

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^{ed} it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Tell me, what does the word Christmas mean for you? I think that for a lot of people, Christmas means at time for presents and parties, cookies and decorations, a time to spend with family, maybe watching a football game. But I think you realize that Christmas means much more than that. Christmas is not so much about the gifts laid under the tree as it is about the Gift laid in the manger. Christmas is not so much about what we get to do at this time of year as it is about what God has already done for us some two thousand years ago.

Christmas is, at its core, is all about an historical event. At a certain place, at a certain time, something happened. The gospel writer Luke records those events in great detail. He tells us that when Quirinius was governor of Syria, a Jewish couple by the name of Mary and Joseph traveled to a town called Bethlehem, where they Mary gave birth to a son and laid him in a manger. You've got the angels and the shepherds there. And St. Luke records all those things and your very familiar with that account. We read those words in our Christmas Eve services last night. The children recited those words at the children's service.

But today we're not going to read Luke's account of Jesus' birth. We're not going to read Matthew's account of Jesus' birth. Instead, we're going to look at John's account of the savior's birth. I'll tell you that John takes a very different approach to what went on at Christmas. While Luke and Matthew focus on the details of the Christmas story, you might say that John focuses on the meaning of the Christmas story. John tells us what's really going on there in that stable.

It reminds me of watching a soccer game for the first time. A few years ago, I went to watch my nephew play in a soccer tournament over at the USA sports complex. Mind you, I've never played soccer in my life. I don't know the first thing about soccer. On that day, I saw all the action, but I didn't understand what it meant until my brother, who was an experienced soccer parent, explained it to me. "Oh, that's what that red card means. Oh, that's what that player was trying to do. Now I understand what's really going on here."

Well, in a sense, that's what John's gospel is. It isn't all the details of what happened on the night of Jesus' birth. Rather it's the analysis of what happened. It's the Spirit-inspired

commentary on Jesus' birth. How does St. John described what happened at the moment of Jesus' birth. He simply says, *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*. On this Christmas morning, let's take a deeper dive into what are arguably the most profound four words in all of Scripture, namely,

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Now, for us to grasp what's really going on at Christmas, we can't start in Bethlehem with the birth of Jesus. We can't even start up in Nazareth with the angel announcing to the Virgin Mary that the Holy Spirit would conceive a child in her. No, to understand what's really going on at Christmas, we need to go all the way back to the beginning. I mean to the beginning of time. That's where John begins his gospel when he writes, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*.

Now, someone might ask, what does John mean by the "Word"? Well, actually, John answers that question a little later when he writes, *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)* In other words, the Word, or in the Greek, the Logos, is actually another name for the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. And notice what John says about the Word. *The Word was with God*. In other words, the Son was alongside the Father. They were two distinct persons. And yet, not only was the Word with God, *the Word was God*. The Son of God was, and still is, 100% divine. That means that the Son of God is equal to the Father in every way, because they are both God.

My friends, do you realize how profound those words are? I find it ironic that even though John has some of the simplest Greek in the whole New Testament, (Every WELS pastor very likely started his journey into the original languages of the Bible by translating the Book of John.) still, even though the words are simple, the meaning behind those words is really more than we can comprehend. John is here describing the mystery of the Trinity, the fact that the Father and the Son are distinct persons and yet both are God.

But now notice, what John says about the Word, that is, the eternal Son of God, who is called the Word because he is the one who communicates to us what God is really like. John says that that Word...*became flesh and it made his dwelling among us*. With those words John is describing two different, but related, things. When he says that the Word became flesh, he's referring to the Incarnation, that is, the fact that the Son of God, who is 100% divine, took on a second nature. He became a human being, all the while remaining 100% divine. Again, this is something that the human mind cannot fathom—how God can become man, and still be God.

I mean, think about it. The almighty Creator became a helpless baby—and still was the Creator. The One who could not die, became one who could be killed, and yet remained immortal. The One who is eternal, suddenly had a birthday—even though he's been living forever. The more you think about it, the more miraculous it becomes.

