied theology, thereby producing a reading that is relevant for contemporary practical theology; second, it explicitly connects this understanding with daily spirituality and Christian identity. The article formulates the concept of "Everyday Christmas," that is, how the birth of Christ (Luke 2:11) becomes a rhythm and practice of everyday life that shapes believers into the "letter of Christ" written by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:3), thus not only expanding academic insight, but also offering a model for spiritual formation and liturgical/pastoral practice recommendations that are applicable in the context of the church in Indonesia. In this way, the article bridges the gap between the theological exposition of John 1:14 and contemporary spiritual formation practices, as well as providing a theoretical foundation for pastoral programs that affirm the concrete presence of grace in the life of the congregation (J. Aritonang, 2023; Mamahit & Hauw, 2021; Nanthambwe, 2024).

The primary aim of this article is to conduct an in-depth exegetical study of John 1:14, examining the phrase *ho logos sarx egeneto* along with the prologue context (John 1:1–18), exploring the meaning of the Greek language, its literary and theological background, as well as the Old Testament reference framework behind the expression "dwelt among us." The intended exegetical approach will combine language analysis, historical-sociocultural study, and reading the prologue as a Christological framework that demonstrates how John understands the concrete presence of God in the person of Jesus; modern exegetical studies show relevant methods for this task and provide a solid hermeneutical foundation for reading this verse in order to highlight the aspect of the incarnation as a form of divine presence that can be experienced by humans (Huntsman, 2019). Secondly, this article aims to theologically articulate that the incarnation is an action of grace, an embodied grace, by placing John 1:14 within the discourse of contemporary practical theology. This approach adopts the idea of embodied grace developed in new practical-theological studies, which affirms that the incarnation does not stop at doctrinal acknowledgment but requires a practical response: solidarity, service, and social transformation. By combining the reading of the Johannine text with the framework of embodied theology, this article will explain why and how the incarnation can rightly be called 'Amazing Grace,' that is, grace that descends into human history and flesh to bring salvation and tangible change (Nanthambwe, 2024). The third objective is to bridge exegetical findings and theological formulations into practical implications, developing guidelines for spiritual formation, liturgy, and church practices that

enable the faithful to experience a “daily Christmas,” that is, a life reflecting the Word made flesh. To this end, this article considers contemporary models of spiritual formation that emphasize everyday practices such as personal obedience, reflective reading of Scripture, communal life, and service as expressions of incarnate faith. Studies on Christian spirituality rooted in daily life praxis show that authentic spiritual formation does not stop at theological knowledge but is manifested in life transformation and tangible witness in the world (J. Arintonang, 2023; Suseno et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The Doctrine of Incarnation in Christian Theology

The doctrine of the incarnation is one of the most fundamental teachings in Christian theology, affirming that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ as an event with implications for salvation, revelation, and the God-human relationship. This event is understood not only historically but also theologically, as it forms the basis for understanding the mission of salvation and the life of faith. In the historical development of the church, early church theologians and councils such as Nicaea and Chalcedon explained that Christ is one person with two natures, divine and human, without mixture and without change, a formulation that later became the classic theological foundation for understanding the incarnation throughout church history. The doctrine of the incarnation remains relevant in shaping the understanding of faith, because the incarnation is not only a 'past event' but also functions as a mystery of faith that guides the theological and practical life of believers today. This thought is supported by the tradition of historical theology, which connects the biblical narrative, the works of the Church Fathers, and modern theological reflections in order to strengthen faith in Jesus as God who became human and Savior (Pranoto, 2023). The incarnation, both in classical and contemporary understanding, is the central doctrine of Christology that unites the belief that God incarnated for the work of human salvation and continues to shape the faith life of Christians.

In addition to exploring the traditions of the early church, the understanding of the doctrine of the incarnation has also developed through reflections by contemporary Protestant and Reformed theologians who affirm the connection of the incarnation with the concepts of grace, the work of salvation, and the divine-human relationship. In contemporary systematic theological studies, the incarnation is not only seen as a historical claim that the Word became human, but also as the center of divine revelation that shapes the way humans understand love, presence, and their relationship with God in daily life. This approach is viewed by a number of modern Protestant theologians as a reflection of grace manifested concretely in human history, rather than merely an abstract metaphysical assumption. This idea aligns with the emphasis that the incarnation is God's loving self-sending, which continues to have implications in the faith life of the congregation (Gofwan, 2025). This perspective underlines that the doctrine of the incarnation is not only the foundation of classical Christology but also a framework for experiencing God's grace in modern Christian life.

