



Westminster
Presbyterian Church
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

And the Word was Made Flesh

John 1:1-18

Hear the word as I read John 1:1-18. I will be reading from the New Living Translation, which is a little different than the New International Version which is on the front of the bulletin:

In the beginning the Word already existed.

**The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.**

He existed in the beginning with God.

God created everything through him,

and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

This ends the reading of God's holy Word, and may God add his blessing to it!

I pray everyone had a joyous Christmas celebration. Ours was a little marred by sickness and coughs that linger, but I can assure you that the Newtons had a wonderful time together on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. And we are still celebrating. Our nativity scene is still in our front yard, our laser lights shine each night on the pine trees in our back yard, making it look like I went to a lot of trouble stringing lights in all those trees; our Christmas tree remains in our the living room, stockings hanging from the fireplace mantle, and the snow village is sitting on the shelf on our hutch. We try to leave everything in place until January 6, when the Christmas Season is officially over. I know you are aware that Christmas begins on December 25, followed by the twelve days of Christmas.

We all have our various Christmas customs. I understand that in Jakarta, Indonesia, where our church operates a theological seminary, the Christians there rather than have an exchange of gifts, they gather as families, share a

meal and go to church. They attend church twice a day from December 23 to December 28. That is their custom.

Back here our tree is doing its traditional thing; that is, dropping its needles on the living room floor. And so our post-Christmas rituals of taking down our decorations may begin a little early when it comes to the tree. Sometime in the next few days all our Christmas decorations will be put back in their boxes. The houses in the snow village all have their own little box lined with Styrofoam. The tree will go to the burn pile. The garlands and lights will be carefully put back in the attic. I think when it is all said and done we will have at least ten boxes filled with Christmas stacked in their place in the attic, waiting to be pulled out again next December.

Now that the Christmas parties are over and the New Year's are about to begin, it may be time to concentrate on getting rid of the extra five pounds; and as I work on this project, I wonder, now that the calendar is about to turn to 2018, and it seems that Christmas is over, does anybody feel a little empty, or a little hungry for more? Not more food, or gifts, or football, or family, or traveling, but do you feel you missed something important?

What was it all about?

One child tells what it was all about. Her name was Sharon and I guess she exemplifies the words of the Psalmist that we read earlier: **"From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise."**

Sharon was five, sure of the facts, and recited them with great reverence, convinced every word was revelation. She said, "Mary and Joseph were so poor they had only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to eat and they went a long way from home without getting lost. The lady rode a donkey, the man walked, and the baby was inside the lady. They had to stay in a stable with an ox and a donkey, but the Three Rich Men found them because a star lighted the roof. Shepherds came and you could pet the sheep but not feed them. Then the baby was 'borned.' And do you know who he was?" Her quarter sized eyes inflated to silver dollars. "The baby was God!" And she

jumped in the air, whirled around, dove into the sofa and buried her head under the cushion, which was her proper response to the Good News of the Incarnation." Sharon's inability to restrain herself with the wonder of the Christmas story just may be the evidence that she understood what it was all about.

For the wonder of Christmas is summed up with the most quoted verse in the Bible: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but shall have everlasting life."**

Christmas is the story of God's incredible, unfathomable, infinite love for us. It is such a wonderful thing that we cannot wrap our minds around it.

The coming of God in human form is such a mystery that we will never understand it. The best we can do is pray that God will use Christmas to touch our hearts with his love.

Love is something that comes from the soul, and Christmas is the moment, as one preacher put it, when God is straining to find a way to make his love known.

In the beginning, God created, and in an expression of his love he created men and women. He created us with the ability to choose. Those are difficult words for a Presbyterian, but unless we can choose to love, whatever our response is to God is, it cannot be love unless we are free to choose. And from the very beginning, men and women have broken God's heart by choosing rebellion.

Remember that time in the desert. God had delivered his people from Egypt. God provided them food and drink in that barren wilderness. He called Moses to the Holy Mountain to receive the law, or the covenant which would bind God to his people forever. And what did we do? We took our gold and made the image of a calf and said, "This is our God."

God brought his people into the land which he promised to Abraham. It was a land so rich that the people called it a land flowing with milk and honey. Yet God's people adulterated themselves, seeking the gods of the Canaanites.

The day came when the people understood that their help came in military might rather than from God. They decided to band together under a king who would build an army to protect them from the Philistines. And God comforted Samuel, saying, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me."

