

THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND LIVED AMONG US**Sermon for Christmas Day, 2021****John 1:1-18**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel from before, John 1:1-18: ¹ **In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.** ² **He was in the beginning with God.** ³ **Everything was made through Him, and not one thing that was made was made without Him.** ⁴ **In Him was life and the Life was the Light of mankind.** ⁵ **The Light is shining in the dark, and the darkness has not understood it.** ⁶ **A man came, whom God sent and whose name was John.** ⁷ **He came to testify, that is, to testify about the Light that through Him everyone might believe.** ⁸ **He was not the Light but came to witness about the Light.** ⁹ **The genuine Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.** ¹⁰ **He was in the world and He had made the world, and the world did not know Him.** ¹¹ **He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.** ¹² **However, to all who received Him, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God.** ¹³ **They have been born not of blood or of an urge of the flesh or of a husband's desire but of God.** ¹⁴ **The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son – He is full of grace and truth.**

¹⁵ **John testified about Him when he cried out: "This was the One about whom I said, 'He who is coming after me has been before me, because He has been before me.'** ¹⁶ **For from His fullness we have all received and grace upon grace.** ¹⁷ **For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.** ¹⁸ **No one has ever seen God. The only God, who is in the lap of the Father, has made Him known."**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Christmas marks a dividing line between truth and error. The reality of what happened at Christmas - namely, that **"The Word became flesh"** is so shocking, so utterly unreasonable and offensive, that it drives people crazy. It causes them to deny the truth and to promote error in its place. Most all the classic heresies that have been around for 2,000 years now, in various forms, have the following in common: They cannot handle the truth of Christmas. They cannot stand the idea that the Word, the eternal Son of God, had to become flesh, with all the implications that flow out of that.

Now we like to think of Christmas as kind of soft and fluffy and inoffensive. Cute and cuddly. But to reduce Christmas to that - well, *nothing could be further from the truth*. Christmas is not "cute." Instead, it is raw reality that deals with the root problem of humanity. It is earthy, not fluffy. It is flesh-and-blood stuff that brings God to us up close and personal, and that is why ultimately, it is so shocking and controversial. But to us who know the truth of Christmas, its "fleshiness" is *absolutely crucial*. Our very salvation depends on it! So the church must always be vigilant about confessing this truth: **"The Word became flesh."**

No more profound truth was ever written in so few words. No more unfathomable mystery was ever captured in such a simple statement. **"The Word became flesh."** The apostle John penned these words for the prologue to his Gospel. What was he saying with this? Let's back up a bit. We first need to identify what he means by **"The Word,"** and for that we go back to the opening verses of that prologue.

John writes, **"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.** ² **He was in the beginning with God."** Here John recalls the creation account from the opening of Genesis: *"In the beginning..."* He's saying that there is one called **"The Word,"** the Logos, who was in a face-to-face relationship with God and yet who was also God in His substance, in His essence. This One called the Word was there **"in the beginning,"** that is, at creation, which means He Himself was not created. He is God eternal in His being, without beginning or end, and this Word who was with God in the beginning likewise *was active in the act of creation*. So John says of Him: **"Everything was made through Him, and not one thing that was made was made without Him."** This One called the Word is true God, from eternity, above all created things.

Now comes the shocker: **"The Word became flesh."** The One who was true God, from eternity, at a certain point in human history, became true man. The Word became flesh, became one of us, a flesh-and-blood human being. He

became our brother. How can this be? Our minds and our reason cannot comprehend just how this is possible. But God declares that it is, and so it is. Faith receives this truth in quiet humility.

“**The Word became flesh.**” This truth is crucial to our salvation, and here’s why.

John goes on to finish the sentence: “**The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son – He is full of grace and truth.**” Now we shall see why this truth is so saving - and so controversial.

“**The Word became flesh and lived among us.**” You could also translate it, “*He tabernacled among us.*” In the Old Testament, the Lord God had made His dwelling in the midst of His people at the tabernacle, “*the tent of meeting.*” The Lord had made His presence known among the people in order to meet with them and interact with them. The Lord had tabernacled among them, to guard and guide them, to give them His Word, to forgive their sins through His appointed sacrifices, to lead them into the Promised Land - in short, *to save them.* That was how the Lord had dealt with Israel by tabernacling among them.