One important aspect of the doctrine of the incarnation in Christian theology is the concept of kenosis, which is the self-emptying of Christ who willingly took on human form as part of God's work of salvation, as reflected in the wording of Philippians 2:7 where Christ "emptied himself." Kenosis is not understood as a loss of divine nature, but as a limitation of action in order to live out Jesus' humanity without negating His Divine person, thus this concept becomes a theological bridge between the divinity and humanity of Christ in the incarnation. In contemporary local studies, Siregar and Yosef emphasize that kenosis demonstrates God limiting Himself in order to give autonomy to creation and to experience the reality of human suffering, which then becomes the theological basis for how the incarnation becomes an event of concrete love with implications for the God-human relationship as well as the practice of believers' lives (Siregar & Yosef, 2025). Thus, the dimension of kenosis shows that the incarnation is not only a historical event, but also an act of love that places God in full solidarity with the human experience.

2. The Concept of Grace (Charis) in the New Testament

In the Gospel of John, grace (*charis*) is understood distinctively as an incarnational reality, that is, God's gift present concretely through the person of Jesus Christ. John 1:14 emphasizes that the Word made flesh came "full of grace and truth," indicating that *charis* is not merely an abstract divine action but God's own presence entering into human conditions. The term *sarx* (flesh) in John 1:14 refers to the full humanity of Jesus, with all its limitations, mortality, and solidarity with humans, so that the incarnation itself represents the most tangible expression of God's grace, humbling Himself and dwelling among humans (Haryanto et al., 2025). This understanding is reinforced by a biblical theological study of the Gospel of John, which emphasizes that grace in John is inseparable from the relationship and encounter with Christ. In John 1:16-17, grace is understood as a continuous divine gift—grace upon grace—that flows from the fullness of Christ and transcends the framework of Mosaic law, without negating the value of truth within it. Thus, *charis* in the Gospel of John is personal, relational, and transformational: the grace of God experienced through fellowship with the Word made flesh, who continues to work in the life of believers. This emphasizes that John's grace is incarnational, present, experienced, and lived out in the history and daily life of believers (Beasley-Murray, 2020). Therefore, in the Gospel of John, grace (*charis*) not only refers to the gift of salvation, but also to the presence of God who incarnates Himself in Christ, so that this grace can be tangibly experienced in the relationships, life, and spirituality of believers. In New Testament theology, grace (*charis*) is understood primarily as God's active initiative that precedes human response, rather than as a reward for human effort or piety. This perspective is evident in the testimony of the Gospels and the apostolic letters, which affirm that salvation and the restoration of the relationship between God and humans are rooted in God's own free and loving actions. In the Gospel of John, this initiative is concretely realized through the incarnation, showing that God does not wait for humans to come to Him but rather is present first in Christ as the Word made flesh (John 1:14). *Charis*

in the New Testament is dynamic and active, that is, a grace that “moves outward” from God to save, renew, and shape human life, so that grace is not only a theological status, but a divine power working in the history and life of believers (Nanthambwe, 2024). Thus, grace in the New Testament must be understood as God's active and preceding action, calling humans to respond to that grace in faith and transformed life.

3. Theology of the Prologue of John

In the prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18), the term Logos is understood not merely as a cosmic rational principle or an impersonal word, but as the eternal Divine Person equal to God. John explicitly states that the Logos has existed from the beginning, was 'with God,' and 'is God,' a Christological statement affirming the full divinity of the Word before the incarnation. John's use of the term Logos is a theological strategy that combines the background of Jewish thought (God's word as an agent of creation and revelation) with a Hellenistic context, yet transcends it by presenting the Logos as a living, relational Person, actively involved in the history of salvation. Thus, the Logos is not only a medium of divine communication, but God Himself who reveals Himself and relates to humanity, culminating in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Pranoto, 2023). Therefore, the theology of the prologue of John emphasizes that Christian faith is rooted in the confession that Jesus Christ is the living divine Logos, who has existed as God from eternity and now manifests God tangibly to the world.

