

The Word Became Flesh - Rev. Denise Stone

Text: John 1:1-18

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 01-02-2022

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. **11** He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. **12** But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. **15** (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because

he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.ⁱ

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Today is the Second Sunday of Christmas.

John 1 is the Christmas Story – from a long-range view.

The opening of John’s Gospel reminds us of the Genesis Creation Story.

God the Creator spoke the universe into existence by the very Word of God.

John 1:1-3a states,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

As you read all 18 verses of this Prologue to the rest of the Gospel, John is boldly stating that Jesus is *THE* Word that was with God and was God – from *before* the very beginning!

Do you know what that means?

It means that God had planned for our salvation from before the beginning of time as we know it.

That is an amazing thought.

We don't know and can't know all the ways and thoughts of God. Our finite human minds cannot wrap our heads around all that is God.

But we can know, from John's Gospel, that God had planned for our salvation from before the beginning of time.

Skipping over the part about John the Baptist for a moment, we read in verses 10-13

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

Not only did God plan ahead for our salvation, but by believing in Jesus Christ, we have the ability to become children of God. We who believe in Jesus as our Savior, are adopted into the family of God. Not by our doing, but solely by God's.

If you allow yourself to see and hear the importance of this idea, you should have goose-bumps. This is powerful. The God of the Universe has adopted us into God's family.

In verses 14-18, we find the heart of John's Christmas Story.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

During the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness, God's presence was intimately with them in the Tabernacle that accompanied them along their journey. The Greek that we translate into English as "lived among us" in verse 14 has this same connotation – God was intimately with the people of God, like in the Tabernacle, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, of the Word becoming Flesh.

God wasn't just among us, he was and is really WITH us.

Look closely at verses 16-17

¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Jesus will later in the Gospels tell us that he did not come to abolish the law, but rather to fulfill it.

If we allow God to reach into our hearts through Jesus Christ, then we will experience grace and truth. God does not demanded our obedience but rather God wants our obedience to be freely given through our love for God.

Our knowledge of God is made plainer in the person of Jesus.

Verse 18 tells us, “¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

This is the grand sweep of the Christmas Story.

It is beautiful and powerful.

“¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

Now we come to our usual question about scripture:

What does it have to do with us, on this second day of the year 2022?

There is more to these verses than we have covered thus far.

Verses 3b-4 and 10-11 state,

What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

God came to the world in the form of a human baby. The world did not recognize this Word become Flesh. The darkness, still present, did not overcome the light of Jesus Christ.

Stephen Bauman in his article on this passage puts it more eloquently than I can,

If Jesus is truly God, then God is not separate from fleshly experience, but profoundly and intimately present. Our material existence matters. It matters in an absolute sense by virtue of God blessing it, but it also matters to God relationally. If Jesus is truly God, then God came to share in human experience, human suffering, human agony of every kind – even the most gruesome of human deaths. God is not far away. God is as close as our next breath and bears the pain we bear as well as celebrates the joy in which we exult.ⁱⁱ

When we sing songs like O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and when we read and declare that the Word became flesh and lived among us, we are declaring that GOD is truly with us.

The prologue of John in this first Chapter is filled with images of light, glory, grace and truth. These are harder concepts to imagine than say shepherds and angels and a baby in Bethlehem.

In Jesus, John says, the Word becomes flesh. The intangible light, glory, grace, and truth of God are embodied in him. God puts skin on those divine attributes so that followers who want to know how they sound and act have someone to show them.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the person of Jesus Christ, we come to know and relate to God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer in a more deep and intimate way.

We have all experienced two really hard years in 2020 and 2021. We begin this new year with new hopes and dreams.

We still do not know when this pandemic will end. This can feel heavy and frustrating. That we need to continue to mask and care for ourselves and one another – can be overwhelming.

Just as God did not remove pain and suffering from Jesus Christ's life, God does not always remove pain and suffering from our existence.

What we DO know is that God is with us in our pain and our suffering. God is truly Emmanuel, God With Us.

The climax of the prologue of John and the climax of the Christmas Story is found in John 1:14, "the eternal, divine,

creative Word became of person of flesh and blood in Jesus. In this Jesus, God's own glory is visible."^{iv}

The Word Became Flesh and dwelt among us.

Invitation to Communion:

With the beginning of this new year, we're opening a door onto 52 new weeks.

On this Sunday, this Table is set.

You are invited to be a guest at the feast where Christ offers you forgiveness, and a covenantal promise not to leave you or forsake you.

The thing is, you must be willing to walk through the door.

Once you do, the blessing of Emmanuel, "God with us" is yours!

So come, share in this communion feast as we give thanks for Jesus.^v

ⁱ Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ Feasting on the Word, pg. 192.

ⁱⁱⁱ Feasting on the Word, pp. 189, 191 (Barbara Brown Taylor).

^{iv} Feasting on the Word, pg. 193 (Paul J. Achtemeier).

^v Adapted from <https://centerforfaithandgiving.org/2021/12/january-2-2022/>.