Now in our text, John is saying that this is what had happened on an even greater scale when the “**Word became flesh**” and “*tabernacled*” among us. God was present in the midst of fallen humanity in order to save us. The only Son of the Father, the glorious Son of God from eternity, pitched His tent in our midst when He became flesh, and He did so “**full of grace and truth.**” God’s Son was on a saving mission to redeem mankind, and He did it by Himself becoming man. That’s what the little Baby in the manger is all about. That’s what Christmas is all about: ***The Word becoming flesh in order to save us.***

But why did God have to become man in order to save us? Because the situation called for it. This was God’s plan, and it’s the only one that works. All of humanity, every one of us, has fallen into the death trap of sin ever since our first parents. We have fallen, and we can’t get up. We cannot save ourselves. Only God can do that. But at the same time, God’s justice had demanded that those who sin must die.¹ Man had sinned, and man must die. Sins can’t just be swept under the rug. They must be dealt with.

And so “**The Word became flesh and lived among us.**” Christ Jesus came, as a man, to do the job and fulfil the demands of God’s Law. Jesus, as a man, kept the commandments to love God and to love one’s neighbour, and He kept them *perfectly.* He’s the only One who ever has. Jesus is the one righteous Man, totally innocent. Even so, He suffered and died, as a man - as though He were the sinner - in our place. He’s the only One who could do the job. Being true God, His suffering and death has infinite worth, sufficient to cover the sins of all humanity. Jesus has died as our Substitute to pay the price our sins deserve, and in exchange, ***His perfect righteousness is credited to our account.*** When Jesus rose from the dead, He showed that He had indeed done the job and conquered sin and death. So we are acquitted, declared not guilty, in God’s court of justice. A righteous Man has been found to keep the Law. A righteous Man has stepped forward to bear the penalty of the Law against sinners. But none of this would have happened, had not “**The Word became flesh and lived among us... full of grace and truth.**”

But that is also why Christmas is so *hated.* The real Christmas - not the pop-culture Christmas. The real Christmas, which is about the Son of God coming in the flesh to suffer and die to save us from our sins - the real Christmas is not nearly as popular as the world’s artificial Christmas. Many people cannot accept the fact that God became man, that the “**Word became flesh,**” in order to suffer and die to save us. Why? Because if that’s the case, then it says several things about me. It says that I need saving, that I am a lost sinner, unable to save myself, and I don’t like to hear that. My natural man, the old Adam, hates that and hides from it, hides from God. “*To say that it takes the death of God’s own Son to pay for my sins - am I really that bad? You mean, I’m not good enough on my own? You mean there’s nothing I can do to merit my own salvation? No, I don’t want to hear that! I can’t accept it.*” These are the implications that flow out of the Word becoming flesh.

So, over the years, people have changed the message to suit their desires - their desire to be their own god, to be their own saviour. They don’t want or think they need God’s Son dying for them as the only solution to their problem. They prefer some other plan, whereby they are good enough or can make themselves good enough, to gain God’s favour, whether by attaining to some secret “knowledge” or by a life of good works or by self-improvement or whatever. Anything but the Word becoming flesh to save them. Anything but Christmas.

¹ Ezekiel 18:20

Even in the Early Church, errors concerning the person of Christ had crept in. In the fourth century, there was a man named Arius, who couldn't accept the idea of God and man together in the one man Jesus Christ. And so, the church had to come up with a way to both affirm the truth and reject that error. It's called the Nicene Creed. Those words concerning Christ as *"the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made,"* were written to combat the error of Arianism and to affirm the true doctrine of the person of Christ. You see, the person of Christ, who Jesus is, goes hand in hand with His saving work: *"who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man."*

Still, in our day, the church needs to be vigilant to guard this precious truth of Christmas. Many un-Christian religions change the person of Christ to fit their own made-up religions. Then there is the more subtle error of the megachurch preachers who leave out the real Jesus, the crucified Christ, almost entirely, or at most, turn Him into some sort of a "life coach." They preach a different gospel, which is no gospel at all.

Can you see why Christmas is so controversial? People don't want a flesh-and-blood Saviour who has to die for them in order to make them acceptable before God. They'd rather do it themselves or imagine themselves good enough on their own. So then they'll change Christmas into some inoffensive feel-good sentimental thing about Santa and reindeer and family get-togethers and so on. Not that there is anything wrong with families coming together. Not at all! It's just that they can't do what our flesh-and-blood Saviour can do.

