

“The Word became flesh”

John 1:14-18

Advent Midweek III

December 19, 2018

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

*Now* we get it (at least we’ve scratched the surface). Though we could meditate upon this marvelous text of John 1 for hours and hours more, now – after spending a few evenings meditating upon the divine Logos coming into the world – now we begin to understand why this text is so monumental... why the Word’s incarnation is such a breathtaking truth... why – when we hear these words again in Divine Service on Christmas morning – we will have every reason to say, “There’s nowhere in the universe I’d rather be than where the Word made flesh comes again to those who believe on His name, that His own may now receive him.”

“The Word became flesh”... can it get more profound than that?

Last week, I mentioned that tonight we’d consider the *how* of the Incarnation. But, quite truly, it’s so miraculous – beyond miraculous, if you will: it’s not merely God making something tangible do what it’s not supposed to do (bread multiplying, diseases retreating, death fleeing) it’s God himself becoming his creation,

spirit becoming flesh and blood - beyond miraculous... so mysteriously divine that it can only be 'explained' by the text itself: "The Word became flesh." It's a truth that none other than the **holy God** may perform (not in terms of power and ability, but in terms of definition... for, honestly, all else *is* flesh, except for the angels, and they can't become flesh... so out of both necessity and glory, power and mere definition, "The Word became flesh" uniquely requires the profundity of God!). And yet, it takes the **merciful** God to submit himself to such a reality, to involve himself in man's predicament... it takes a *merciful* God, for what Creator is going to *become* His creation, to 'become man' – that's humility enough – but to do so not for His own glory or praise – for He could just make a new creation to praise Him and save himself a lot of trouble – but do so (and become flesh) for the sake of his broken creation's redemption?

To look at the one hanging on the cross and say not only 'He died for me,' but to say 'He became flesh and blood for me.' That's the reason we went the route of a handcrafted corpus rather than an alabaster white or metallic silver corpus... even if we don't know exactly what he looked like, he became flesh... that he might die the sinner's death. *Why* is it so easily considered offensive to behold the fleshly resemblance? ... perhaps because it pricks us at the heart to know just how much God allowed himself to be offended for our sakes, that he would become flesh and blood to save us.

So, can it get more profound in matters of holiness and mercy than “The Word became flesh”?

Actually, yes... “The Word became flesh *and dwelt among us.*” How profound that God would dwell *among* His people. Not just dwell alongside them or near them – as when he told Moses and the priests to come up the holy mountain... not just dwell alongside them, as Jesus conversed for a moment with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration... but to dwell *among* us, to spend earthly time living earthly life amid earthly strife... so that, the Scriptures say, he can “sympathize with us in our weaknesses” because he knows experientially what it means to be the sin-bearer of a sin-laden world!

And yet, it becomes even *more* remarkable when we remind ourselves that the word we translate “dwell” is actually the same word used in the Greek to say “tabernacle.” – He *tabernacled* among us. And with the use of that word, the text opens up for us the whole purpose of Christ’s coming – He was not made flesh to die for us and then take the flesh off again... not just to make the sacrifice, then retreat behind the veil of the Most Holy Place... but, having made the sacrifice, to give us access to the Most Holy Place... to bring the holy and sacred (*everything* holy and sacred) to sinners, to be the dwelling place between God and man, to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins *and* the high priest for our intercession, to make the holy of

holies not only an accessible room but the trustworthy and *regular* meeting of God and man in Christ's own flesh and blood.

And, if you are going to lay eyes upon the tabernacle, upon the *holy of holies*, upon the most *sacred* place (or person, as it were) in human history, then "we have seen his *glory*, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Wasn't the tabernacle a glorious place, filled not only with holy *things*, but with God's very presence! But, wasn't the tabernacle also a place of *grace and truth*... for there, the blood could be poured out, the penitent forgiven, the incense of prayers ascend, God and sinners be reconciled. But, now, in flesh and truth, that tabernacle is now a person... full of the glory and radiance of God, filled with far more than holy things or burnt incense but with holy, precious blood, divine righteousness and merit – what glory to behold! And yet, full of grace and truth: the love to pour himself out in a sufficient and perfect sacrifice, to forgive sins by taking them on himself, to petition the Father on our behalf as the utterances of the Word-made-flesh waft into heaven, to teach us the way we should go, and to lead us into all truth – found only in him and culminating in life everlasting.

