

The Word Became Flesh

John 1:1-14 ~ December 25, 2016 ~ Heritage Lutheran Church

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

Each year when we read these words we tend to slide right over what they are really saying. What does it mean to, “Become Flesh?” Take just a moment to think about that. Very few people claim to remember their trip down the birth canal. But many of us have witnessed the birth of children. Most of us have a pretty clear idea about how the process works. There are very few things that mark our humanity like the birth of a baby. Amidst the water and the blood new life emerges with all of its hopes and dreams. At the same time the full consequence of failure, sin, tragedy, and finally death weigh down upon us all. This includes the newly born, even as they are held in loving arms of their exhausted parents. Becoming flesh is such an awkward, pungent, and wonderful event that it has the capacity to transform our entire understanding of reality.

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When it comes to Jesus' birth our imaginations tend to run away with us. We portray Mary and Joseph as two uneducated youths alone in a barn, struggling with a difficult first birth in totally unsanitary conditions. There is no need to exaggerate the lowliness of Jesus birth with this kind of hyperbola. The Bible simply states that the barn was the place where the Word became flesh. The baby Jesus lying in a manger is the sign for shepherds to recognize the truth of their encounter with angels. The wonder is that something so humble could be the verification for something so sublime. Even more importantly, it is highly unlikely that God, who invented birth in the first place, would compromise the nativity of his own son. Mary and Jesus were safer in that barn than any birth that has ever happened in any high tech birthing facility. Jesus was born by the will of God in order that the Word became flesh. No hospital, no palace, no temple, nor any human structure could have been more holy or safe than that stable when imbued with the will of God. For that was the place that God chose for the Word to become flesh.

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It is so easy for us to get distracted by the flesh that we almost entirely forget about the word itself. The wonderful story we tell each other of a baby lying in a manger is sentimentally powerful. It captures our imaginations in a way that lifts our eyes from the mundane world we encounter every day into the romantic bliss of angels, shepherds, and the little town of Bethlehem. As lovely as this is, even with all its pleasant charm, it is a distraction from the central message. Perhaps to compensate, John begins his Gospel the way he does. There is no mention of the nativity and its consistent fulfillment of prophecy. Instead John begins with the centrality of the Word, who that Word is, and what that Word means for us.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

That is who the Word is. It is God. It is the Power of God to create all that is. The Word is the source of light itself. It is that which drives back the force of non-being to make way for light, life, and creation itself. Only when we embrace this reality, do we come to any kind of realistic understanding of what and who has become flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the Word which powered the explosive generation of our universe that is "the Word became Flesh." The divine intelligence that is master of everything took on himself the form of a servant. For He became Son of man, who was God's own Son, in order that He might make human progeny into the children of God. He who was high above everything became low so that you might be raised up. Raised up to eternal life.

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But why flesh? Why would this mighty Word become flesh? Of all mysteries this is the greatest. It simply boggles the mind to think about it. Scripture is most emphatic about the incarnation of Jesus. Somehow, beyond our understanding, Jesus is truly a human, born of a virgin named Mary. At the same time He remains truly divine, begotten of the Father. The Bible explains this quite plainly. But the world does not see it. Steeped in its terminal cynicism, the world looks at us in wonder when we say such things with a straight face. Even we ourselves catch our breath in wonder to see how the Word has enabled us to believe this explanation of God's action and his love for us. But it only makes sense when we think about where we look for answers. This is the world's great

folly. Where we look for truth in the pages of Scripture, the world looks to itself for answers. In its hubris it pokes and prods for answers inside of creation. The world restricts itself to answers inside the system without a thought about where that system itself came from.

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We know the power of the world's folly. It has taken its root deep in our own lives. We think poorly of our flesh. We step on the scale to weigh ourselves with dismay. We peer into our mirrors in horror at time's effect on our flesh. We ransack our closets in fruitless attempts to hide the true nature of our bodies. We look back through our memories and remember with horrific sadness the sinful failures of our flesh. And then we hear that the Word became Flesh. Is this a joke? Is it a cruel jest? What God in his right mind would become flesh?

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Only a God who loves us would willingly take on the damaged, decaying nature of our flesh. Only a love more profound than anything we know would lead God to enter bodily into our human state. This is the very nature of grace. Grace is the power of God to love the world so much that he gave his son to save us. In this season so cheapened by plastic commercialization it is easy for us to lose sight of the incredibly costly nature of that grace. Grace that God extends to us in the Word become flesh. But as we stare into our dark human past we see the essence of our corrupted nature. A careful look at the state of our own souls reveals the true cost of God's grace. If this were a simple rescue it would not be so. If God simple drew us up into heaven to save us, then grace would be cheap, simple, and of no great consequence. But...

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Because God himself entered into our creation as truly human, then every sin, every depravity, every groan of creation counts into what it cost God to grant his Grace to us. God knows the depth of humanity's fall better than anyone and yet he stooped to enter into life as a human being. He became incarnate. The word became flesh. Not for God's benefit. But for yours. The word became flesh to save you from the way of flesh. The word became flesh to grant you eternal life. The word became flesh so that Jesus Christ could dwell with you. And He does indeed live with you. He lives in you. In the wisdom of the incarnation, he has poured out his spirit on all flesh. In you, that Holy

Spirit, by grace, has worked faith. And now you believe in the "Word become flesh" and by that faith you are saved for eternity. By that faith you have become the children of God. By that faith you now dwell with the Word become flesh in this very moment and in every moment of everlasting life.

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The cross is full. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive and leading us out to go, make, baptize and teach disciples. Let us take up our cross and follow him.