

“THE WORD BECAME FLESH.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: John 1:1-14

Prayer: Holy Father, you are light, shine your light on your Word, enlighten the eyes of our hearts, enable us to see Jesus as He truly is. Be glorified and edify us with spiritual truth.

Introduction.

As we come back to this same text again this week I want to encourage you to do something with this text during Advent. Read it once a day. Read it yourself, read it during family devotions or at the dinner table. Read it each day. And if you really want it to sink in, try memorizing it.

Have you ever been on a really big roller coaster like the ones at Six Flags? Back in my college days I rode one of the highest wooden roller coasters at Six Flags in Gurnee, Illinois. You know how it works, they start out by taking you up as high as they can and then drop you as far and as fast as they can. The really brave/foolish people do it with no hands.

Last week I tried to take you up as high as I could into the heavens, as high as our finite minds could fathom the Son of God. Jesus existing without time or limit, infinitely big and powerful, creating everything from the vast universe filled with trillions of galaxies and stars, quasars and blackholes, down to the trillions of living creatures that inhabit our planet, and then sustaining everything He created every second of everyday.

When a text starts out that way, you expect it to continue that way. You expect it to continue with grand and otherworldly language, magnifying the splendor of Jesus as God enthroned above the heavens, ruling and reigning on high. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word created everything that is.

But then there is a twist, an unexpected turn. This week we are going to plunge to the depths in a most precipitous fall to earth. I probably can't create that sinking feeling in your stomach as the roller coaster drops over the hill, but I hope to create profound sense of what Jesus did for us.

And the Word became flesh.

Let me first say what God didn't do. (Illustration credit Harry Blamires, On Christian Truth).

Most of us have had jobs where you had some kind of inspection. Maybe an environmentalist showed up to check out your dairy, or OSHA came to inspect your shop or factory, or someone from headquarters came to snoop around and ask questions or audit the books or do a white glove test. We have it here at church, the furnace inspectors were just here, the elevator guy comes once a year as does the fire department to check the alarms and extinguishers. Our Potato Salad Ladies still remember some fun times with the health department.

God could have done it that way. He could have sent Jesus down from headquarters and told Him about the huge mess all those people down there have made of everything. "See if you can sort it out and get them to start flying right. This is their last chance, otherwise we are going to have to shut the whole operation down. I came close to doing that back in Noah's day, but this time I mean business. Tell them all that sin has got to stop."

Jesus didn't come down from on high on an inspection tour sent by an unhappy CEO to try to make for a better future.

Or God could have gone a softer and gentler route and sent Jesus not to be heavy handed but to get down on their level and try to win them over. Maybe go disguised at first, just be one of the guys, maybe you can gain their appreciation and respect. Maybe they will feel ashamed for being so hardheaded and difficult and come around to see things from our perspective.

Jesus didn't dress up or come disguised, to trick us into better behavior. There was no acting or pretending. Jesus didn't come just to teach or train or inspect or be a better example.

The Word became flesh. It's called the Great Condescension or Great Humiliation.

That could sound a bit offensive to us, after all we don't think it's all that bad to be human. Some of my best friends are people. Certainly, we are better than being born some lowly animal or insect. Why does O Come All Ye Faithful says He didn't abhor the virgins womb? What's so abhorrent about sweet Mary's womb?

We can't fathom the gap between the divine and the human and how far a fall that is. How can a sinner's womb hold One not even the universe can contain? The eternal, pre-existent, divine creator and King of kings and Lord of lords becoming a baby is unthinkable. The angels in heaven didn't see that coming, never dreamed their creator and master on whom they could not even look, would become human flesh. The closest analogy might be if we were sent to be an ant or a snail or a cockroach.

One pastor tried to express the condescension and humiliation this way.

“The Word became flesh / God became human / the invisible became visible / the untouchable became touchable / eternal life experienced temporal death / the unlimited became limited / the infinite became finite / the unbreakable became fragile / spirit became matter / eternity entered time / the independent became dependent / the almighty became weak / the exalted was humbled / glory was subjected to shame / fame turned into obscurity / from a throne to a cross / from ruler to being ruled / from power to weakness” (Sam Storms).

He went from being Lord to being servant, from being master to being slave, from owning everything to owning nothing. He rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. When asked about taxes He had to ask for a coin. He had no place to lay His head.

Christ humbled Himself by falling from the highest pinnacle of glory to the lowest depth of shame and dishonor, to be mocked, falsely accused, spit on, hated, beaten, and killed.

Incarnation.

We use the word incarnation to describe this. You know the word “carne.” Carne asada means grilled meat. Chili con carne means chili with meat. It's a Latin word. “In” means to cause something to become something. “Carne” means flesh. Incarnation means to make to be flesh. The incarnation is about getting flesh in the game, getting smelly and dirty, getting boots on the ground.

At ***creation*** man was made in the image of God, at the ***incarnation*** God was made in the image of man. In the incarnation, the eternal Son who has always possessed the divine nature has not changed or set aside His deity. His divine nature was veiled but never lost. Instead, He has added to Himself a second nature, namely a human nature consisting of a human body and soul.

He wasn't a clone or a phantom or in disguise, He wasn't an angel or an alien, but a genuine man. He was recognized by others as a real man. So much so that all His enemies vehemently denied He was God and saw Him as the lowest form of human, a blasphemer.

The incarnation is not a subtraction, but an addition. The Word did not cease to be the Word, God cannot cease to be God, but the Word became flesh, having skin and bones, hair and teeth, organs and five senses, all our normal physical, emotional and mental attributes.

Like us He was conceived in a woman and lived in her womb for nine months.

