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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Christmas Day

John 1:14

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

What was it that the shepherds saw wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger? The apostle John explained it with the most profound words ever written in the history of the world, words that only the Spirit of God could have given him: The Word became flesh.

God the Son has many titles, like Christ, Redeemer, Son of man. He is also called the Word. We might think of the Word in two ways. First, there is the thought that is conceived in your mind. Then there is the same thought that you express with your mouth. That's like God the Son's role in the Trinity. He is begotten of His Father from eternity. And He is the one through whom God speaks and reveals Himself to us. God the Son is the Word.

We know God the Son participated in creating the world and all things. In Genesis chapter one, whenever God created something we are told, "God *said*, 'Let there be light,'" and "God *said*, 'Let the land produce living creatures,'" etc. God the Son is the Word.

How was God going to express Himself to us humans? The Word does personally communicate Himself to us on the pages of the Bible. He authored it. His Spirit lives in it and sparks faith through it.

But He even went a step further. The Word became flesh. The kicking, gurgling, swaddled infant on whom the shepherds gazed was no less than God from God, Light from Light. He permitted Himself to be conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and to be born in the usual way of all men. And yet, His purely spiritual, infinite omnipresent existence as God the Son was not *exchanged* for a bodily existence. He took on personal

human flesh but though He lay, only 6 or 8 pounds, in a feedbox of a barn, at the same time He still filled the entire universe.

God is spirit. What is further from the flesh than spirit? Flesh is weakness. Spirit is strength. Flesh is mortal, but spirit immortal. Our own flesh is local, confined to this world, and tangible to us, but the Spirit of God is everywhere in this world and beyond this world and invisible to us. Our flesh is sinful but the Spirit of God is perfect and holy. How could God become real to us, make contact with us, and rescue us from the deterioration and death of our flesh? The Word became flesh. He could we see God, comprehend Him, learn about Him, or put our confidence in Him? The Word became flesh.

Therefore the true God will not be found, understood, perceived, apprehended, or believed in anywhere but in the person of Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh. Jesus and Jesus alone bridges the gap between us and God.

Not only by Who He is, but also by what He did. As true man, body and soul, he lived as a substitute for us. With graceful kindness to all, He muscled His way through life in a world of sin without so much as being touched by sin or its deteriorating effects. Flesh without sin. He became our bridge, our way, our ride to the God of no sin because He is God. Yet He lived with us. We can have life with God because it's His life that makes it possible.

But He also took on Himself the very thing that keeps us away from God, the very thing that fogs our minds, spoils our emotions, fires our urges and decays our bodies. He took on Himself the guilt, the responsibility, the blame for our sin. He willingly bowed to the verdict that He too, just like the rest of us flesh human beings, had to be separated from His heavenly Father. That's what happened as He suffered and died on the cross. Except He was separated with a damning separation. God turned his back on His own Son. The damning anger of the Almighty covered Him so thickly that the sun in the sky could not pierce His furor with its light. He endured in His flesh the punishment that all flesh, that is all human beings deserve.

The result is that He, this Baby, Jesus of Bethlehem, won our acquittal from God. Because of Jesus' death God declares all flesh, including you and me, innocent of any sin. By what Jesus did, there is now nothing separating you and me from God any longer. God proved it, He smiled on Jesus by restoring life to His flesh once again. Jesus came out of the grave three days after His death to show us that we are forgiven, and therefore the destructive, deadly, decaying, damning effects of our sin are no longer everlasting. No, what we receive instead is everlasting life –just as Jesus Himself now lives forever.

Many people took hold of Jesus with their own hands while He was here on earth. Mary cradled Him. Simeon and Anna took Him in their arms. Children sat on His lap. Crippled people reached out to Him. Mary Magdalene clung to His feet. John leaned his head on Him. Joseph of Arimathea unfastened His limp body from the cross and carried it to the tomb. The disciples grabbed Him tightly for sheer joy after the Resurrection. His Holy Spirit does something even more remarkable for us. His Spirit resuscitates our flesh with a new spirit so that you and I can apprehend Jesus, hold tightly to His promises, fall back on His grace, lean on His faithfulness, trust in His strength, and ride on the things He did to save us. It's called faith.

But there's another wonderful thing He does for us. Today the Word Himself is preached and the Word Himself becomes flesh to us in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is as astonishing a mystery as the incarnation of Christ itself. That God would become man, but also that this God-man would present Himself to our rescue here and now, body and blood, for our salvation in the form of bread and wine. It is nothing less than the only begotten Son from eternity that you receive into yourself. What more powerful remedy could there be for our sin or any other problem we are dealing with in life?

Martin Luther wrote, *Thus the most precious treasure and the strongest consolation we Christians have is this: that the Word, the true and natural Son of God, became man, with flesh and blood,*

like that of any other human; that He became incarnate for our sakes in order that we might enter into great glory, that our flesh and blood, skin and hair, hands and feet, stomach and back might reside in heaven as God does, and in order that we might boldly defy the devil and whatever else assails us. We are convinced that all our body parts belong in heaven as heirs of heaven's realm."

Thus, the Word became flesh. Not for His own sake, but for ours.