What can He do? This Jesus, God in the flesh, can save us! He has saved us! He has come in the flesh and has died on the cross to do the job. Now we are forgiven; now we are God's children. Celebrate this truth! Celebrate this Christmas! Rejoice in it! God is with us, to save us, in the person of Christ.

Dear friends, here is the real Christmas: **"The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son – He is full of grace and truth."** Have a holy and Christ-filled Christmas! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from eternity You planned to send Your only Son Jesus. You overshadowed the Virgin through Your Spirit, so that Mary's holy child was true God and true man. We praise, glorify, and thank You for the appearing of our Saviour, and for the promises You make to us in Him. Through Jesus You have revealed Yourself to us, so that to know Him is to know You, to love Him is to love You, and to hear Him is to hear You.

Help each one of us to know the true joy of this day, and to welcome the Saviour into our hearts as the one You have appointed Lord of all life, as the one under whose feet You have placed all things. Above all else, cause us to rejoice in Your promise that whoever believes in Him will not die but will have eternal life.

Grant, O Father, that the whole earth may come to love and worship the Manger-child, and know Him as Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. May people everywhere, to the very ends of the earth, acknowledge Mary's Child as the incarnate God and their Lord and Saviour. May this truth change the hardest of hearts, soften the most stubborn of wills, and penetrate the darkness of all who live in the shadow of death.

Make every home receptive to the glad tidings of the true Christmas, that all children and parents may know and rejoice in the greatest Gift of all, the Child of Bethlehem. Teach all to keep all pleasure in earthly gifts in proper balance before the wonder of the heavenly gift of Jesus.

Look with compassion on all who are in want or need this day. Look with mercy on the hungry and the poor, the lonely and forsaken, the sick and the troubled, the sorrowing and the dying. Help them to remember that You are the deliverer of Your people, the helper in every need, the healer of the sick and the hope of the dying. Give all the assurance that in Christ who is Immanuel, God with us, You are near to those who call on You. All this we pray in the name of Jesus, in whom alone is salvation. Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Isaiah 52:7-10

⁷ **How beautiful** on the mountains **are the feet** of the messenger **who brings the good news**, who **announces peace**, who tells the good news of good things, who proclaims salvation and who tells Zion, “Your God is King!” ⁸ Listen! Your watchmen have raised their voices and are shouting together joyfully. For eye to eye they will see it when the LORD returns to Zion. ⁹ Be happy and shout joyfully together, ruins of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth **will see the salvation of our God.**

Hebrews 1:1-12

¹ God has long ago spoken at many times and in many ways to our fathers by the prophets, ² but has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. He has made Him the Heir of all things and through Him He has also made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being. He maintains all things by His powerful Word. After He had made purification for sins, **He sat down at the right hand** of the Majesty on high.

⁴ He has become as much greater than the angels are as the name that He has inherited is superior to theirs.

⁵ For to which of the angels has God ever said, “**You are My Son. Today I have begotten You**”? Or again, “**I shall be His Father, and He will be My Son**”?

⁶ Again, when God brings His First-born Son into the world, He says: “**And let all the angels of God worship Him!**” ⁷ With reference to the angels He says, “**Who makes His angels spirits and His servants flames of fire.**” ⁸ However, to the Son He says: “**Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever, and the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of Your kingdom.**

⁹ **You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, Your God, has put You above Your companions by anointing You with**

the Olive-Oil of gladness.” ¹⁰ He also says, “**Lord, in the beginning You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands.**

¹¹ **They will perish, but You continue. They will all become old like a garment. ¹² You will roll them up like a robe and like a garment, and they will be changed. However, You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.**”

John 1:1-18

¹ **In the beginning** was the Word and the Word was **with God** and the Word was God. ² He was **in the beginning with God.** ³ Everything was made through Him, and not one thing that was made was made without Him. ⁴ In Him was life and the Life was the Light of mankind. ⁵ The Light is shining in the dark, and the darkness has not understood it. ⁶ A man came, whom God sent and whose name was John. ⁷ He came to testify, that is, to testify about the Light that through Him everyone might believe. ⁸ He was not the Light but came to witness about the Light. ⁹ The genuine Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world and He had made the world, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. ¹² However, to all who received Him, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God. ¹³ They have been born not of blood or of an urge of the flesh or of a husband’s desire but of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son – He is full of grace and truth.

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