

The Word Made Flesh

Last week Korleen and I hit the malls in Spokane for boxing week sales. As soon as we crossed the border we were struck by how much more “religious talk” we heard going on around us. Clerks and customers freely chattered about church life, prayer items. In the next booth in the restaurant they discussed controversial spiritual issues. . .

I’m reminded of Paul’s words to the Athenians: “ I can see that in every way you are very religious. (Acts 17:22) But what was really telling was, once we hit the mall, the Hallmark greeting card store had already stocked the racks for Valentine’s and St Patrick’s Day. What happened to Christmas overnight?! Where did it suddenly go? By Boxing day there was no more “Silent Night” on the loud speakers. It had been efficiently replaced by the usual non-descript jazz. Background music for the consumer-culture.

But it was *Christmas* just a matter of hours ago. Isn’t there any more *depth* to this mystery than this? This INCARNATION? This unbelievable moment when God touched this dusty old planet for a one time visit in human flesh? But then again we *do* have take down the Christmas tree eventually. But when? When do you rip it all down, fold up and put it away? Sure the season ends, but shouldn’t the *message* go on and on like a stone tossed into the silent pool of our hearts? There should be *ripples* going out day after day. This message of Christ has an *epicentre* a . . .

Beginning

“In the beginning . . .” So begins the Gospel of John. These are exactly the same three words that begin the Bible itself. And for a good reason. The birth of Christ was a new Genesis, a second beginning, a new creation.

Can we *begin again* with God. We can begin a *new year* with the Lord’s Table, where the opportunity exists to start the celebration of life all over again because the Word became flesh to live with us and share with us and conquer sin and death for us At this Table, the Word comes to us once again and .Yet to all who did receive him, [at this table.] to those who believed in his name, [at this table.] he gave the right to become children of God [at this table.]

the *right* to become children of God

the *power* to become the children of God.

Because the “Word was made flesh”. That’s an unusual expression because of . . .

What is usually meant by " Word"

Letters on a page. Languages. Audible syllables carried on the air. The Bible. But how is the word made flesh?

The Jewish people considered God's name, Yahweh” so holy that they found ways of avoiding saying it aloud. So when they came to the word Yahweh in the scroll they would not pronounce it aloud but say instead “THE NAME”. They would talk about God as "Wisdom" or “The Shield of Abraham” or some aspect of God to avoid uttering the sacred name.

This is a little like the way we speak about "Old Man Winter" who came over the pass and dumped a load of snow. We are actually talking about Winter, but when we talk about "Old Man Winter" we mean the *effects* of winter as we experience it in snow and wind, in icicles and frost. So when we talk about "the Word" we are really talking about God as we experience him. And specifically how God expressed himself through Jesus Christ.

The Jewish Rabbis said that when God created the heavenly abode and earth below, the first two things created were a throne of Glory and the Book of the Law.

And the Rabbi's taught that everything else: sun moon, stars, birds, trees, all animals -- is simply a further explanation of God's throne and his holy Law.

The "Word" (Greek: *logos*) of God is not just speech or letters on a page but God in **action**. He spoke and everything appeared. God has a plan for this universe, and whenever God reveals that plan to a prophet we read that the "**Word of the Lord came**" to that prophet.

In the beginning was the Word: a Spirit, a plan, the will of God to be accomplished. In the second Genesis. . .

The Word is restoring a lost harmony to creation.

(The Psalms often talk about people, much like ourselves, who find themselves caught in the various problems of life but . . .

. . . they cried to the LORD in their trouble
and . . .

²⁰He **sent forth his word** and healed them;
he rescued them from the grave. (Psalm 107:19-20)

So the Word of God is God: creating, revealing, and redeeming but

In what sense is *Jesus* "the Word"?

John says that the "Word was made flesh". The writer to the Hebrews starts his letter by saying... Hb1:3a NRSV

"He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of his being."

In Jesus, God left the exact imprint of his will, his character, his plan on human flesh.

At Bethlehem God set in motion a plan and Jesus was so central to that plan that in fact He was the plan. The Word was God. The baby in the manger is God in action.

What does this mean to us ?

Just think of that *world* in which Mary and Joseph lived in. Like our, it was a world of death and disease, poverty and ruthless power. It was a world in which human life was cheap. And yet the Word became flesh, and entered into that *world* because God had a plan for that world to redeem that world.

God's plan was to give us eternal life. "In him [Jesus] was life". Everlasting life through Jesus, the Word made flesh.

But v11 says

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

We each have to decide at one point in our lives to personally receive Christ as our saviour. But what's more, even when we *are* Christians, even if we belong to him, we still must *continue to decide* whether or not to *continue* to receive him into our lives.

