

## **“THE WORD BECAME FLESH.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**December 1, 2013, 10:30AM**

**Scripture Text: John 1:1, 14-18**

### **Introduction.**

Today marks the first day of the Christian church calendar which begins with the season of Advent. It marks the beginning of our celebration of the incarnation, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

All over the world today the Christian church is beginning their celebrations of one of the most central truths of the Christian faith, that astonishing miracle when God became a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

This truth makes Christianity absolutely unique among all the religions of the earth. No other religion or faith community, not even Judaism, believes this. It's unique to Christianity that God takes the initiative to take on our human nature in order to redeem us from our fallen sinful nature.

We are so used to Advent and Christmas that we no longer think about the mystery of so great a miracle as the incarnation. We are no longer stunned and astonished.

The joy of Christmas is not bound up in the gifts or family gatherings or the songs or any of the other trappings and traditions. The great joy of Christmas is the glorious miracle of God becoming one of us to deliver us from all our sins and reconcile us to a holy God.

Satan hates the incarnation. And if he can distract us and better yet depress us by all the trappings and trimmings and tinsel and glitter, so much the better.

So our aim this morning and this month is to remember the true reason for the season, and to remember how and why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

### **Incarnation.**

The word incarnation is a Latin word that means becoming in flesh. We hear this in English in words like carnivore, meaning flesh eating. Some of you like the Mexican dish carne asada, which is grilled meat; or chili con carne which is chili with meat.

What do we mean by the word “incarnation”? The idea is found in several texts which speak of Jesus as "coming in the flesh" (1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 7), being "sent in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3), "appearing in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16); he also "suffered in the flesh" (1 Pt. 4:1), "died in the

flesh" (1 Pt. 3:18), and "made reconciliation in the body of his flesh" (Col. 1:21-22). In sum, "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

The incarnation is a real stumbling-block for Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and many others. In 1977 a group of prominent British theologians and NT scholars released a bold attack on the doctrine of the incarnation in a book called *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by John Hick.

Let me encourage and strengthen your faith and your witness with a summary of the truth contained in these few and simple words found in John 1:14. This verse contains more than enough truth for a dozen sermons. It will be the foundation of our Advent series this season. The Word became flesh.

### **John 1:1, 14**

#### ***The Word.***

Verse fourteen tells us the meaning of the **Word** in verse one. The Word is a person, the person of Jesus Christ. Verse one teaches us about the divinity/deity of Word. Verse fourteen teaches us about the humanity of Word, or His incarnation.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

The Word was **eternal**. He never began to exist. He was before the world, He was before all things, He was before time. He always was and always is and always will be. He was. Period.

The Word was **with** God, meaning the Word was **distinct from God** the Father. The Word was a separate person yet one with the Father.

The Word was **God**. He was not a created angel or creature, He was not less than or inferior to the Father, He was nothing less than God, equal to God in every way. In Him dwelt the whole fullness of deity. This truth refutes the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims and Jews and all other religions that say Jesus Christ was not truly God.

### **John 1:14.**

#### ***Became.***

The Word **became** flesh. The Word didn't appear, it wasn't beamed down, the Word didn't assume or adopt flesh or pretend to look like flesh. The Word **became** flesh.

Remaining what He was (God) He became what He was not (man). He is now what He always was (God). He is now what He once was not (man). He is now and will remain forever both (God and man). When Jesus became flesh, He became flesh forever. We will see Him in His flesh, we will see His scars.

If we want to be precise in our language we would say that Jesus has not always existed, Jesus was not in the beginning with God. The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, He has always been from the beginning. But Jesus, the human name given to the second person of the Trinity when He took on human flesh, began when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary.

### ***Flesh.***

The Word became ***flesh***. Again more precision and careful language.

John by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit didn't say the Word become man. The Word didn't become human, the Word didn't become a body. The Word became ***flesh***.

Why the careful distinction? Some Greek philosophers believed that the material body was inferior to the spirit and that Jesus only appeared to have a body. So Scripture is very clear, He had a real flesh and blood body, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh with skin and muscles and organs and cells and hair. When you cut Him He bled and then scarred.

Flesh means He took our weakness and infirmity. Jesus bore our limitations in His human body. Jesus didn't just humble Himself to the point of becoming a human being. He humbled Himself to the point of suffering as we suffer and dying as we die.

He shares the common humanity of every one of Adam's children. He is like us in every way except in our sin.

The Savior became body and soul to be the Savior of all flesh. He isn't the Savior of animals, they don't have souls; He isn't the Savior of angels, they don't have bodies. He is the Savior of all who have a body and a soul.

### **What was it like for Jesus to be human?**

The NT gives no description of Jesus' physical appearance. The only descriptions at all are two of His glorified appearance, once on the Mount of Transfiguration and once in Revelation 1.

In the OT there is one prophetic description in Isaiah:

**Isaiah 53:2-3** ... he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men; ... and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

We can reason some things that are true of children growing up in a Jewish world. Different writers have tried to describe God becoming a man (Sam Storm, Max Lucado, etc.):

***At conception:*** The creator of galaxies and oceans, He who fills the universe, was confined to Mary's womb as a tiny fertilized egg, an embryo, then a fetus.

