

The Nativity of Our Lord
St. John 1:1-18

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

It's so easy this time of year to get caught up in the Christmas story as told by St. Luke, even if, because of how we do things here, you only hear it at the Lessons and Carols service or in the candlelight portion of last night's service. Nevertheless, it is a prominent thought, even here, at this time of year. Pregnant Mary, no room in the inn, finding room in a stable, giving birth, manger, swaddling cloths, angels singing, shepherds wondering. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” (Luke 2:14) These are all great things, things to marvel over, things to rejoice about. “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11)

But John gives a different perspective. He fills in the blanks that, as you read Luke, you might not realize are there. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Word of God is God; practically inexplicable and wholly incomprehensible beyond what John says. There is another person to this Godhead, the Word, and He is God. He was there in the beginning; of course He was, since He is God.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” He who exists outside of time, beyond time, beyond your comprehension became flesh. “The Word dwelt among us.” So, let's look at those two parts individually.

The Word became flesh—mystery upon mystery. If you came to the first mid-week Advent service here, you would have beheld this mystery with Mary conceiving the Word of God as the Holy Spirit came upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her. (cf. Luke 1:35) She would give birth to the Son of God and give Him the name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

But there in her womb, the Word became flesh as egg was miraculously fertilized, and a zygote was formed. No longer is the Word something or someone which comes forth only from the mouth of the Father, who occasionally manifested Himself as “the angel of the LORD,” but He came forth from the womb of the Blessed Virgin with flesh and blood. The Creator is wrapped up in the things of creation; a manger and swaddling cloths, yes, but more than that, in flesh and blood! He through whom the cosmos was created, by whom all creation was called into being, in whom you live and move and have your being (cf. Acts 17:28), lives and moves and has His being in the same fashion—the same flesh and blood—as the pinnacle of His creation, Adam, and all of his sons and daughters. That would be you, dear hearers.

The Word of God became flesh. He was conceived, developed, and born. He is fully man while losing nothing of His divinity. And He lived. And He died. And He was buried. Marvel at this mystery, dear hearers: God becomes one of you! In Jesus, God becomes one *with* you! The Word became flesh—flesh like yours, bone like yours, blood like yours, cells like yours, brain like yours...in a manner of speaking, a biology like yours. Jesus is Man; “true Man, yet very God.”

And the Word of God shared a biology like yours along every stage of life, like you. He was conceived and born. He grew and learned. He acquired a trade, a job, a vocation. And He died. In every stage, Jesus was there, like you are or will be, from conception to death. He even met a stage that, because He did, you too will see: He rose again from the dead. He did it all perfectly, and credits every moment to you—all of it for you!

Proclus of Constantinople wrote,

Mary did not give birth to a mere man, nor to God in the nude. The one who redeemed us was not a mere man. May this never be. But neither was he God denuded of humanity, for he had a body. And if he had not clothed himself with me, he could not have saved me, but in the womb of a virgin the one who pronounced sentence against Adam clothed himself with me, who stood condemned, and there in her womb was transacted the awesome exchange, for taking my flesh, he gave me his spirit.¹

You can think of it this way: By clothing Himself in human flesh and blood, Christ appropriated the life of humanity. Now, through baptism, there is a ritual exchange of garments as Christians are clothed with Christ. (cf. Galatians 3:27) Dear Baptized, you are saved for in baptism you have put on Christ, the Word who became flesh.

"...and dwelt among us." On the surface, as you hear those words, you hear that the Word lived among people. And that is true. He assumed your flesh and blood and lived like a man among man. He did that as grew before His parents, gaining wisdom and stature (cf. Luke 2:52), assumed a trade (likely that of His guardian, Joseph, a carpenter, made friends and enemies, ate and drank...lived as a man "among us."

But there is more to the words that John used. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." As you might recall from last night's sermons, God dwelt among His people once before. In the time of the Exodus, God led His people out of Egypt as a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. God instructed Moses to build a tent, fill it with holy articles, not the least of which was the Ark of the Covenant, and into this tent would the pillar of cloud descend, and there God would dwell among His people. (cf. Exodus 29:43-46) This tent would eventually be set up in Shiloh, then a new structure built in Jerusalem to replace the tabernacle, and in these buildings would God dwell among His people, seated on the throne that was the Ark of the Covenant.

And it is to this history that John calls you when he wrote, "[D]welt among us." The word John used for dwelt is the same word for tent, for pitching a tent. The Word became flesh and tented among us, pitched His tent among us, "tabernacled" among us. This time, however, it is different. There is no pillar of cloud or fire. There is no unseen presence. This tabernacle is filled with flesh and blood, and that is the flesh and blood of God. It is your flesh and blood! "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

And who is humanity, that the Word should become flesh and "dwell among us?" None other than His own. Just as the tabernacle was erected among His people, so now the Word of God is flesh and dwelling among His people. "He came to His own," St. John wrote. So, yet again, marvel at this mystery. God is Man—*your* Man!

What does that mean? It means that in becoming flesh, your God took upon Himself and into Himself everything of you that is wounded and sick, fallen and sinful, vile and pungent, dead and dying, and in return gave Himself to you. He was given the name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. He will save His people from their sins by being flesh and blood like them and taking all that is fallen and cursed of that flesh into His own and given Life in return. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

This is what His conception and life were all about. Every moment of the life of Jesus in the flesh was to be your Savior. He bled, He was baptized, He cured, He gave sight and hearing, He raised the dead; and all of it for you, to be your Savior, in the flesh. And then, as the pinnacle of His Saving work, He took all that was fallen and cursed in your flesh into His own and to the cross, there to shed that blood and give that flesh over to death for your fallenness and cursedness—for your sin.

1 "Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos, and the Loom of the Flesh", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3:2, 169-194, 1995

He died and was buried, things that flesh and blood do. And He was raised from the dead, winning for you life eternal, like His—in the flesh!

What's more, the Word is still flesh, and still dwells among you. You receive Him in Word and Sacrament, where, in flesh and blood, He comes to you and gives Himself to you. You'll see Him and receive Him most manifestly as He gives you that flesh and blood like yours hidden in simple bread and wine. He comes, not frighteningly as cloud and fire, but graciously as bread and wine, to give you forgiveness, life and salvation. He comes in Word and Sacrament to lift you up out of the vileness of your fallen life and give you His own exalted life.

St. John Chrysostom said, "Let us learn to know which nature it is to which the Father said, 'Share My seat.' It is that nature to which it has been said, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'" The Word of God became flesh and blood—was born and named Jesus—and in so doing, your flesh and blood is exalted in Him. In Him, you are made children of God, a right conferred to you by way of being in Christ and Christ being in you. The fall of Adam diminished you, brought you low; the Word becoming flesh elevates you—because the Word became flesh for you. God is Man, *your* Man. And if He is *your* Man, then you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.