The key expression *ho logos sarx egeneto* (“The Word became flesh”) in John 1:14 is a very radical theological statement, as it affirms that the divine Logos did not merely 'manifest itself' or 'dwell temporarily' in human form, but truly became flesh (*sarx*), that is, fully assumed human nature. In the context of the Gospel of John, the term *sarx* refers to the frail, limited, and mortal condition of humanity, so the choice of this word emphasizes the tangible reality of the incarnation and rejects any form of docetism. By using the term *sarx*, John intends to emphasize God's solidarity with humans, showing that God does not save from a distance but enters directly into human reality through Jesus Christ. Thus, the incarnation is not merely an abstract theological event, but an act of God's love, humbling Himself and being present in human history, which forms the basis for understanding salvation and God's relationship with His people (Haryanto et al., 2025). Therefore, the phrase *sarx egeneto* underscores that the core of Christian faith lies in the acknowledgment of God truly becoming human to reveal His love and grace tangibly in history. In John 1:14, the phrase *eskēnōsen en hēmin* (“He dwelt among us”) carries profound theological meaning as a statement that God Himself indwells visibly among humans through the person of Jesus Christ. The verb *skēnoō* literally means “to pitch a tent” or “to tabernacle,” which in the Old Testament tradition symbolizes God's presence personally and directly among His people. This term depicts how God is not only present theologically but comes down and dwells among humans as He once dwelled symbolically in the tent/tabernacle, making the incarnation of Christ a manifestation of God's grace and His deep relationship with His

creation. From a theological perspective, *skēnoō* signifies a radical change in the way humans experience God: no longer from afar or only through intermediaries, but God Himself is present directly in human history and life through Jesus Christ, while also serving as the foundation of Christian faith in God's real and transformative presence in the world (Haryanto et al., 2025). Thus, the concept of *skēnoō* affirms that the incarnation is not merely a theological idea, but a concrete expression of God's presence choosing to "dwell" among human life, making God's grace tangibly present in the history of human salvation. In John 1:14 the phrase *plērēs charitos kai alētheias* is often translated as 'full of grace and truth,' and the terms *charis* (grace) and *alētheia* (truth) reflect a profound theological picture of God's relationship with humanity through Christ. Linguistically and historically, *charis* refers to God's undeserved mercy towards humans, while *alētheia* denotes the reality of true truth that comes from God Himself. In the context of the Gospel of John, the mention of grace and truth emphasizes that Jesus does not merely bring one or the other; He combines grace and truth simultaneously as attributes of God's full presence among humanity. Various traditions of reading the Scriptures see this phrase as the fulfillment of the Old Testament theme of *hesed we'emet* (steadfast love and truth) in the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 34:6), which is now realized fully and supremely in Jesus Christ; this means that through the incarnation, God's grace is not separated from His truth, but rather that grace is authentically and faithfully manifested in the history of salvation through the Logos who became human (John 1:14, n.d.). Thus, in the Prologue of John, "grace and truth" are not merely two divine attributes side by side, but form a unity that reflects the way God manifests Himself to declare love and the reality of truth in its fullness through Christ.

4. Amazing Grace in Theological Perspective

In Christian theology, grace is understood not merely as a moral attribute or normative concept, but as an active initiative of God that transcends human effort, achievement, and logic. Grace demonstrates God's free and unexpected action, offering salvation and restoration to humanity even though they are not worthy of it. This is reflected in the narrative of salvation from the Old Testament to the New Testament, where God takes the initiative to save fallen humanity, not through human effort, but through divine action that precedes and surpasses human ability to "reach it." God's grace is an unmerited gift, undeserved by humans, and serves as the foundation for both personal and communal experiences of faith. God first chooses, calls, and restores the unworthy through Christ as the embodiment of that grace itself (Novianti, 2025). Daeli also emphasizes that human salvation begins with God's promise and initiative, which surpass human expectations, showing that grace is not the result of human conditions, but an active act of a sovereign God (Daeli et al., 2022). Thus, the theology of grace places God's initiative at the center of salvation, which consequently implies that Amazing Grace is God's action that transcends rational logic and human effort to fulfill His will of salvation. Therefore, from a theological perspective, God's grace is understood as a divine act that precedes and surpasses human logic, demonstrating that salvation and restoration are purely God's gifts, not the result of human effort or achievement.

From the perspective of the theology of revelation, grace is not only understood as the gift of salvation or the forgiveness of sins, but also as God's action in actively revealing and introducing Himself to humans. The transcendent God takes the initiative to manifest Himself so that limited humans can know Him. The Gospel of John emphasizes that 'No one has ever seen God; but the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known' (John 1:18), so the incarnation becomes the ultimate expression of grace that is revelatory in nature. In this case, grace serves as a bridge between the holy God and limited humans, enabling a relational knowledge of God that was previously impossible. Haryanto's theological study shows that the incarnation of Christ in John 1:14 is an act of God revealing Himself concretely and historically, so that humans not only receive salvation but also gain true knowledge of God through the presence of Jesus (Haryanto et al., 2025). In line with this, Pranoto emphasizes that grace in the Gospel of John is always personal and relational; God does not just 'give something,' but gives Himself so that humans can live in true fellowship with Him (Pranoto, 2023). Thus, Amazing Grace is not only a saving gift, but also a gift that reveals God, unveils His divinity, and invites humans to know and live in an intimate relationship with Him. Therefore, grace is understood as an act of God that not only transcends human logic but also fully opens Himself so that humans can know, experience, and live in fellowship with Him.

