When we look at the Bible, we find that the noun *evangelism* does not occur in the Bible and the word *evangelist* is used only three times in the New Testament. Phillip is referred to as an evangelist (Acts 21:8), Timothy is exhorted to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5), and we are told that some are called to be evangelists (Ephesians 4:11). Despite this, the *concept* of evangelism is strongly represented in the New Testament.

The Greek word-groups that are used for evangelism are *euangelizo* (to share good news), *keryso* (to preach), and *martyreo* (to bear witness). The proclamation of Jesus’ birth is one of the first examples of evangelism recorded in the New Testament as the angelic chorus bear witness to the good news: “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

**Contextualized Evangelism**

The New Testament itself offers an excellent example of contextualized evangelism in the character of the four Gospels, which are in effect four contextualizations of one story:

Each of the four Gospels reflects the cultural orientation of its author and is clearly addressed to a particular audience. Matthew’s Jewish orientation is reflected in his emphasis on messianic prophecy, kingship, the divine titles of Jesus, and the Aramaisms which characterize his Jewish-Greek language. Luke, on the other hand, reflects a distinctly Hellenistic mind-set….The comprehensive range of Luke's Gospel with its emphasis on the universal implications of the gospel gives it a unique appeal.

In the early Church, evangelism was viewed in the

…narrow sense of the verbal proclamation of the good news of salvation with a view of leading people to a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. But it touches on other aspects of “mission,” which also includes the non-verbal aspects of Christian witness to non-Christians…

Robert Coleman describes how Jesus viewed his role as an evangelist:

Jesus interpreted his mission as fulfilment of this promise (Luke 4:18-19). He saw himself as an evangelist, announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God. This message was to be proclaimed in the context of demonstrated compassion for the bruised and forgotten people of the world.

As a result, Coleman cautions against truncated views of evangelism as either just the verbal declaration of the gospel or just caring for people and rectifying injustices in the society. Both are necessary elements of evangelism: “If Jesus had not born the sorrows of people and performed deeds of mercy among them, we might question his concern. On the other hand, if he had not articulated the gospel, we would not have known why he came, nor how we could be saved.”

The model of Jesus suggests that authentic evangelism that changes and transforms lives requires more than talking about Four Spiritual Laws or passing out gospel tracts. It is a message that needs
to be fleshed out in word, deed, and sign in ways that are relevant and meaningful for hearers in their own cultural context.

As the New Testament progresses from the Gospels to the Book of Acts, we see that the task of evangelism passes on from the disciples with their Jewish origin to the wider Church. The Church is vividly portrayed as the missionary agent of God’s redemptive plan of salvation. Jesus commanded the Church to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation (Mark 16:15).

The Holy Spirit came to empower the community of believers so that they could be powerful witnesses both locally and globally (Acts 1:8). This has implications for cross-cultural evangelism. The purpose of the Body of Christ, the community of active disciples, is to present Jesus Christ in the world as tangible, real, visible, and effective. For us to do this in ways that are tangible and effective implies that we will proclaim a contextualized gospel.

**Incarnational Life for Contextualized Evangelism**

How was Jesus able to effectively practice contextualized evangelism? What does the New Testament say is the essential key to contextualized evangelism? It distinctly presents incarnational life as the cornerstone and prerequisite of successful contextualized evangelism. The absence of incarnational life can lead to “transplanting evangelism” from one place to another place, an imperialistic approach.

How would Jesus and the evangelists in the New Testament react to a missionary who cannot speak the local language and is not inclined to take time to stop and study it? Would Jesus and Paul use interpreters for their evangelism? Never.

Matthew’s Gospel distinctly portrays Jesus as the disciple-making missionary. In his incarnation, Jesus was born to inaugurate the Kingdom of God through discipling his people. He was a local Galilean who committed his life to discipleship and to exhibiting the model of how to evangelize and disciple people groups. His last and most heart-gripping command was to make disciples, not just converts who pray a prayer after raising their hands to accept Christ. A biblical evangelism in the New Testament never focuses on making converts, only on making disciples.

In John’s Gospel, the greatest mission story was revealed when God decided to tent (dwell) among his people. The New Testament vividly depicts that the eternal Word of God was enfleshed in Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:14) for thirty years, during which time he immersed himself in a local cultural context prior to launching his three years of public ministry.

In his incarnation, Jesus exegeted the Father to us. He was thoroughly immersed in his Jewish culture; he participated in its celebrations and traditions; he spoke Aramaic with a Galilean accent; he had distinctive physical features and personality traits. His thirty years of incarnational life enabled him to engage in his three years of contextualized evangelism.

The mission of God was achieved by the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus, in turn, said to his disciples and to us, "As the Father has sent me into the world, so send I you into the world" (John 20:21). The incarnation is the foundation of his global vision for every people group being evangelized and disciplined through the Church incarnating among the people groups. The early Church focused on
effectively incarnating among people both locally and cross-culturally for contextualized evangelism, not hiding out or separated from the world by towering walls.

**Colorful Evangelism in Colorful Contexts**

Jesus was a colorful evangelist who expected the Church to be creative in implementing colorful evangelistic methods with suitable contextualization to evangelize colorful people in colorful missional contexts. The New Testament portrays at least twelve types of evangelism the Church in the twenty-first century can learn.

2. Power Evangelism (Acts 2:22; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6; 19:11; and 3)
3. People Evangelism (Acts 2:46; Romans 16:3-5)
4. Proclamation Evangelism (Acts 2; 13:16-41; Romans 10:17)
5. Provision Evangelism (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9)
6. Perseverance Evangelism—persecution is a door of evangelism (Acts 7:58; 16:24)
7. Pen Evangelism—Luke used his pen to explain the gospel (Luke 1:3)
8. Presence Evangelism (Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 3:3; 5:20)
9. Personal Testimony Evangelism (Acts 22; 26)
10. Praise and Worship Evangelism (Acts 2; 16)
12. Process Evangelism (John 3; 19)

**Conclusion**

The New Testament depicts that the success of evangelism always depends upon the divine factor of God’s divine sovereignty. Jesus was the central focus in evangelism and mission of the early Church. With all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), Jesus laid out the incarnational model for the Church to imitate for effective contextualized evangelism.

As the Church in the twenty-first century effectively incarnates among people, it can formulate colorful contextualized evangelism to reach the world. Then, the Lord will add new disciples to his Church day by day (Acts 2:47).

**Endnotes**


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