The question is, why? Why did God become the God-man? Why did God take on a human nature? The answer? So he could be our perfect substitute. As true God, Jesus could keep all the commands of God. He could fulfill all the requirements that God makes of every human being. He could live his whole life without sinning once. And as true man, Jesus could suffer the penalty that our sins demand, namely, eternal separation from God. Jesus endured that penalty by his death on the cross. Jesus had to be true God and true Man so that he could live and die in our place. That's why the Word became flesh.

But notice that John goes on to say that (the Word) *made his dwelling among us*. With those words, John is not referring to God becoming man, but he's rather referring to God living

as man here on earth for a time. Those are technically two different things. The Greek word there literally means Jesus “pitched his tent among us” or he “tabernacled among us.” It reminds us of what God had the Children of Israel to do in the wilderness. He had them construct a very ornate tent. (They called it a Tabernacle.) And when the Tabernacle was completed, the fiery glory of God entered it, and from then on, the Tabernacle represented the presence of God among his people. In a very real sense, God had “made his dwelling among” the people.

So now, think of the parallel with Jesus. Jesus, who is the all glorious Son of God, took on flesh and made his dwelling among God’s people. He came and lived here on earth for a time. He, in effect, pitched his tent among us for a while. And as John says, *we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son*. On the one hand, that’s certainly a reference to the fact that John and two of the other disciples were eyewitnesses of the glory that Jesus displayed on the Mount of Transfiguration, when his face and clothes were as bright as the sun. But John is also referring to the fact that God’s true glory is seen in the love that Jesus has for us, the sacrifice he’s made for us, and the eternal salvation he’s won for us—that’s what makes God so glorious in our eyes.

The question is, “So what? So what does all that mean for our lives today? What impact does the fact that the Word was made flesh have on our lives today? Well, let me tell you. First, it means that, contrary to popular opinion (in fact, contrary to what we ourselves might sometimes be tempted to think), God is not a million miles away. He’s not some kind of distant celestial being, who is totally disconnected from our world, disconnected from our lives. You know, “out there somewhere.” No, the fact that the Word became flesh means that God became one of us, he stepped into our world, just so that he could know and experience what we are going through on a daily basis.

For example, does Jesus know the pain of losing a loved one? Absolutely. Jesus wept at the grave of his good friend Lazarus. Does Jesus know what it’s like to have a good friend stab you in the back, or tell lies about you or act like they don’t know you? Absolutely. These were the things that Jesus’ own disciples did to him. Does Jesus know what it’s like to be absolutely tormented by the temptations of Satan? Absolutely. And not just for 40 days in the wilderness, but for really every day of his life. Does Jesus know what it’s like to be unjustly accused, unfairly punished, mistreated for doing the right thing? Absolutely. There is nothing that you or I could ever go through that Jesus hasn’t experienced as well. Jesus took on flesh so that he could know what you’re going through. But even more important, he remained God so that he could do something about it. Jesus took on flesh and stepped into your world, so he could know what you’re going through, and more importantly, so he could do something about it.

Isn’t that right? When God saw how badly sin had messed up our lives and our world, he didn’t send some lackey to try to fix it. No, he considered this rescue mission so critical to the future of our world and our lives, that he had to do it himself. God came to earth to do what only God can do. And that is, to reconcile a world full of sinners to himself through his blood, to set people free from the guilt and punishment of their sins forever, and give believers a life with God that never ends. All this God did by having the Word become flesh and live for a while among us.

In fact, do you know what that reminds me of? That picture of God coming to us in a bodily form to reconcile us to himself? It reminds me of Holy Communion. I mean, think about it. Just as surely as God once came down in bodily form for people to see and touch, so God comes to us today, in his body and blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine, for us to see and touch, to assure us that God has reconciled us to himself, he’s forgiven our sins and restored

us as children of our heavenly Father.

I know that sometimes when people see that we're celebrating communion on Christmas, they maybe think, "Communion on Christmas? Do those two things really go together?" Yes, they do. In my mind, there is nothing quite like celebrating communion on Christmas. Both of them are about how much God loved sinners like us, how we stepped into our world, how he gave himself for us to make us right in God's eyes. If you think about it, both Christmas and communion are about the body of Christ. Whether that body is laid in a manger, or it's laid on your lips, the message is exactly the same: God loves you. He forgives. And now he gives you, his peace. Yes, peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. Reconciled by the Word who became flesh, for you and me. Merry Christmas, my friends! Amen.