In the narrative of Christ's birth as recounted in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, God's grace is present as a concrete divine gift and the pinnacle of the act of salvation, where God Himself takes the greatest initiative in human history by sending His Son into the world. The event of Christmas not only tells of the birth of a child in humble circumstances in Bethlehem, but also represents the fulfillment of God's promise and a tangible manifestation of grace that overcomes humanity's separation from God due to sin. The birth of Christ in this context becomes an extraordinary expression of God's love, because God does not only show His compassion through words or laws, but through the real presence of the Messiah born in a vulnerable human state, an act that surpasses human logic regarding how God 'should' reveal Himself. According to theological studies that emphasize that Christmas is the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation, the birth of Christ shows that God draws near to humanity not based on human effort, but entirely on the initiative of God's grace, making Christmas a revelation of Amazing Grace as a concrete divine act in the history of salvation (Manurung, 2021). Therefore, in the narrative of Christ's birth, God's grace is seen not only as an abstract theological term, but as a real event in which God fulfills His promise and opens Himself to humanity through Christ who was born into the world.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a theological qualitative method, which is a research approach that focuses on exploring the meaning, structure, and theological implications of biblical texts through interpretative and reflective analysis. The purpose of theological research is not to test hypotheses quantitatively, but to interpret theological data, particularly biblical texts, in order to understand the truth of the Christian faith systematically and contextually. Lumintang emphasizes that theological research is a scientific theological inquiry that has its own methodology, where the Bible is treated as the primary normative source examined through an integrated approach of science and faith (Lumintang & Lumintang, 2016). Thus, the theological qualitative approach allows this study to examine the incarnation as Amazing Grace in a deep, reflective, and academically responsible manner.

The main approach in this study is the exegesis of John 1:14, combined with a literature study of systematic and biblical theology. Exegesis is understood as an effort to explore the meaning of a biblical text based on its historical, literary, and grammatical context, with the aim of discovering the original author's intent before applying the text to contemporary contexts. Sitompul and Beyer emphasize that responsible exegesis must start from the text itself, paying attention to language structure, pericope context, as well as the background of the original author and readers (Beyer & Sitompul, 1999). A literature study of systematic and biblical theology is then used to relate the results of the exegesis to a broader doctrinal framework, so that the findings of the text can be understood within the unity of the Christian faith. This approach ensures that the interpretation of John 1:14 is not speculative but rooted in the text and in a theologically accountable tradition.

The analytical steps in this study were carried out gradually and systematically. First, a text observation of John 1:14 was conducted to identify the pericope boundaries, sentence structure, and the literary context of the Prologue of the Gospel of John. Second, a Greek term analysis was performed on key words such as *logos*, *sarx*, *egeneto*, *charis*, and *skēnoō* to understand their lexical and theological meanings in the original language. Third, the results of the exegesis were compiled into a theological synthesis by relating them to the doctrine of the incarnation and grace in Christian theology. Osborne emphasizes that a healthy interpretive process moves in a spiral, from the text, to theological understanding, and then back to the text, until it produces meaning that is faithful to the author's intent and relevant to the context of contemporary readers (Osborne & Gani, 2012). The final stage is drawing theological and practical implications for the spirituality of Christmas and the daily life of Christians. Through these steps of analysis, the research is able to bridge the biblical text, theological reflection, and the practice of faith in a comprehensive and continuous manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Result

1. Exegetical Analysis of John 1:14

The Prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18) is arranged as a structured and progressive theological unit, serving as a thematic introduction to the entire Gospel. In general, scholars agree that this Prologue moves from the pre-existence of the Logos (John 1:1-2), to the work of creation and life (John 1:3-5), John the Baptist's testimony (John 1:6-8), the rejection and acceptance of the Logos (John 1:9-13), up to the climax of the incarnation in John 1:14, which is then confirmed with testimony and theological reflection on grace and truth (John 1:15-18). In this structure, John 1:14 occupies a central position as the point of culmination, because this verse marks the transition from the eternal and cosmic Logos to the Word who is historically and personally present among humans. Haryanto's exegetical study emphasizes that the structure of the Prologue of John is not merely a poetic narrative, but a theological framework intentionally constructed to guide readers in understanding Jesus' identity as God who manifests Himself through the incarnation, so that the entire Gospel must be read in the light of the event of the 'Word becoming flesh' (Haryanto et al., 2025). Thus, the Prologue's structure functions as a Christological and theological foundation that places the incarnation at the center of God's revelation and as the beginning of the narrative of salvation in the Gospel of John. Therefore, the structure of John's Prologue affirms that John 1:14 is the theological center of the Gospel, where the incarnation is understood as the pinnacle of God's revelation to humanity.