We each find yourself today in church, sitting at the Lord's Table, where Christ again comes to his own. But will we **receive** him. It's not a automatic.

How could this happen? Could this happen to you or me today? Could we end up no longer receiving the Word made flesh? Let me tell you a story:

From my earliest days of childhood, a painting hung in our hallway at home. It was the

famous painting of Christ praying in the garden of Gethemene. There was a golden glow on his face as he folded his hands. He was almost alive. It was as if I could reach out and touch that long bearded face or at least the hem of his long flowing garment.

In the background of this painting were the disciples -- *sleeping*. Can you see them dozing on a rock here, another one cradling his head in his hand over there. (They kind of remind me of the seven dwarves.)

And you know the Bible story. The disciples couldn't watch and pray with Jesus for even an hour without falling asleep because the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. But that picture of Jesus in our hallway reminded me, and it was kind of a comfort to know, that even when my *mom and dad* went to bed, and they turned out *all* the lights, and we were *all* asleep, Jesus was still awake. He was still out there in the hallway.

When you're a kid, a painting like that is a bridge to another world. Jesus *was* out there, just outside my bedroom door, *in* that painting *on* the wall, and he was still *awake*.

But something began to happen to our painting. The chemicals in the ink began to deteriorate and darken with age. Strangely enough though, Jesus seemed to remain as bright as ever but the *disciples* in the background began to fade into the darkness of the night. It was so slow a process -- so slow that I didn't notice it. Years went by, and finally there was only Jesus in the painting. The disciples had totally disappeared into the black background and could not be seen.

The human mind is an amazing thing. I remember a day when I was a young teen age looking at that painting which I had ignored for many years now, and saying, "You know, I was sure there were some disciples in the background of that painting. . . ." I stared closer and closer until my nose was right up against the painting. I could not see a single disciple.

I remember thinking for the first time in my life, my memory must be failing me. Nowadays it fails me all the time, it's nothing unusual. . . but for the first time I was worried there must be something wrong with my memory.

Looking back at that experience I can draw a lesson from it. I was one of those fading disciples. I had slumbered and slept for years, slowly fading into the background of the Christian community. Reading my Bible less and less. But Jesus had remained the same

Sometime people expect their church to preserve their relationship with Christ -- but Jesus is not the church.

Some people read their Bible's everyday and still they continue to fade spiritually because they stop receiving Christ, because they are no longer willing to receive the Spirit of truth.

Why?

The Word was not made

paper and ink
 paint on canvas
 concrete and stone
 stained glass and candlesticks.

The Word was made flesh.

"From his fullness we have all received"

This “fullness” refers to the Jesus the Son's complete God-ness. cf Col 2:9,10.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ keeps on giving, one blessing after another, year after year after year. Receiving Christ as our saviour is only a beginning. There is more and more fullness of grace and truth to be found in Jesus all the time.

Was it when I was a kid and on Christmas eve the house was filled with spicy aromas and in the darken living room beneath the glittering tree my sister and I could each open one small gift before being shushed off to bed so that my mom and dad could put the finishing touches on all the plans they had made so that the next morning would be so special. O, those childhood Christmases seemed so *full*. There was no better moment than to be ankle deep in gift-wrap and gathering up the treasures.

When we were little children, God spoke to us at as little children. But as we grow and mature, we discover more and more how superficial those material gifts really are.

For so many years you and I have heard the word:

"Today in the city of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

Every year that sentence is more powerful. Some Christmases have been are *merrier* than others. But in joy or in sorrow, there can always be more *fullness* in our experience of Jesus Christ: the Word made flesh.

(Move to table now)

At this table, as we begin another year, we want to receive his fullness today. May it never be said about us here today "that he came unto his own but his own did not receive him....."

Will you receive him today

-into your plans

-into your laughter

-into your business

-into your conversations

-into the movies you watch?

Will you receive Jesus Christ today

-into your anger

-into the advice you give

-into the questions you ask

-into the recreations you choose

-into your finances

-into your possessions

John's Gospel has shown us the manger scene as viewed from the heavenly realms. Bethlehem is more than just a place in Judea so long ago. Bethlehem is the place where you and I receive the *fullness* of God into our lives.

It's a place where light overcomes darkness. It's a point in our lives where my heart gets in tune with God's plan, his purpose, that will of God for *my* life. It's a place where I meet Jesus who came from the Father full of grace and truth, and I receive from the fullness of his grace one

blessing after another.

I'm talking about the Bethlehem of the heart. Bethlehem is the place where we understand Jesus as God's plan for our lives and where we receive through him the grace and forgiveness of sin we need. Let earth receive her king.