

Christmas Day – December 25, 2018

John 1:14 – “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Type in a search for “Christmas miracle” and it’s kind of sad what you’ll find. There are references to movies which may talk about the Christmas spirit or things along the lines of Santa, but have nothing to do with the real meaning of Christmas. There are the good news headlines like the Christmas miracle of a family in need that was helped and the strange headlines like the Christmas miracle in Portland that three inches of rain did not cause the sewer to overflow into the river, but no headlines about what happened in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. This morning we are here to celebrate the true Christmas miracle of the incarnation, God becoming man and taking on human flesh. Using just verse 14 of our gospel lesson from the opening chapter of John, we will look at how much is packed into the words of that verse as we see that **“The Word Became Flesh.”**

In John’s opening verses of this chapter he reveals the identity of the Word—he is God (v. 1) and he also came to this world (v. 10). The Word is a name for Jesus that is only used in two other places, the first chapter of John’s first letter and also in Revelation chapter 19. We learn about our Triune God from reading his written word, the Bible, where he reveals himself. Jesus is called the Word because he is the center and focus of the Bible and also how God chose to reveal himself physically to this world. The Word becoming flesh, God becoming man is the miracle of Christmas. We cannot understand how it happened—it is a mystery. Mary conceiving by the Holy Spirit? A member of the Triune God limiting himself by taking on human flesh? It doesn’t make sense. The more one tries to think about it, the more confusing it will be. But miracles are miraculous because they cannot be explained and so it is stated simply—God became man, the Word became flesh.

John was an eyewitness to this. “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father.” John of course was not an eyewitness to his birth. And if he had been there in Bethlehem it wouldn’t have looked all that glorious. A baby placed in a feed box because his family was staying in a stable. The shepherds were the ones who saw glory that night, witnessing the choirs of angels proclaiming the good news of the Savior who was born in the town of David. But John was a witness to his later glory. He had seen Jesus perform miracles. He had also been one of the three disciples to witness his transfiguration. There he got a taste of seeing Jesus in his full glory. There he heard the Father proclaim that this was the Son whom he loved, the One and Only who came from the Father. This child born in Bethlehem was no ordinary man, he was also true God.

John described Jesus as “full of grace and truth.” Grace reveals the motivation for the Word becoming flesh. Grace is God’s undeserved love for sinners. Jesus came to save us. Why did God have to become man to save us? Jesus needed to be human to live under the law—he had to be subject to God’s laws so that he could keep them in our place. We break those laws every day when we sin, but our Savior needed to be God so that he could keep those laws perfectly and never sin once. Jesus also needed to be human so that he could die. Sin requires punishment—the wages of sin is death. To save us he needed to suffer in our place and he needed to be God so that his suffering could count for the entire world. Did we deserve any of this? No. But that’s what grace is all about. Jesus did it for us anyway because of his great love for us.

As for the truth, Jesus came to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37). He had taken on human flesh to complete his mission. He never shied away from proclaiming that truth, whether the devil tried to tempt him or the Jewish leaders were plotting against him or Pontius Pilate had the opportunity to spare him from death. His message was always repent and believe. Turn away from sin and trust in the one who had come to be the Savior from sin. John and the other apostles would continue to testify to this same truth as they proclaimed that the Word became flesh to the world.

Fast forward two thousand years to what Christmas has become for many today. It's a time for peace and good will. It's a time for showing love to one another. It's a time for giving to others. And of course none of these things are bad! But when such sentiments are disconnected from the true Christmas miracle, they become hollow and empty. We have peace because our Savior has come. We show love and good will because God has shown us his love and grace. We give because we have received the greatest gift already—the baby in the manger, born to save us from sin and death. This is the truth that is proclaimed in God's Word, the truth that we still testify to in our world today.

The miracle that the Word became flesh is not just something to celebrate for today. Too often when Christmas is over as we take down our decorations and pack things away for another year, we do the same with the miracle. But as we daily struggle with our sinful nature, we need that miracle because the Word became flesh to win for us the forgiveness of those sins. One of the ways we receive that forgiveness is through the Lord's Supper, which is closely tied to this miracle. As we eat of the bread and drink of the cup we also receive Jesus' true body and blood and share in this Christmas miracle. The Word became flesh so that he could live and die for the forgiveness of our sins. This is the communion we share in each and every time we come to the Lord's Table.

One last word from verse 14—Jesus made his “dwelling” among us. Literally, he tented among us. A tent is not a permanent dwelling. The Word became flesh to live on this earth, but only for a time. After his mission was complete on the cross, he would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. Jesus' human body would be transformed and glorified. And the same will be true for us. This world is our temporary dwelling. Because the Word became flesh, we too will someday enter into heaven with transformed and glorified bodies. Today we celebrate the true miracle of Christmas—the Word became flesh so that someday we too will be eyewitnesses of his glory, the One and Only who came from the Father. Amen.