The expression "The Word became flesh" (*ho logos sarx egeneto*) in John 1:14 is the most radical and central Christological statement in the Gospel of John, because it declares that the eternal and divine Logos (John 1:1) truly enters human reality. The word *sarx* (flesh) does not merely refer to a physical body, but to the whole human condition in its limitations, fragility, and existence in history. By using the term *sarx*, the author of the Gospel of John emphasizes that the incarnation is not an illusion or metaphorical appearance, but the real presence of God in human existence. The phrase *sarx egeneto* signifies God's seriousness in humbling Himself and identifying with the human condition, without losing His divinity, making the incarnation the basis for understanding grace in a concrete and historical way (Haryanto et al., 2025). In line with this, Pranoto explains that "becoming human" in John 1:14 is not only an ontological event but also an act of salvation, because through the incarnation God reveals Himself, bridges the separation caused by sin, and opens the way for a new relationship between God and humans (Pranoto, 2023). Thus, the meaning of "the Word became human" affirms that Christian salvation is rooted in God's action entering human history and life in a tangible way. Therefore, the statement "the Word became human" places the incarnation at the center of revelation and salvation, while also serving as the foundation for the understanding of Amazing Grace in the Gospel of John.

The expression "full of grace and truth" (*plērēs charitos kai alētheias*) in John 1:14 describes the quality and character of Jesus' presence as the Word made flesh. The term *charis* (grace) refers to God's free and saving gift, while *alētheia*

(truth) points to the true and reliable divine reality. The combination of these two terms reflects continuity with the Old Testament concept *hesed we'emet* (steadfast love and faithfulness of God), which now reaches its fullness in the person of Jesus Christ. This phrase marks a shift from the revelation of God through the law to the personal and relational revelation of God in Christ, where grace and truth are no longer abstract, but are present and experienced in real human life (Haryanto et al., 2025). In line with this, Pranoto points out that 'full of grace and truth' emphasizes the Christological balance of the Gospel of John, that Jesus not only reveals God's saving love but also God's truth that discloses who God truly is, so that Christian faith is rooted in a relationship that is both saving and transformative. Thus, this phrase shows that the incarnation is not merely an event of God's presence, but also the full embodiment of God's grace and truth in human history. Therefore, the expression 'full of grace and truth' affirms that in Christ, God's saving love and God's revealing truth meet perfectly for humanity.

2. Incarnation as the Revelation of Amazing Grace

The incarnation of Christ in John 1:14 reveals Amazing Grace as a grace that is not abstract, but becomes real, personal, and relational in Jesus Christ. God's grace is no longer understood merely as a theological concept or a promise of future salvation, but as the presence of God that can be seen, touched, and experienced in human history. Haryanto emphasizes that the incarnation is the pinnacle of God's revelation, where grace is manifested through God's actions present concretely amidst the fragile and sinful reality of humanity, so that humans can know God not only conceptually, but existentially and relationally (Haryanto et al., 2025).

At the same time, the incarnation also expresses the radical humility of God, a transcendent God who willingly limits Himself, takes on human form, and enters human history to save and restore His creation. Pranoto points out that God's willingness to "become flesh" is an expression of grace that surpasses human logic, because God does not wait for humans to rise to Him, but instead He descends and is present in the historical reality of humanity (Pranoto, 2023). Thus, the incarnation reveals Amazing Grace as God's action of drawing near, humbling Himself, and taking the initiative to establish a real salvific relationship with humanity. Therefore, the incarnation of Christ discloses Amazing Grace as a personal and historical grace, God humbling Himself and being present in history so that humans can experience salvation and true knowledge of Him.

