

The Word Became Flesh

Christmas 2018

Intro:

Today we have the wonderful privilege of preparing our hearts together to wonder, worship, and adore our Savior, Christ Jesus who as we have read in Philippians, made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross. Each week as we gather together to worship corporately this God who loved us with such abounding and eternal love that He covenanted within the Godhead to enact, from eternity past His great plan of salvation, we remember specifically the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is His death and resurrection upon which all of history turns and on which all of our hope must be anchored.

Hebrews 6:19-20 tells us: We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf...

For the child of God there is not a more enthralling and encompassing reality in the entire world than the death and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed we will see today that even as we prepare our hearts to celebrate the incarnation of our Lord there stands behind his manger a cross. That the Word became flesh as we will read today so that He might give His life a ransom for many.

As we find ourselves in the midst of this Christmas season though there is an English proverb that comes to mind. "Familiarity breeds contempt" There is within the human heart and mind a tendency to allow extensive knowledge about something to breed within our minds contempt for that thing, or at the very least a familiar sort of indifference.

Because of our sin we are prone to move to quickly through this season, prone to let our minds be distracted by other things that seem more pressing; prone to feel a need to move on to something else. After all, we know these things. We know that at Christmas Jesus, the Son of God was born of a virgin. We know that the angels announced His birth to shepherds in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. We know that magi from the east came to offer the young Christ gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We know that they followed a star, or maybe it was a comet, or maybe it was the sheer glory of God radiating from the place where Jesus lay.

We know these things and yet all too often we lose our sense of wonder at them. When someone hears news that blows them away there is usually one of two possible reactions: stunned silence or over the top excitement and exuberance.

There is though, another reaction, when news isn't new news any more but something that has been known for a long time and yet it is cherished anew each time it is thought about. A sense of warmth and deep feeling, the sense a husband or wife might get when they think of the life time of love they share with a spouse. When that love was first expressed there was amazed silence or excited exuberance but now there is likely just a deep and abiding sense of awe and wonder at the shared experience of love between the two.

As we explore what John has to say about the incarnation of God today, I want you to remember that he intends for us to feel one of these three things. If you are new to faith, or perhaps have no faith he means to blow you away with these amazing realities, he means to stun you into silence or move you to exuberance or maybe some of both as these truths land on your heart for the first time.

If, as I believe many of you are, you are one of God's children, saved by the death and resurrection of the Word who became flesh, John means to move your heart with that deep and abiding sense of wonder at this amazing reality; that God took on flesh so that He might become sin for you.

Whichever it is, there should not be an indifference to these things bred by familiarity. These truths are too wonderful even for words and we will see that as John stretches the limits of human language to proclaim the truth of Christmas, the truth of the incarnation of the Son of God for us today.

Opening Prayer:

After prayer: Let's read our text for today. John 1:1-18

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 was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, the gave the right to become children of God, 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 have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

John 1:1-18

John:

Before we begin our exposition of the text I think it would be helpful for us to take just a brief moment to talk about the man who is writing these words. The Gospel of John was written by the apostle John. John was the brother of James and one of the first disciples that Jesus called to follow him. John was a fisher man but would become one of Jesus' three key disciples, John was chosen to go with Peter and James to the mount of transfiguration and the three were again chosen to go and pray with Jesus in the garden the night of his arrest. John describes himself in this gospel as the disciple who Jesus loved.

John had a close relationship with Jesus.

In this opening to his gospel we can feel that closeness. The way he wrestles with language to pick just the right words to hold these truths of the incarnation. John's aim is that all who read this gospel would

come to know Christ in the deep and personal way that he does. He says this in John 20:31 “These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

John’s aim is that we might come to know Christ in a deep and abiding, saving way, and that we may have life in that knowing. That we might know that Jesus is the Son of God.

This then drives us back into our text for this morning, the opening of the gospel, the introduction to Jesus Christ.

In the Beginning:

As it is John’s aim that we might come to know that Jesus is the Son of God he starts his introduction to Jesus at a much different point than the other gospels. They all start on earth, John starts in Heaven and not just in heaven but in heaven before time even existed.

Picking up the language, intentionally so, from Genesis 1:1 John says, “In the beginning was the Word.”