Over the centuries, God sent his prophets to call the people back to himself, and the people refused to listen. What could God do to get our attention?

We are told in our text that comes from the Gospel According to John, **"The word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth."**

To communicate God's love in a way we could understand, the miracle of the incarnation took place. God put on human flesh. God limited himself with a human nature. He felt pain as we do. He felt loneliness as we often do. He knew rejection as we know it. And of course he died as we one day will.

Our God has truly entered the human condition, a human condition that is not all clean and lovely, warm and welcoming, as some Christmas cards would have us believe.

Our secular, consumer society has usurped much of the wondrous mystery. And the church at times has sanitized the whole scene. Have we softened the rough straw with *Downy*; sprayed a fragrance to cover the smells of the animals; silenced the cries of Mary in childbirth; tranquilized Joseph in his fear as he cut the umbilical cord with shaking hands, and heard the first cries of this baby boy? Then there were these strange shepherds who had come in from the fields, unkempt and poor. Could not this have felt rather intrusive to Mary and Joseph in this shabby but sacred scene with their newborn? Was there possibly a healthy hesitancy in Mary to hand them her

baby so they could hold and see this marvel? All of this was followed by word that Herod was out to kill the baby; the family must flee to another country.

No longer can we say that our God does not understand what it's like to struggle against the cold, to have to flee to another country, to live as a refugee, to be betrayed by a friend, to grieve the loss of a loved one, to fear suffering and/or death, to experience a seeming absence of God. You see, God has truly walked our walk; God's Word of Love has taken flesh. And the words of Jesus took flesh as well.

He didn't just say, "I love you," to Zaccheus, but called him down from his tree top, and went home with this tax collector and offered friendship and sat at dinner with him.

Jesus not only spoke of a God of mercy and forgiveness, but extended that forgiveness to a frightened, shamed woman standing, accused of adultery who stood alone with a pile of stones left about her.

He redeemed his friend Peter, who denied him at a second charcoal fire.

Jesus not only spoke of God's Kingdom of justice, but he stood in solidarity with the poor and the outcasts.

He not only spoke of a God, who longs for our wholeness, but he touched a leper, he touched a leper. No one touches lepers, but Jesus did and made him well.

He spoke words of eternal life to a Samaritan woman.

He not only said, "I love you," to the hungry crowd, but fed their hungers with truth and with bread.

He does not simply say, "I love you," to each of us, but picked up a cross, suffered, died our deaths, and rose that we might know life eternal.

God's gift to us may not be the right size or color, but his gift may not be returned to the store.

My family bought me a Fitbit for Christmas. They think I need to take a few more steps every day. I cannot return the Fitbit, and now I have to decide what to do with it. Will I attempt the goal of 10,000 steps a day, or just get more out of shape?

And now we must decide what to do with the gift of God's love. We must each decide what to do with it. Yes, like little Sharon, we could jump in the air, whirl around, dive into the sofa, and bury our heads under the cushions. That works for a five year old, but what are we going to do?

We learn of God's love, but maybe we are not actually convinced. I don't know what it is, but we just bury our heads, and go on with our lives.

However, we could say to God: "I want to prove my love. I want to actually love you with my heart, soul, mind and strength. And of course the only way to do this is to do what Jesus did, that is allow for our time and my actions to speak of our love for God." **And the words are made flesh**, as we try to be God's loving presence in God's world today.

The prayer attributed to St. Theresa of Avila says it well: **"Christ has no body now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Ours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now."**

In Jesus Christ the word became flesh. But in our present context, filled with Christ's Spirit, to live to the glory of God, our lives are to be embodiments of God's word and his love. Therefore we give him our hands and our feet, our eyes, our brains and our hearts, and allow God to use us in the world to bring light where there is darkness.

So what's it all about? Christmas every day, as we gift one another, not necessarily with another tie or sweater, perfume or computer game. No, in

gratitude for the Incarnation, we now try to gift others with God's saving love tangibly expressed.

I believe that we saw this in Mother Theresa of Calcutta, who said: "...we believe God loves the world through us. Just as he sent Jesus to be his love, his presence in the world, so today he is sending us."

If you feel as though you have missed something this Christmas, maybe you missed the opportunity of being a tangible expression of God's love. That is what it is all about, and I pray you don't miss it. Thus, Christmas is to be experienced every day, so that a year from now we can say: The words were made flesh; and the love of Emmanuel, God-with-us, was made tangible for God's people day after day in our little corner of the God's world. Amen.