3. Incarnation as the Basis of Salvation

The incarnation of Christ through His birth marks the concrete beginning of God's work of salvation in human history, not merely a symbolic prelude to the cross. From the perspective of the Gospels, the birth of Jesus represents God's entry into the sinful and limited condition of humanity, so the entire life of Jesus, from birth, ministry, suffering, to resurrection, must be understood as a unified work of salvation. The incarnation in John 1:14 is the soteriological foundation of the Gospel of John, because salvation does not begin solely with the death of Jesus, but with God's presence united with humanity from the very beginning

(Haryanto et al., 2025). Thus, Christmas is not only a celebration of the birth, but a celebration of the beginning of God's work of salvation that touches all aspects of human life. Therefore, the birth of Christ should be understood as the tangible beginning of God's comprehensive and ongoing work of salvation in human history.

Theologically, the incarnation cannot be separated from the purpose of redemption and the restoration of creation, because God became human so that humanity could be redeemed and restored to a right relationship with God. The incarnation paves the way for the cross, and the cross leads to the resurrection as a sign of the restoration of full life. Pranoto explains that within the framework of the Gospel of John, the incarnation is the initial step in the series of God's saving works, where the presence of Christ in the world makes possible the redemption of sins and the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity (Pranoto, 2023). In line with this, Lumintang emphasizes that Christian salvation is integral, encompassing liberation from sin, the restoration of human dignity, and the restoration of the relationship with God, all of which are rooted in God's action in the incarnation and the redemption of Christ (Lumintang & Lumintang, 2016). Thus, incarnation, redemption, and restoration constitute a unified work of God's grace that saves. Therefore, the incarnation of Christ becomes the foundation of complete salvation, because through Him God redeems and restores humanity entirely.

Discussion

1. Integration of Findings with Theological Literature

The findings of this study, which affirm the incarnation as a revelation of Amazing Grace through John 1:14, indicate a strong continuity with both classical and contemporary theological thought within the Christian tradition. Classically, the theology of the incarnation has always been understood as the center of God's revelation and salvation, where the transcendent God deems it fitting to draw near to humanity through Christ. Within this framework, the incarnation is understood not merely as a historical event, but as an act of God's grace that determines the entire narrative of salvation. These findings align with the assertions of contemporary systematic theology, which states that the incarnation is the most concrete form of God's active and relational grace. God not only saves humanity, but also reveals Himself and establishes a real relationship with His creation. McGrath emphasizes that in the incarnation, God's grace becomes "visible and accessible" in the person of Jesus Christ, so the doctrine of the incarnation cannot be separated from understanding grace and salvation (McGrath, 2016).

In the context of Indonesian theology, this finding also intersects with the studies of Pranoto and Haryanto, who emphasize that John 1:14 serves as the Christological and soteriological foundation of the Gospel of John, where the incarnation is understood as God's initiative to save and transform human life both historically and existentially (Haryanto et al., 2025; Pranoto, 2023). Thus, this research does not stand apart from existing theological traditions but rather integrates classical and contemporary perspectives to reaffirm the incarnation as the center of Amazing Grace in the Christian faith. Therefore, the integration of

research findings with theological literature demonstrates that understanding the incarnation as Amazing Grace has a strong basis in both classical and contemporary Christian theological traditions and is relevant for contemporary reflections on faith.

2. Theological Implications for the Church

Understanding the incarnation as Amazing Grace carries significant theological implications for the church, particularly in restoring the meaning of Christmas, which is often reduced to a cultural celebration, an annual ritual, or merely a sentimental symbol. Christmas, in the light of John 1:14, should be understood as a celebration of God's active grace, God who reveals Himself, humbles Himself, and is present in human history for the sake of salvation. When the church places the incarnation at the center of Christmas reflection, the focus of the celebration shifts from mere ceremony to a deep encounter of faith with the incarnate God. The church is called to reinterpret Christian faith celebrations so that they remain grounded in their theological foundation, allowing Christmas to once again become a moment of faith renewal and an experience of God's grace in the lives of the people (J. S. Aritonang, 2023). Thus, the restoration of the meaning of Christmas is not just a matter of correct liturgy, but about how the church guides the faithful to experience Christmas as a living and transformative theological event. Therefore, the church has a theological responsibility to restore Christmas as a celebration of God's saving grace that truly changes the lives of the faithful.