***At birth:*** God entered the world as a baby, amid the stench of manure and cobwebs and prickly hay in a stable. The newborn Jesus had a misshaped head, wrinkled skin and a red face. God with eyebrows, elbows, kidneys and a spleen. God in diapers sucking His thumb.

***In infancy:*** The infinite God learned to crawl, stand, walk; he spilled his milk and fell down and bumped his head. The one who spoke the world into existence had to learn to talk. Did Mary play "patty cake" and "this little piggy went to market" with Him?

***As a young child:*** God learned his ABC's or alpha, beta, gamma. Beginning at age six and extending for five years, Jesus would have studied the Torah, the first five books of Moses. At the age of twelve he was taken, according to Jewish custom, to Jerusalem.

***As a teenager:*** God went through puberty! His voice changed; he had to shave. Was Jesus a typical uncoordinated teenage boy? Was He picked last when the kids chose up sides for a game? Did He have pimples and body odor and bad breath?

***As a carpenter:*** The God who spoke trees into existence with just a word, now had to cut them down with His hands through hard physical labor. He would have had calloused hands. He had to deal with customers who complained about his work or tried to shortchanged him. He was cold in winter and sweating in the summer. He no doubt wore out a hundred pairs of sandals in His 33 years of walking everywhere.

He was hungry, thirsty, tired, felt pain, wept, rejoiced, marveled, was moved to anger and compassion. He learned, submitted, prayed, read Scripture, suffered, was tempted, was tortured, bleed, and died and was buried.

"The Word became flesh / God became human / the invisible became visible / the untouchable became touchable / ... / the unlimited became limited / the infinite became finite / the immutable became mutable / the unbreakable became fragile / spirit became matter / eternity entered time / ... / the almighty became weak / the loved became the hated / the exalted was humbled / glory was subjected to shame / fame turned into obscurity / ... / from a throne to a cross" (Sam Storms).

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. For 33 years He pitched His tent in our backyard. If I were to set up a tent in your backyard what do you think would happen? I would probably ask to use your bathroom, maybe have some meals with you, maybe watch some football.

In other words, we would probably start to get to know each other a lot better. That's what God came to do. To be in a real relationship with us, the kind of personal intimacy He had with Adam when He used to walk with Adam in the garden in the cool of the evening.

## **Full of grace and truth.**

What was previously only partially revealed before in creation and in the Law of Moses (Hebrews 1:1-3) is now fully and completely revealed. What was before given by prophets and seen in types and figures and symbols and shadows is now fully seen, the veil is pulled back. Grace and truth become a person and dwell among us.

Jesus is full of grace without which I would never be saved. That grace that first caused my heart to fear and tremble and want to run and hide, that grace that first exposed my darkness and sin and made me want to flee further into sin, that grace persevered in my heart and turned my heart to Him.

Jesus is full of truth without which I would never know the truth. He comes infinitely full of truth. In Him there is no falsehood, no deception, no lies. Jesus comes to us full of truth and in that truth there is life and light.

John could have said full of signs and wonders, or power and miracles, but instead focused on what is most to our benefit.

He wants us to see His glory and to know His grace. Jesus came full of grace and truth. He wants us to receive Him and to receive His grace.

Only those with the eyes of faith can see His glory and the glory of His grace and truth. Without faith, the incarnation is nonsense, meaningless words. Don't spurn His grace and truth. Pray, ask, seek, knock. Those who seek Him and receive Him, He will never cast out.

## **Application and conclusion.**

This is arguably the greatest miracle that has ever occurred, greater than creation, greater than the resurrection from the dead.

This supreme condescension for the Son of God to become one of us shows how priceless and infinite is Christ's love for us. He did something for us that He didn't do for the angels. And He did this for one reason, *so He could die for us*. God can't die, so He had to become human in order to die for us.

It pleased the Father to send His only Son to suffer and die for the sake of the salvation of those who believe in His Son. God went to the most ultimate and extreme length for the sake of His people.

**Romans 8:32** He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

What a profound mystery and miracle that the Lord of glory would lay aside His glory to enter our world and our history to save us from our sins. And in this way reveal to us the glory of His love, kindness, mercy toward us.

The Word became flesh in Jesus and dwelt among us. This is the meaning of Christmas and this is the meaning of this table.

### ***The Lord's Supper***

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper He taught that the bread represents His broken human body and the wine His shed human blood.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and united His life to ours so that our life could be united to His. When He died, we died. When He rose, we rose. When we eat and drink we feed on Him in our spirits and we are renewed and refreshed with His life.

As we come to the table of our incarnate Lord we are not just remembering a past event, we are participating in and receiving the life of the one who dwells among us and in us. He is with us and His real spiritual presence meets us here. And one day we will sit at this table with Him in His real physical presence.

Oh how the love of God is magnified in the incarnation. Oh how great is the love of the Father for us. Amazing love, amazing grace. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.