

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (ESV)

In the name of him who became a little child, that we might become the children of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. It means, of course, that Jesus, the eternal Word of God, came down to earth and took on human form. He became a real flesh and blood person like you and me. It means that he was born an infant of a virgin, in a place meant for the housing of cattle, and not babies. It means that he nursed at his mother's breast and grew up as our children do. It means he took his first steps and spoke his first word. It means that he stretched into teenage years and advanced into manhood. It means that he got broken nails and calluses, and that he lived among men up to and on through his crucifixion on Calvary, until his ascension into heaven.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and I guess we take that pretty much for granted every Christmas season. He dwelt among us. But have you ever thought what might have happened if he had disappeared soon after he was born-- if he had returned to heaven with the choirs of holy angels that first Christmas night? Or if the Word made flesh had withdrawn from the world of the common man, and lived the life of a hermit, in complete isolation from the life and world of ordinary human beings. Then, of course, not much would have happened. To say the least, we would not have a Savior with whom we could identify and who has identified with us--one who knew all that sin and time and death could do to us.

But thanks be to God, that didn't happen. The Word dwelt among us. He became flesh and dwelt among men, and the men with whom he dwelt were just like us--altogether human-- altogether sinfully human. The Word ate with them and drank with them and prayed with them and worked with them and spoke with them. He saw them casting out their nets to catch fish. He saw them sowing seeds, pruning vines, and herding flocks. He saw them

buying and selling, getting married, and having fun. He saw them being children and playing games. He noted their simple joys, and he noticed their heartbreaking sorrows. He watched the children play "wedding" and "funeral" in the streets. He knew about the great pain of a woman about to have a child, and the joy that filled her heart because a child was born into the world. He met and healed people who were suffering from disgusting and revolting diseases. He talked with the social outcasts of society, people no one called "friend," people who were never ever to enjoy the kind of fellowship we have. He touched the blue and icy hands of a corpse, and he comforted mourners. He cuddled with little children, and he wept.

And even more, the Word who became flesh never remained detached or apart from any of the experiences of the people among whom he dwelt. He participated in all the affairs of men, but without sin. He spent his life helping people, blessing children, soothing the hearts of the bereaved, and revealing to people the glories of the kingdom of God. He taught men how to pray and what to pray for. He was incisive and almost ruthless with the hypocrites and the self-righteous. He broke into tears at the thoughts that came with the death of his friend Lazarus, and at the thought of the fate of Jerusalem. He healed every imaginable disease, and raised the dead. He suffered, and then died the death of a common criminal, and suffered the worst that hell could offer -- all for us -- to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil, and rose again from the dead to grant us his blessed presence forever. All that and more is included in the brief statement "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

It was Dr. Martin Luther who said: "Behold, God's son lies in the manger, draws milk from his mother's breast, lies in bed, fetches the ax for his father, and wood and cheese for his mother. When John leaned on the master's bosom, he leaned on the bosom of God. When he and the other disciples heard the master's voice, they heard the voice of God."

And the word which became flesh dwells among us, too. He dwells right here in this company of sinner-saints. He dwells right in his body --the church-- which is made up of people like us, people upon whom God has staked his claim in Holy Baptism. He dwells among us, who by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the Word believe him to be the victorious Savior and ever-living Word. He dwells among us as we love and worship him in the 101 ways we go about our daily tasks and living.

The Word made flesh talks to us again today through the Holy Scriptures, and through each other, too, when we minister to each other and share our glorious faith with others. Today, we sense his presence in every Baptism, in every celebration of the Lord's Supper, in every faithful preaching of the Word, in every announcement of forgiveness that conveys to the penitent sinner the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, who for his son's sake accepts us and forgives us, and loves us to the end.

For wherever there are Christians gathered around the Word, there is Christ. And where Christ is, there is eternal life, and peace, and joy, and hope, and love. Where Christ is, there God is, and where God is, there is his eternal blessing.

And that's precisely WHY the word was made flesh--to die for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and on the third day, to rise again -- to grant people like us forgiveness from every filthy sin. The Word was made flesh so that we might be free, and clean, and holy, and thankful again.

The Word was made flesh and came into this world of sin as a weak baby, coming into our lives in a crude and smelly stable. He came to Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds, and the wise men, and he comes to us again this Christmas Eve. He comes to us--one by one--in ordinary places and in ordinary times. He comes to very important people, and to very insignificant people like us, but he always comes IN PERSON. He is so close to his people. He is between them, and among them, and within them.

The miracle of the birth of the Son of God is once again alive. And the Gospel of his love for us circles the globe, because he comes like light. We call him Immanuel-- God with us.

He has freed us from our sin, and so we call him Savior.

He has bought us back from the slavery of our own passions, and so we call him Redeemer.

He teaches us the love of the Father, and so we call him Rabbi.

He molds and masters our life, and so we call him Lord.

He walks us through the valley of the shadow of death, and so we call him our Resurrected brother.

And as he prepares a place for us in heaven, we call him the Author and Finisher of our faith.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us so that again this Christmas we might hear the blessings of the message of angels and feel the joy overflowing in our hearts, as we marvel at the love of God for people like us.

I guess that's about all I want to say today. We are in all the loveliness we call Christmas, with the hymns and the trees and presents and the love and the music and the lights, and the children looking on with wide-eyed wonder and excitement. We watch the shepherds hurrying to the manger, and you and I with them, toward the child, and the light of eternity which he gives.

It is good to have all that again by the grace of God. It is good to have all that by the grace of this child, the Word made flesh, who loves us so much that he would not let us live on this earth without him, who loves us so much that he would not live in heaven without us.

May God keep you strong in that love. In his name. Amen.

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December 24, 2016  
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