In addition to restoring the meaning of Christmas, the incarnation as Amazing Grace also calls the church to place the incarnation at the center of its message and ministry throughout the year, not just during the Christmas season. The incarnation asserts that God is present and at work within human reality, so the church's proclamation should be contextual, grounded, and touch upon the concrete struggles of the people. The church is called to present the Gospel message in an incarnational way, a message conveyed not only through words but also through presence, service, and solidarity with the world. Pranoto emphasizes that John's Christology guides the church to see the incarnation as the foundation of Gospel proclamation, where God's grace and truth are manifested in relationships and tangible actions, not just in doctrine (Pranoto, 2023). Thus, incarnation as the core message of the church encourages the church to become a community that brings Christ into the real life of the social, cultural, and spiritual spheres of the people. By placing incarnation at the center of its message, the church is called to be an extension of Christ's presence, manifesting God's grace tangibly in the world.

3. Christmas Every Day: Spiritual Implications (Luke 2:11)

The angel's statement in Luke 2:11, "Today a Savior has been born to you," affirms that the event of Christmas is not merely a historical memory or an annual celebration, but a reality of salvation that is present and continually effective in the life of believers. The word "today" emphasizes the immediacy of God's work touching human existence at all times, so that Christmas is understood as an ongoing experience of faith. In the light of the theology of the incarnation, the

birth of Christ becomes the foundation for a spirituality that lives from the presence of God continuously accompanying His people. Healthy Christian spirituality does not stop at a particular ritual or liturgical moment, but is realized in the awareness of God's active presence every day (J. S. Aritonang, 2023). Thus, Christmas as a reality of life leads believers to experience salvation not as a seasonal event, but as the foundation of identity and daily faith life. Therefore, Christmas should be understood as a spiritual reality that is continually lived, not merely as an annual celebration that passes without transforming life.

If Christ was truly born "for us" (Luke 2:11), then His presence requires a tangible response in the believer's life through attitudes, character, and daily actions. The incarnation as Amazing Grace does not stop at the confession of faith but continues into the ethical and spiritual call to bring Christ into social relationships, work, and ministry. From a New Testament perspective, faith in Christ is always performative; living faith must be evident in acts of love, obedience, and the testimony of life. In the Gospel of John, the recognition of the incarnate Christ always implies life transformation, so believers are called to become extensions of Christ's presence in the world through practiced grace and truth (Pranoto, 2023). Thus, a "daily Christmas" means allowing Christ, born for humanity, to continually be present and work through the lives of believers as witnesses of God's grace. By living out the presence of Christ in daily actions, believers make Christmas a faith experience that continues throughout all aspects of life.

4. Daily Reflection on the Word as a Response to the Incarnation

The incarnation of Christ as Amazing Grace demands a spiritual response that goes beyond cognitive reading of the Word toward the experience of the Word in daily life. If the Word has 'become flesh' (John 1:14), then the Word does not stop as a text to be read or studied, but as a living reality that shapes the way believers think, behave, and act. Within the framework of incarnational theology, daily reflection on the Word serves as the primary means through which people encounter God, who reveals Himself and guides their lives in concrete ways. The incarnation places the Word in the realm of real life, so that knowing the incarnate Christ must be manifested in living relationships and daily obedience, not merely in mastering doctrine or theological knowledge (Haryanto et al., 2025). Thus, daily reflection on the Word becomes a form of the faithful's participation in the dynamics of the incarnation, the Word that continues to be present and active in their lives. Therefore, daily reflection on the Word is a faithful response of faith to the incarnation, where the Word of God continues to be lived out and realized in the daily life of believers.

Furthermore, true reflection on the Word will produce a fruitful life, that is, believers who become doers of the Word as a manifestation of God's grace working and transforming life. From the perspective of the Gospel of John, grace (charis) not only saves but also transforms, so faith in the incarnate Christ is always accompanied by tangible changes in life. Grace and truth in Christ guide believers to live in obedience and witness, where ethical and spiritual actions are

not merely human effort, but the fruit of God's grace active within the believer (Pranoto, 2023). Thus, being a doer of the Word is not a legalistic requirement, but a response of gratitude for the Amazing Grace received, which enables believers to live according to God's will.

5. Believers as the “Epistle of Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:3)

Paul describes believers as a 'letter of Christ' that can be read by everyone, a metaphor that emphasizes that Christian identity is not primarily determined by verbal confession, but by a life that concretely presents the Gospel (2 Cor. 3:3). In the light of the incarnation, this identity originates from God's grace, which takes concrete form in Christ and is then continued in the lives of His people. Nanthambwe emphasizes that true grace is always embodied, meaning it is present and recognized through life practices that reflect Christ's character in the world. Thus, Christian identity is a representative identity, a life that becomes a medium for the presence of the Gospel to others (Nanthambwe, 2024). Therefore, being a believer means being a living representation of the Gospel that manifests God's grace in a tangible way.

