

The Word Became Flesh and Lived Among Us

**A Sermon by Pastor John W. Bengston
Augustana Lutheran Church
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Instead of the very familiar Christmas Story from Luke 2, this morning we read from the 1st chapter of John's Gospel, a far different presentation of the Incarnation. John opens his biography of Jesus with glorious and lofty words and thoughts: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). At times, his language can sound a bit confusing, such as verse 10: "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him" (John 1:10). What??

We listen to this writing by John, but we hear it not in the language John wrote, Greek, but in an English translation. The word "Word" is the English translation of the Greek word "Logos." Books are written on the philosophical derivation of that word and John's use of that expression as a means to try to bring together Greek philosophical thought and Christian faith. John wrote this way to connect the Incarnation (God became flesh) with Greek thought forms so that the Gospel of Christ Jesus could be transmitted to an audience outside of the eastern end of the Mediterranean world.

It is not my intent this morning to get into all of that, but it is to point out the challenge of understanding John's writing and to receive the power of his witness. John is telling us that Jesus is not the beginning of the Christ. In fact, The Christ was the means of creation; he was from the beginning. The Hebrews text declares the same message:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

Hebrews 1:1-2

The last verse we read this morning is the one that speaks the faith to us very directly and clearly: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). "Lived among us" is one way of translating a Greek word which can also say "pitched tent with us." Jesus came to be with us as a human being to redeem human beings from selfishness and sin.

The Word became flesh and lived among us – with us, for us.

On August 10th, The Denver Post printed an article about a 32 year old man whose name I am sure to miss pronounce, but I think it must be something like Para-MES-war-an. He was with a Denver hiking group in the Gorge Lake area at about 12,800 elevation level when he fell on some loose rock and broke a leg. The rescue people were notified, and

two park rangers reached him late in the afternoon. It was too late to try to move him, so the rangers made him as comfortable as possible and made sure he was warm enough, and then they spent the night with him before the removing him by helicopter the next day to St. Anthony Central Hospital. Can you imagine how comforting it must have been to Mr. Para-MES-war-an to have a couple of park rangers stay with him?

That's a small example of what "God in the flesh" means. God has come to stay with us, not just for a night on a mountainside, but always, through thick and thin, through joys and sorrows, through life and death, through mountaintop experiences of transformation and days in the valley of despair. When John wrote that "the Word became flesh and lived among us" he did not mean for a moment, or a nighttime, but forever.

In the Church, we use the word Incarnation to name what the Lord God did in Christ Jesus. Incarnation means "in the flesh." That is God's gift, a gift that endures. The two rangers stayed with Mr. Parameswaran for a night, and that's only a hint as to what the Lord Jesus does with us. Mr. Parameswaran's experience is a glimpse into the power and promise of the Incarnation.

What a comfort to know that we have a God who comes to us and does not require us to qualify to come into his presence. A Christmas hymn that we seldom sing (perhaps because it has 14 verses) begins:

From heaven above to earth I come
To bring good news to every one!
Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To all the world, and gladly sing.
From Heaven Above, LBW #51

The direction of the relationship between God and me, God and you, God and this world is from God to me, you, and us. The sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are two of the clearest statements of this relationship, because God comes regardless of the persons status, condition, or qualification. When we receive the elements of Communion today, we do not have to prove our faithfulness, dispel all our doubts, have all the answers, or purge all our fears and frustrations. God come inspite of all the obstacles we bring, just as God in Christ came to be born in Bethlehem and who is the Savior for all.

Another hymn that appeared in the Service Book and Hymnal and which expresses this dynamic so well states:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true;
No, I was found of thee.
SBH # 473

This is Christmas Day, the Day of the Nativity. On this first major festival of the Church Year we come together to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation and to give thanks to God for the presence of the Almighty in our lives continually, without pause, interruption, or end. We have heard the words of The Bible, soon we will receive the Christ in Holy Communion; and we gather in a fellowship of faith, all of which are signs of God's presence today. May you have a Blessed Christmas as you live in the grace, peace, and hope of the Word made flesh for us and for our salvation. Amen.