John grounds the truth about Jesus to the truth about Creation itself.

One of the great hallmarks of the Christian world view is that it involves God creating all things out of nothing. Ex Nihilo. There was a beginning and before that beginning there was for all of eternity past only one preexistent entity and that was God. Thus John’s readers would have well expected John in citing these well-known words to have continued the thought “in the beginning God” and yet that is not what John does. John is working to expound the truths about the Son of God and he takes that well-known opening for the whole canon of scripture and adds; through the inspiration of the Spirit, “in the beginning was the Word.”

The full thought is “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

There are three things I want to look at here. John’s use of with and was and John’s use of Word as the title for Christ.

Firstly and more simply, John says that this Word was with God. Most readily this located the existence of the Word outside of space and time. In the beginning before anything existed, before, as we will see in just a few verses, anything was made that was made, there was the Word. This points to the Word having the same eternal nature as God.

However, the word with also tells us more than just the period of the Word’s existence. It speaks to the quality and substance of the Word’s relationship with God. The by saying that the Word was with God John is not simply saying that the Word had a co-existence with God but that there was an active relationship between the Word and God. Additionally and very importantly so, the fact that a relationship existed between God and the Word means that the Word is a person in nature not a generic thing or thought.

John also uses this term “was” to distinguish between God and the Word. The two are not each other they cannot be each other and be “with” each other, this is a logical impossibility.

All of this would be fine and logical but John then continues his thought and adds that not only was the Word with God, he says next that the Word “was” God.

In asserting that there was a being that was co-existent with God before the creation of all things would have stretched the Jewish mind and their conception of “One God” to assert that there is an entity that has been eternally co-existent with God but who is also God stretches all thought.

The force of the wording here is almost to the extent of saying that the Word continually was God. He has always been God. There was never a time when the Word was not God.

This clearly takes us then into Trinitarian theology. The way that John frames his teaching here leaves no room for any of the heresies that have crept into the Church throughout the ages that seek to make Christ less than absolutely God. Christ could not have been created by God because He has eternally existed with God. Christ cannot be of a different substance than God because He has always been God.

The only theological framework that will carry the weight of John’s words is a robust Trinitarian theology in which One God in essence or substance has existed eternally in three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Word:

Let’s allow that Trinitarian framework to rest in our minds for a moment and ask another question. Why does Paul choose to call Jesus the Word?

We need to realize is that in Christ a whole new level of divine revelation was made manifest. God in Christ had begun to fully reveal all that he had ordained to reveal to mankind. This fullness of revelation caused those early followers to seek for language to express these newfound realities. As we have already seen these things, being Trinitarian in nature, do not easily fit into our systems of thought and language.

John here chooses to call Jesus the Word. There is a strong Old Testament foundation that he is drawing from in assigning Jesus this title. Word, or Logos in Greek was used in the translation of the Old Testament where the word of the Lord was spoken of in acts of creation, revelation, and salvation. Verses like

Psalm 33:6 “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.”

Here the word of the Lord is the creative force that brought the heavens into being.

Countless times throughout the prophets where the word of the Lord is said to come and reveal a message to the prophet.

Finally the word of the lord is seen to be a powerful agent in the deliverance of God’s people. Notably in Isaiah 55 where God says, “...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

We can see then why John would choose a word like Logos to define Christ who has become the personification of God’s divine self-expression in creation, revelation, and redemption.

The Word is also an apt title because it is something that is very clear. Words well-spoken are not ambiguous, someone can question actions and motives but we can best make ourselves clear through speaking precise words. This is why the loss of the ability to communicate verbally is one of the most devastating losses a person can experience and why we go through such great lengths to give people that cannot speak a way to still communicate with words!

Jesus as the Word is God's clear and precise self-expression made manifest to us. Manifest in his acting in creation, his bringing of divine revelation in its fullness, and His accomplishing salvation for God's people.

Words are used to reveal and Jesus reveals God because Jesus is God.

Trinity:

Let's return then to the Trinitarian framework that we allowed to rest in our minds a moment ago. I wrestled with whether or not to include much of this point but I think it necessary.

