

## Christmas Day 2015 Sermon

*And the Word became flesh...*

It is one of the most familiar statements in the Bible, and it is at the heart of John's whole Gospel. We hear it read every Christmas Day. Our lectionary also assigns it to be read this coming Sunday.

But while **we** are familiar with "And the Word became flesh," that phrase, that idea was a *startling* affirmation for the earliest Christians who heard it. David Lose explains: "Living and operating in a world dominated by the Greek sensibility that God is, above all things, eternal and immutable and invulnerable, the idea that God would take on human flesh was both shocking and scandalous. And so for about three centuries after John first penned these words, Christians debated whether he was being merely symbolic or actually meant what he said.

"Here is just a snippet of that argument, caught in a few lines from an ascetic monk named Tertullian of Carthage, writing around 200 AD in response to the contention of a Gnostic Christian named Marcion that Jesus was *not*, in fact, fully human but only *appeared* that way: 'Come, then, start with the birth itself,' Tertullian writes [to Marcion], 'the object of aversion, and run through your catalogue: the filth of the generative seeds within the womb, of the bodily fluid and blood; the loathsome, curdled lump of flesh which has to be fed for nine months off this same muck.'

"Pretty strong language! ... But then Tertullian gets down to business: 'You repudiate such veneration of nature, do you,' he asks [Marcion], 'but how were *you* born?' And there it is, Tertullian's point all along: if human birth is too messy or mucky for God, then so are we.

"This is just what St. John is confessing as well – that in the Incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, God takes on our lot and our life, experiencing the same hopes and disappointments that we do so that, first, we may know that God fully understands our life and, second, that we have the hope that just as God shared in **our** life, so also may **we** share in God's." <sup>1</sup>

Fr. Thomas Keating takes Dr. Lose's insights even further. He writes:

"In becoming a member of the human family, Christ became every man and every woman. In joining the human family to himself, he has taken every member to himself. The whole cosmos has been transformed by the Word made flesh. The whole creation has become his body. He is the leaven that transforms everything into himself. The divine energy of the God-man is directed to one thing: to win your love. The light of all the galaxies points to one thing – his love for you! All the beauty, goodness, and truth in the world is designed to win your heart to himself. Everything that exists is for you! ...

“All kinds of mysteries come spilling out of the Gospel on Christmas...,” Fr. Keating continues. “Events and images in Scripture **symbolize** *inner* experiences. Christmas is, therefore, an important occasion in our *personal* history. Through it God awakens us to the divine life in us. We are not only human beings; we are *divinely* human beings. ...

...  
 “[The prophet] Elijah on Mount Horeb experienced an overload of his sense perceptions in the form of a raging fire, a whirlwind, and an earthquake. But it was only in the still small voice that he recognized the presence of God. His was one of the peak experiences of the Old Testament. But it was not the **fullness** of the Gospel. Something more has been given [in the Gospel]. Now God has become one of us and is breathing our air. In Jesus, [God’s] heart is beating; [God’s] eyes are seeing; [God’s] hands are touching; [God’s] ears are hearing. Through his humanity, the whole material universe has become divine. Now God *is* in the whirlwind, in the earthquake, and in the raging fire. By becoming a human being, he is in the heart of **all** creation and in every part of it.

“On the Feast of Epiphany the liturgy celebrates this insight and sings of the waters of the Jordan sanctified by the touch of the body of Jesus. Every drop of water on earth, as a result of that contact, has become matter for the sacrament of baptism. It has become the material element for the transmission of divine life. Similarly, by eating and drinking, Jesus has made food and drink, especially bread and wine, the means of divine transformation.

“The overload from some strong sense experience that speaks of God not only **points** to him, but in some mysterious way contains him. Now Jesus can say that whatever is done to the least of his little ones is done to him. Every human person, by virtue of the Incarnation, is Christ.

“Everything in creation has been transformed by contact with his humanity. By his breathing, the atmosphere is sacred. By his eating, food is sacred. Now **every** sense experience conveys the mystery of Christ. He gives himself to us in everything that happens. ‘The Word was made flesh,’ made a part of creation, made matter – ‘and dwells among us.’ Jesus is trying to give himself to us in every experience.”<sup>2</sup>

*“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory... full of grace and truth.”*

Because the Word became flesh, God’s glory can be seen in every thing God created, if the eyes of our heart are open to see and to receive the fullness of grace and truth.

AMEN

<sup>1</sup>(“*In the Meantime...*” blog, 18 Dec 2014, David Lose)

<sup>2</sup>Keating, Thomas (2012-04-01). *And the Word Was Made Flesh* (Kindle Locations 182-195). Lantern Books. Kindle Edition.