Like us He was born as a baby.

Like us He grew from infancy to toddler to little boy to a teenager and finally into a young man.

Like us He read and prayed, He submitted to His parents and to His Heavenly Father.

Like us He got hungry and thirsty, got tired and took naps, felt pain, wept, rejoiced, was moved to anger and to compassion.

Like us He worked a job, did manual labor, made things with His hands.

Like us He had a body and a soul, and like us He suffered, when He was cut He bled.

And like us He died, He really died and was buried.

From cradle to grave He was like us, in every way human, except without sin.

He knows what it's like to eat a meal and take a walk and sit and talk and have a stomachache and rejoice at a wedding and weep at a death and be indebted to a mother and have to go to court and stand trial and be falsely accused and falsely charged and suffer for it.

He didn't become like Adam before the fall, He became like Adam after the fall, liable to every infirmity and to all our weaknesses, He felt and experienced everything we do.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

There was no moment in all His time on earth when He was not fully and entirely both God and man. *And these two natures are now united for the rest of eternity.*

When Jesus ascended to heaven and reentered glory and sat down on the throne at the right hand of the Father, He didn't shed His skin or brush it off, glad to be rid of it. He is fully man forever. We will see the scars in His hands and feet.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The word *dwelt* basically means pitched His tent among us, Jesus went camping. Our Chinese students over the years have told us how strange a concept camping is. We have taken them on the church family camping trips and it's a real stretch for them. Why would you leave a perfectly good house with warm beds and bathrooms and running water and sleep outside on the ground in a tent? Only really poor people do that, like Yak herders in Tibet. Normal people don't do that.

Why would God leave a perfectly good heaven with everything and give up everything and come live on earth? He pitched His tent in our backyard, meaning He is going to want to use our bathroom and join us for some meals. He wants to know us, be with us, relate to us, be in a relationship.

He didn't come down for a day or two or even a month or two. He really did dwell among us for 33 years, plenty of time to establish He really was one of us. He pitched His tent, set up camp, and went in and out among us.

He is Emmanuel, God with us, and now His Holy Spirit tabernacles in us, dwells in us.

The greatest proof that Christ once lived in history is the fact that He lives today in people's lives. Every time a person receives Christ as Savior, God in the person of the Holy Spirit takes up residence in his or her heart.

When did the Word become flesh and dwell among us?

Galatians 4:4 says in the fulness of time. In the fulness of time history was split in two.

The birth of Jesus divided history in half. Until our politically correct age every year has been described as either 'B.C.' ('Before Christ') or 'A.D.' (Anno Domini, 'in the year of our Lord'). Jesus Christ is the line in the sand at the very center of history.

Whether you believe in Jesus or not, every time you write a letter or put a date on a paper or homework or contract, you are bearing witness to the fact that 2,018 years

ago God invaded human history to reconcile the world to Himself. Every page of every calendar convicts our conscience of the truth of the Bible and what God did 2018 years ago. It's inescapable and renders us without excuse.

In the fulness of time, meaning at the time appointed by God, all the sermons and prophecies of all the prophets were ready to be fulfilled and this seed of woman was born of a woman. The ages had reached their fullness, and we are blessed to be on this side of it.

Implications and application.

Is our God a great God? Is there any God greater in power, majesty, authority, dominion, rule and reign? When we look at creation and the vastness of our universe and the intricacy and complexity and order in creation we see the evidence of a very exceedingly great God.

But our God is even greater than all that when He stoops down and dwells among us as one of us.

The incarnation displays the greatness of God. Our God is the eternal God who was born in a stable, not a distant, withdrawn God; our God is a humble, giving God, not a selfish, grabbing God; our God is a purposeful, planning God, not a random, reactionary God; our God is a God who redeems us by his blood, not a God who leaves us in our sin. Our God is great indeed!

The implications and applications of this great truth in our lives are many. Showing up is incarnation applied. When you show up at the hospital or care home, when you show up to help someone move, when you show up with a meal, when you serve in the nursery, that is incarnational. When you serve at the Lighthouse or Project Hope or New Way or help a stranger. Husbands and wives, parents and grandparents, can be Jesus with skin on when we show up, when we care, when we died to ourselves and our own interests and serve.

As God went out of His way and suffered and sacrificed to communicate the Gospel to us, so we are incarnational when we do the same and when we support others in doing so.

Paul captures the implications of the incarnation in Philippians 2 when he says let this same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, when though He was God emptied Himself and humbled Himself and took human form.

Philippians 2:2-5 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, ... 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

People talk about the *Christmas spirit* in a shallow sort of way. This is the Christmas spirit, when we see a human in need and we go to them the way Christ came to us. How can we spend ourselves for others?

I know of at least a half dozen families who are embodying the spirit of the incarnation this season, families who are emptying themselves to enrich others in need. One family is spending their Christmas day serving the homeless at the Lighthouse mission. Humbly, quietly, in tangible ways being like Jesus with skin on for others.

What has Christ done for us? What will you not do for Him? What can we do for others? He became poor, so we could be rich. He bore offenses and suffered accusations and criticism, He didn't hang on to what He had, but gave up what He had for the sake of others, even others who didn't deserve it. How can we enrich the life of another as a token of our understanding of that Christ has done for us?

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth.

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Prayer: Holy Father, Jesus is seated at your right hand in glory in the flesh. When you look on us you see Him and remember Him and what He has done. You remember His perfect obedience and His perfect righteousness and His satisfying your just wrath, how He came to stand in our place and bear our curse. Give us a profound sense of what Jesus has done for us. Enable us now to be Christ to others, even those who don't deserve it, the way we didn't deserve it.