

THE WORD BECAME FLESH!

Christmas Morning 2011

John 1:1-14



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 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.

The Word became flesh. That's Christmas in a nutshell. God and man have come together in one Person. The Infinite has become the finite. The Creator is one with the creature. The Eternal breaks into time. The fullness of the Deity dwells bodily form among us. It is almost too much for the mind to bear. How can the Word who fills all things, who made all things, who is before all things, limit Himself in this way, becoming bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, yet still remain God? We must let reason become second to faith in this great mystery and trust in God's Word alone.

We do try though. Our old Adam would like reason have the upper hand over God's Word. But the Word does become Flesh and yet remains the eternal Word, even in Jesus takes up residence in humanity. The infinite, eternal Word remains the infinite, eternal Word even as He takes up residence in the finite. But the door gets opened in that little phrase trying to separate Christ's humanity from His divinity, or at the very least having something more than this baby lying in a manger. The old Adam always wants "something more" than what God is giving.

Luther was fond of saying things like, "*I look for no other God than the one lying in the crib, nursing at the breast of His mother, and hanging dead on a cross.*" John would say, "That's right, Dr. Luther. No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known." Do you want to see God? Do you want to behold the glory of God? Do you want to see the true grace of God? Don't go looking into space or groping in your heart to find God. Go to the baby in the manger, as the shepherds did. Go to the young child in the house, as the wise men did. Go to man on the cross. And since we can't literally do any of those, go the Word and the Sacrament where the Son of God is mangered for us so that we might be able to perceive and receive Him.

The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us. This is the essential core of Christmas: the incarnation of God. I've noticed something over the last several years as a pastor and preacher. Perhaps you've noticed it too. Cultural Christmas seems to be on the wane. Political correctness, atheism, apathy, and the ACLU have all had their way with cultural Christmas. I did a little quick shopping the other day. No, it wasn't Christmas shopping, but auto parts shopping to get the right parts to fix my car. Yes, the store had a Christmas tree near the front door, and one of the salesmen was dressed in a Santa suit, but that was the extent of it. The gal behind the parts counter told me to "Have a great holiday," I'm not sure which holiday of she referred to, but the phrase was sure not to offend. I smiled and said, "You too." There seems to be fewer light displays on our street. We used to be one of the few holdouts. Perhaps we've started a trend. Or maybe the neighbors are doing their part to conserve energy. Part of it may be the influx of other cultures and their customs.

I suspect that some of our holiday weariness may be the accumulated heaviness of bad news that seems to permeate our days. The wars in the Middle East, the endless hand-wringing over our dying planet, as if that should come be some sort of surprise. The violence of our youth, many raised without fathers, hardened to suffering by violent movies and mindless video games. The brokenness of our families, decimated by divorce and adultery. The uncertainty of our economy, the high cost of homes, gas and food, the uncertainty of the future. I see that in many of our kids today who don't look to the future with hope but wander aimlessly in the present moment, hence all these protest.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to sustain much Christmas joy for one day, let alone twelve days, especially if you don't believe anything. All the Christmas trees and poinsettias and lights and chestnuts roasting on an open fire won't do a thing to fill an empty heart or broken and contrite spirit. There's no present under the Christmas tree that will quiet a restless conscience or atone for a single sin. There are no Christmas lights that can bring light to a darkened soul save this one, the Light that shines from Bethlehem's crib and Calvary's cross to you in the Word of your Baptism, in the Word of forgiveness, in the Body and Blood born of Mary and there for you at the altar in the holy Supper of the Lord.

Were we to take away the glowing candles, the pretty poinsettias, the Christmas tree and the lights, the banners and all the other stuff, we would still have the essence of Christmas in the Word of Jesus in the water of baptism and in His Body and Blood. You can take away all the tinsel and mistletoe and family parties and endless expectations and have nothing more than two or three poor, miserable sinners huddled around the Word of Christ, and you will have everything of Christmas. The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us. Nothing in this world can take that away from you.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I enjoy the adornments. I love the way our church looks at Christmastime. It's very warm and inviting. Someone commented on that last night, how beautiful everything was bathed in candlelight. Our homes are typically decorated too with all sorts of Christmas stuff. I love Christmas trees with their eclectic ornaments and the nicely wrapped gifts which will eventually get opened. I like all that stuff, and it would be sad if those Christmastime warm feelings weren't there. Yes, even I get the warm feelings on occasion. But I've come to recognize something. Those warm feelings aren't about Jesus and about my salvation. Those feelings aren't necessarily "spiritual" or "religious." They're nostalgic, a longing for the comforts of home and hearth and family. Those things, while important to us, are not the core of the feast of Christmas, but only the outer shell.

I've seen to this poem type prayer every year at Christmas. It's a delightful piece written by John Shea called "Sharon's Christmas Prayer." It's about Christmas through the eyes of a five year old child, who may be in the best position to capture the wonder of the Word become Flesh. It goes like this:

She was five, and
sure of the facts,
and recited them
with solemn solemnity,
convinced every word
was revelation.
She said
they were so poor
they had only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
to eat
and they went a long way from home
without getting lost. The lady rode
a donkey, the man walked, and the baby
was inside the lady.
They had to stay in a stable

with an ox and an ass (hee-hee)
but the Three Rich Men found them
because a star lited the roof.
Shepherds came and you could
pet the sheep but not feed them.
Then the baby was borned.
And do you know who he was?
Her quarter eyes inflated
to silver dollars.
The baby was God.
And she jumped in the air,
whirled round, dove into the sofa,
and buried her head under the cushion
which is the only proper response
to the Good News of the Incarnation..

(“Sharon’s Christmas Prayer” by John Shea ©1977, 1992 The Hour of the Unexpected, Allen, TX:
Thomas More Publishing.)

She doesn’t quite get her facts straight, but she has the heart of it. “The Baby was God!” And if you lose everything else, you have not lost this: The Baby was God. The man named Jesus is God in the flesh who has come to save you.

Ponder this in your hearts today as you enjoy the first of these twelve days of Christmas. The Word became Flesh and dwells with you, so that you might dwell with God. The Word became Flesh so that your flesh might rise from the dead to see God. The Word became Flesh to rescue your flesh from sin, death, and hell. The Word became Flesh so that in your flesh you might know the One who is your Light, your Life, and your salvation.

The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us. Thanks be to God!

We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. Thanks be to God!

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made Himself known. Thanks be to God! For our Lord Jesus Christ has made Himself known, through His Holy Word, through the cleansing waters of baptism and though His own body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. For through God made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, Thanks be to God, in Jesus name, Amen and Amen.