Theologians always seem to get themselves into trouble when they take up the task of picturing the trinity. How God can be one in substance and yet three persons is, counter to secular opinion, no illogical but is difficult to express. All ways of picturing how the three persons of the trinity are related to each other will inevitably fall short. Therefore these attempts need to be well thought out and held loosely.

My favorite conception of the trinity comes from Jonathan Edwards, an 18th century pastor, theologian, and philosopher.

Edwards suggested that God the Father was the fountain of the God head, the stream from which the rest of the Godhead flowed. Edwards said that God being God has for all of eternity had a conception of Himself, an understanding of all of His divine perfections. Edwards suggested that God's understanding of Himself, being that He is God was of such glory and power that it stands out from the Father as the second person of the Trinity.

Again, we are in some heavy grounds and I am doing my best to convey the thoughts of a man many have called the finest theologian and philosopher that American has ever produced on a topic that may well be the most difficult to understand in all of scripture.

Edwards then noted that there would be a divine love which flowed from the Son, the perfect conception of God's glories and perfections, to the Father and from the Father to the Son. Edwards said that this divine love because of its location in the substance of God would stand out to become the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Edwards conception of the trinity is helpful for us because it is built upon, among other things, John's description of the Word as God's divine self-revelation. Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of all the glories and perfections of God. Jesus is the Word.

Created through Him:

We will move on now, into verse 3.

John continues, "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."

Again John is driving home the point which we made earlier that Jesus has always existed. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was the first of God's creations. They could get away with that if the verse simply said that all things were made through Him. However, John closes the loop. John says not only that all things were made through Him but that without Him was not anything made that was made.

Nothing that has ever come into existence has ever come into existence without the agency of Christ. Therefore Christ himself is outside of creation and was uncreated.

A simple thing to do with a Jehovah's Witness is to draw a circle on a piece of paper and write in that circle "created things" and then outside the circle "uncreated things." Then ask them to place Jesus where He belongs according to John 1:3.

The Word of God that spoke and created the heavens and the earth and everything that was made was the Son of God, the one who would take on flesh and be known to us as Jesus, Immanuel, God with us.

The Word Became Flesh:

Let's jump down now to the whole reason we are in this text today, John 1:14.

"And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us."

Just let that sit on your mind for a moment, with all that we have just learned about who the Word is.

.....PAUSE FOR A MOMENT.....

John doesn't mince words here. In fact he means to be as shocking as possible.

John could have said that the Word became Anthropos... became man, He could have said the Word took on a body, soma. However, John uses a term that is almost crass in relation to what we have just learned about the Word. John uses the term flesh. This is the same word used by Paul in Romans 8:3 to talk about weak sinful flesh. Flesh says commentator Andreas Kostenberger, "all the human person in creaturely existence as distinct from God."

The creator came and clothed Himself in creation. But more than that we understand that Jesus has forever joined to His full divinity a full humanity.

This is why there is such rich theological imagery in our Christmas songs. Oh Come All Ye Faithful speaks of Jesus as God of God, very God, begotten not created. Hark the Herald Angels Sing says, "Veild in flesh the Godhead see."

These are the efforts of faithful men and women throughout the history of the church wrestling to convey in beautiful simplicity and fullness the wonder of the incarnation. The wonder of the Word made flesh.

John takes the imagery further.

He goes on, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

There is an allusion to the tabernacle here. In the tabernacle in the wilderness and then in the temple God was said to dwell in the midst of His people.

Both the tabernacle and the temple pictured God, His glory, majesty, power, and holiness. In Christ now God has come to dwell with us as one of us. He has become one of us so that He might make the fullness of God's divine self-revelation known to us. Jesus has come to take up residence among His people!

John then adds what is almost certainly a personal comment. He says that we, meaning he and the other disciples who had the privilege of seeing the transfigured and resurrected Jesus, have seen His glory. There is another allusion here likely to the temple. It was said that the Glory of God filled both that tabernacle and the temple. Here John says that the same glory shown most clearly through Jesus, the Word, the full self-expression of divine revelation!

Lastly he adds that Jesus was full of grace and truth. These words in the OT speak of God's covenant faithfulness to His people and now we find that this covenant faithfulness is expressed in full in the person of the Word made flesh.

