

**The Word Became Flesh
John 1:1-14**

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and from Jesus, the Word who became flesh to dwell among us!

On Christmas we hear the great good news as shared by Luke...the journey to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, the announcing angels, the startled shepherds, the visit to see the newborn, the returning, witnessing shepherds, the pondering Mary. We hear it at worship. We may even hear it on television or radio or on our computer or iphone or android. I never grow tired of the story.

Neither do I grow tired of hearing the great good news of the coming of Jesus told by John, told so differently than Luke. John has no birth story, as do Luke and Matthew. John begins much earlier than birth. John begins with the very beginning. John begins before creation itself. *"¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."* (John 1:1-3) Before creation, the Word was.

Most of us have heard a more ancient word, the first words in our Bible: *"¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light."* (Genesis 1:1-3) And God's Word kept speaking, *"Let there be..."* and sky and water and land, mango and lemon trees, turnips and tomatoes, dandelions and daffodils, sun, moon and stars, salmon and sea horses, whales and oysters, eagles and humming birds, cattle and kangaroos, night crawlers and rattlesnakes, humankind—male and female—all creation came into being through the Word, God's *"Let there be..."*. John takes us back to that Word when chaos and darkness coved the earth and God brought order and light. And John declares that that *Word became flesh and lived among us*. We hear not of a cradled baby but of a cosmic God who takes on our skin, our blood...a cosmic God who limits God's own self to our human situation...a God who shows us by becoming flesh that God loves humans so much that God becomes one with us.

It strikes me in 2011 that we today still know chaos and darkness. Bombs explode in crowded marketplaces, killing scores of people. People battle over turf and ideas, digging in their heels to have it their way or no way. Children die of hunger and malaria, waiting for the resources that already exist to be shared. Families stay in homeless shelters, having lost their homes as refugees from oppression or through foreclosure. To this world, God the Word comes.

John tells us more good news: *"¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:12-13) Consider that! We celebrate Christmas because the Word became flesh. And the Word comes to us so we can become God's children. God comes to give us that gift of believing and belonging in this world.

I share a story written by Gerhard Frost, a professor I had at seminary. The title is "Christmas Lesson."

Christmas Eve,
everything in highest key,
the dinner, the tree, the songs and gifts;
but now the hour was late
with only grown-ups left.
But then the best of all,
that round of visits to all four beds,
the ritual inventory on Christmas Eve.

There he lay,
our child of seven Christmases,
dreams of celebration
reflected on his happy face.

But what was this,
protruding from the blanket?
Two new gloves—with rabbit fur, no less.

Soundly he slept in these,
his newest gifts.

"You teach us well, my son,"
I said, "teach me, your grown-up dad,
(too big for grace sometimes),
the Christmas lesson: how gifts
are believed, received, possessed.
I salute you, my child,
you great receiver from our Father's hand."

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I salute you, sisters and brothers of mine in Christ, you great receivers from our Father's hand of the Word made flesh, given because "...*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*" (John 3:16) The Word made flesh gives us power to become children of God. That Word has a word for us: "*Let me care for you as my beloved children.*"

I share another story written by Gerhard Frost; he helps me see how much God wants to care for each of us as beloved children. The title is "Her Language."

Christmas Eve,
late afternoon,
(I believe I was seven),
and mother, bless her,
was making something special.
Instead of the traditional
jello, whipped cream, and bananas,
she was baking a towering pie!

I stood at her elbow,
as small boys always will,
and peeked for a moment
through the partly open oven door.

Perfect!
the meringue just right
in color and consistency;
the moment had arrived.

Carefully, so cautiously,
she drew it out,
when suddenly
a slip of those sure hands,
and a capsized tower
slithered across the floor,
never to be a pie again.

And mother, no weeper,
(I could count the times),
covered her face with her apron
and cried.

I was outraged
that God could let it happen
because no one—
but no one—
cries on Christmas eve!

Why did she do it,
prepare this gift
for hungry little gluttons?
(Jello was enough!)
I know: it was her language
for telling us
that we were special.

More than sixty years have come and gone,
sixty Christmases,
and I remember that one
and its gifts of tears.

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God cares for us even more than any mother. God has prepared the perfect gift for us. God sent us that gift, the Word who became flesh and dwells among us. God's tears come not from God spilling the gift, but from us not receiving the gift, not relishing the gift, not sharing the gift, even trying to destroy the gift. But God's tears do not keep God away. Rather, God keeps coming and giving God's very self, inviting us again today to the table where Jesus says, *"Take, eat; this is my body.....this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for*

many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26b, 28) So come again to receive him, to know this Word who comes to you so you may become a child of God. The Word will dwell in you so, through you, others in this world may also come to know the Word who creates order and light and life. Thanks be to God!