"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." Breathtaking. Profound.

And so, almost as if to get our heads out of the clouds in this meditation of the divine deigning to dwell, almost as repeating the strategy of the first handful of verses and reminding us that the Word whose life and light was coming into the world, the evangelist seems to snap us out of ‘thinking up there’ to again seeing it play out ‘down here’, as he says,

*“John (the man sent from God to be witness to the light) bore witness of him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”*

How rough and earthy is John the forerunner? So why should our hearts and heads look to the skies for such divine profundity when John bluntly asserts its presence here below in flesh and blood? We love to think of the tabernacle in terms of its gold and holiness; yet, John reminds us, the gift of the tabernacle is God dwelling with man in terms from which *man* can benefit.

And yet, man can only benefit if the dwelling is between *God* and man; so John reasserts the profound truth and speaks of divine gravitas, “He who comes after me ranks before (above) me, because he was before me,” the forerunner says of the Christ.

And that one who ranks higher than John, who was *before* John, He comes to follow on the heels of John and bring the forgiveness we all need and cherish because John’s preaching so divinely, so ably brought to light God’s holy Law and pricked us at the heart. Therefore, this breathtaking, this profound opening to the

gospel would all be for naught – the Logos taking on flesh and becoming man would all be for naught, the light and life of the Christ coming into the world would all be for naught – if not for the promise that we would *receive* from his mercy:

*“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*

I’ve mentioned before that Law and Gospel work together like two effortless dancing partners. They look like they’re made for each other; they’re meant to *be* together! The one without the other is lost and seemingly useless. Is this not the case with the Law given through Moses? Seen for itself, it is as awkward as that dancer without the partner. In fact, as we recently heard, the book of Hebrews even refers to the Old Covenant built on Levitical law as “weak and useless” – not because God’s Law *is* weak and useless... not because God’s Law *isn’t* holy, perfect, and righteous... but because the holy God is only fully seen and known in his mercy, and his mercy and grace and truth are only *fulfilled*, and only *yours*, through Jesus Christ.

And yet, the reverse is also true... the Gospel is bland and tasteless to a world that doesn’t thirst for it because it lives in blindness regarding its sin and *unholiness* before the holy God.

Thus, “the law was given through Moses” – how necessary in God’s plan of salvation! But, “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” ... that’s the benefit of the incarnation, isn’t it? That’s the

*purpose* of the incarnation – to bring grace to a world of condemnation and to bring truth to a world of lies and false hope.

*This grace is yours. This mercy and truth is yours... but it's yours not because you have seen God* – “No one has ever seen God” our text says, but only because the Logos who was in the beginning with God was willing to become one of *you*, that He – the Logos who is at the Father’s side – has made him known to you: “I am the way, the truth, the life... no one comes to the Father ...*except* through Me.” Through the incarnate One, through the Word become flesh, you have not only the right to become children of God, but also the opportunity to see Him face to face. “No one has seen the Father, but the one and only Son” – that Logos “who is himself God” and is in closest relationship with the Father – indeed, the Logos face-to-face toward God... that Logos who has come from the Father... That holy One, that holy child in the manger... yes, through the little child in the manger, you have God, to you, made known.

Next Monday – Christmas Eve – we’ll hear the account of what it *looked* like and *sounded* like on the night the world was introduced to the Logos wrapped in the garb of earth. But, next Tuesday, we’ll *receive* Him; those whom He has given the power to become the children of God will *receive* Him – His life, His light, His very flesh and blood – you will receive Him, and through Him – through the new covenant’s tabernacle dwelling between God and Man – through Him, you will receive the love of the Father. How

profound! How mysterious! How breathtaking... “The Word became flesh.”

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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