Believing and Being Born:

Finally we need to ask the question why. Why did God do this? Why did He send His Son, the full expression of divine revelation to take on flesh, to be incarnate in this world of sin and death?

John tells us in 9-13. The Word became flesh so that those who believe in His name might become sons of God.

John opens with this wonderful reality in verse 4. There he says, "the Word was life and that life was the light of men."

These words address the deepest most fundamental need of fallen humanity. We need life and we need light.

In Ephesians 2:1-5 Paul tells us, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—"

Romans 5:12 explains farther, "...just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"

As people born into this fallen world we are born dead, we are born into the trespasses and sins of our first father Adam. This is why you don't have to teach a child to sin, it comes naturally. This is why our world is filled with such hatred and animosity, the world is filled with dead rebels against their creator.

It is worse than that though. Because we are dead we are also blind. John says that Jesus came as a light but that people hated the light because their deeds were evil (3:19-20) Indeed we, as dead sinners, are

blinded to the light. In 3:2 Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless one is born again, unless one has spiritual life imparted to them, they cannot see the kingdom of God!

This is why Jesus, the Word, comes with life and light. Life that we may be animated again with true spiritual life and then with that new spiritual power flowing through our souls we are enabled to see the light and come to the light!

We see a picture of this salvation presented to us in John chapter 11. Lazarus, the friend of Jesus has died. He is dead and in the tomb. No amount of weeping and wailing at the door of the tomb is going to bring this dead man back. But then...

Here comes Jesus! Jesus as the life and light calls into the tomb to the man who is dead and immediately Lazarus is alive. Then Lazarus being alive moves from the darkness of the tomb out into the light, obeying Jesus' command to come forth!

Life then light, the two fundamental needs of all humanity; Jesus comes to bring them to us as the Word of God made flesh. God's divine self-revelation as savior of His people made manifest as Christ carries out the plan of salvation that had originated in the godhead before the foundations of the world were even laid!

Closing:

As we close there are two things that I am hopeful for this Christmas.

The first is for those who many never yet have experienced this reality of life and light. Those who are still this morning dead in your trespasses and sins. It is my prayer that perhaps even as you have listened to the word this morning that God has begun to pour life into your dead heart, that you are seeing these realities about the Son of God with new eyes. Eyes made alive and able to see and rejoice in the light. Fallen man hates the light; those who are being saved love the light, come to the light, and dwell in the light.

In that is you I pray that you would come talk to Jake or I or another believer that you know so that they can begin showing you how to live in the light, how to live as a child of God. Show you what the proper response is to this thing that has begun to happen in your life.

I implore you, please don't miss this opportunity, don't turn from the light to live in darkness. There is a great and eternal salvation to be found through the death and resurrection of this Word who took on flesh and dwelt among us. Today is the day of salvation.

Secondly, for those of you who by the free and unmerited grace and mercy of God have experienced this new life and have come to live in the light.

I urge you this Christmas to steep your hearts in these realities. Put them before your eyes as you read the word until you feel that warmth and awe flooding your heart. Don't let your mind be distracted from these great and glorious realities. Talk about them with one another, encourage one another in them.

We set our heart to remember tomorrow the Word becoming flesh. A reality so wonderful for words a reality so marvelous that God had to send His one and only Son to be His divine self-revelation to us of his desire to save us, to reveal truth to us in its full, and to create in us a new heart.

As we declare in our communion liturgy each week, we will all fail to do this with such zeal as we ought. We will all fall short. Don't let that though stop you from seeking to cling as tightly to the savior this Christmas as you are able.

Pray that God would enable you to see and savor even more of these wonderful truths as you set out to celebrate the incarnation. That your heart would be filled with wonder and awe at the Word made Flesh.

- I. Intro- Christmas: Familiarity breeds contempt
- II. In the Beginning
- III. Word- Why Word
 - a. With
 - b. Was
- IV. Creation through Him
 - a. The Word not Made
- V. Word became Flesh – Made Him known
 - a. Force of Flesh
 - b. Dwelt
 - c. Glory
 - d. Grace and Truth
- VI. Believe and Born
 - a. Life
 - b. Light
 - c. Salvation
- VII. Closing: Salvation... this morning see for the first time or open those eyes you have to see anew the glory and wonder of Christ