Paul also emphasizes that the “epistles of Christ” are not written with ink, but by the Spirit of God living in the hearts of humans (2 Cor. 3:3). This shows that Christian witness originates from the work of the Holy Spirit, which transforms the inner being and enables believers to live according to God's will. Nanthambwe sees this work of the Spirit as a dynamic of grace that operates from the inside out, so that the life of a believer becomes a living text that is “readable” by the world through attitudes, relationships, and daily actions. Christian witness, therefore, is not an external strategy, but the fruit of grace that transforms the heart and shapes life (Nanthambwe, 2024). As such, the life of a believer becomes an open testimony of the work of the Spirit and God's active grace.

The relationship between the incarnation of Christ and the life of believers reaches its fullness when the values of Christ—love, humility, truth, and sacrifice—are “incarnated” in the life of the people. If Christ is the Word made flesh, then the church is called to be a community where the values of the Word become tangible in its historical and social context. Nanthambwe emphasizes that realized grace is always participatory: God incarnates in Christ, and then the people are invited to take part in manifesting the values of Christ in the world. In this way, the incarnation of Christ continues ethically and spiritually through the life of believers (Nanthambwe, 2024). Therefore, the incarnation of Christ finds its continuation when the values of Christ are lived out and manifested in the life of the people as Christ's message for the world.

6. Theological Contribution of the Article (Novelty)

This article makes a theological contribution by asserting that the incarnation of Christ is the most concrete expression of Amazing Grace, because in the event of the 'Word becoming flesh,' God's grace is not only expressed conceptually but is realized historically and personally for humanity (John 1:14). Thus, grace does not stop at a soteriological status but invites ongoing transformation of life, shaping the identity, character, and practice of faith of

believers in daily life. The novelty of this article lies in emphasizing that Christmas is not merely an annual liturgical celebration, but a continuous rhythm of spiritual life, an incarnational spirituality in which the presence of Christ is experienced and actualized in the reality of everyday life. Furthermore, this article develops the ethical-theological implications that believers are called to be 'letters of Christ' (2 Cor. 3:3), that is, living representations of the Gospel that manifest the values of incarnation, love, truth, and humility, as a continuation of God's work of grace in the world. With this synthesis, the article not only enriches theological reflection on incarnation and grace but also offers an integrative framework between doctrine, spirituality, and contemporary church praxis (Haryanto et al., 2025; Nanthambwe, 2024). Thus, the novelty of this article lies in interpreting the incarnation as living Amazing Grace, shaping daily Christmas spirituality, and calling the church to be an incarnational witness in the world.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on exegetical studies and theological reflection on John 1:14, this article concludes that the incarnation is an extraordinary act of God's grace (Amazing Grace), in which God actively reveals Himself by entering into human reality. The event of the "Word becoming flesh" affirms that God's love and truth are not only conveyed as normative teachings but are made present in a concrete, personal, and historical manner in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christmas cannot be reduced to merely an annual liturgical celebration; rather, it is a spiritual call to live in God's grace every day, embodying the presence of Christ in relationships, attitudes, and concrete actions. The ultimate implication is that believers are called to bear witness to the life of Christ in the world, as a "letter of Christ" radiating the values of the incarnation through lives transformed by grace, so that the Gospel can be read and experienced by others in everyday contexts.

Based on the findings and theological reflections in this article, several recommendations can be proposed. First, for the church, Christmas celebrations need to be continually refocused on their theological core, namely the incarnation as an act of Amazing Grace, so that teaching, liturgy, and worship practices do not get caught up in symbolic or sentimental routines, but help the congregation experience the real presence of Christ. Second, for individual believers, daily reflection on the Word becomes an essential spiritual response to God's grace, in which the Word is not only read but lived out as the foundation for character formation and the testimony of faith in everyday life. Third, for the community of theological academics, this article encourages the expansion of studies on the incarnation in dialogue with the modern context, such as digital culture, spiritual crises, and contemporary church practices, so that the doctrine of the incarnation does not stop at dogmatic formulations, but remains relevant and transformative for the church and society today.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This article has a major limitation because it focuses the study on a single key verse, namely John 1:14, and uses a theological-exegetical and reflective approach, thus not broadly exploring the narrative, intertextual, or contextual dimensions of the entire Gospel of John. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop the study of the incarnation through narrative and intertextual approaches that connect John 1:14 with the overall narrative of the Gospel and other New Testament testimonies, as well as pastoral and ethical approaches that examine the implications of the incarnation for congregational formation, church praxis, and the social responsibility of Christians in a modern context.

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