

The Word Became Flesh

John 1:14-18

Trivia can be defined as “details, considerations, or pieces of information of little importance or value.” That’s a good definition, isn’t it? Or perhaps even more simply, “useless information.”

We live in a world enamored with trivia, and with the trivial. We have a popular board game called Trivial Pursuit. We have popular television shows that thrive on the acquisition of trivial information, including the long running, “Jeopardy.” We have brought that love of trivia into the church, and so we have Bible trivia, and with a disdain for any theology or doctrine, Bible study can be reduced to the pursuit of trivia—learning or even memorizing isolated tidbits of information, each of them in themselves of rather little importance.

By contrast, today I want you to think about the most important event in all of history. It is the complete and absolute opposite of that which is trivial. It is the event which defines the very numbers of the years by which we mark history. It happened over 2000 years ago. It was the event in which God most directly and most personally entered into the history of this created world in time and space. That event is, of course, the incarnation. God, in the flesh. The eternal word of God became flesh.

In simple words, Jesus was born.

Yet we reduce that to the trivial when all we think about is a little baby being born in a manger. It is a warm and comfortable holiday tradition, but these days it seems like you can’t even say the name of the holiday in public since it embodies Jesus’ own name. In public discourse now it is impolite to wish some a merry Christmas, and we are left with a bland and trivial, “Happy

Holidays.” Such a trivial thought when compared to the glory and majesty of the eternal word of God becoming flesh. Happy Holidays.

I fear that we have all but done away with a recognition of the weighty matters that are sung about during this season of the year in the words of Handel’s Messiah, which itself has become trivialized by its being relegated to the realms of mere tradition. It is sung every year. But what are the words. Just think of them,

Rev. 19:1 After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.” Again they said, “Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” Then a voice came from the throne, saying, “Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!” And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”

He reigns in triumph. He reigns in judgment. He reigns in glory. The Hallelujah Chorus. That’s a far, far cry from, “Happy Holidays.”

Joseph Mohr captures the idea much better in these also familiar words we often sing, perhaps too often without thinking of their meaning, “Silent Night! Holy night! Wondrous star, lend thy light: with the beams from thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.”

And so I proclaim to you the most important event in the history of this created world, a day of such unparalleled importance because on that day,

I. GOD BECAME MAN IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST.

v.14

Remember the identity of that word.

v.1-3

Now, let me keep you on track with good doctrine, with a proper understanding of Jesus Christ. The Word, as it says in verse 14, is Jesus. And the translation is proper, that the word became flesh.

Flesh refers to our nature, our human nature. Sometimes the word flesh has a reference to our sinful nature, but it surely can't here. For Jesus didn't inherit our sinful nature. But he did obtain our flesh, a word that does emphasize the frail and transient aspect of our human existence. In other words, our mortality!

In the graphic words of John Calvin, "[John] wanted to show to what a low and abject state the Son of God descended from the height of His heavenly glory for our sake. When Scripture speaks of man derogatorily it calls him 'flesh.' How great is the distance between the spiritual glory of the Word of God and the stinking filth of our flesh!"

So Jesus not only became man, but he became man in the fullest sense, in the sense of our human mortality. The son of God descended from the height of his glory to assume the low and humiliating nature of a corruptible man, a mortal man.

Indeed, we know from,

Isa. 40:6 The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."

That word of God, that eternal word of God, who was with God in the beginning, actually appeared in the form of the grass that withers and the flowers that fall. Our Shorter Catechism properly call that his estate of humiliation. He became man. A man subject to all the infirmities and weaknesses of the flesh as we are, even unto death.

That doctrine is so practical, and so important? Why? We read in,

Hebr. 2:14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."

Also,

Hebr. 4:14 "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points

tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore he is now a high priest who can sympathize with the weakness of our human condition. And he dwelt among us. That word translated dwelt has a literal reference to a tent, or to a tabernacle. The word of God became flesh and tented among us. He tabernacled among us. And the emphasis is that his living among us was temporary.

A. God lived with us temporarily as a man.

He pitched his tent among us, so to speak. And became, in the flesh, that which the OT tabernacle represented. We read in,

Ex.40:34 “Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

“The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” That was the place of the presence of God’s glory. That was the place which represented the very presence of God among his people. And Jesus is the fullness of what that OT tabernacle represents. He is the tabernacle in the flesh, for in him, even while he was in the flesh, “the glory of the Lord filled him.” In Jesus, we can rightly say that, “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

Meaning what?

B. God revealed the fullness of his glory in a man so that we could see it and comprehend it.

Again,

v.14 “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory...”

Whose glory? Whose glory did we behold in the person of Jesus Christ? God’s glory!

v.14b

Only Jesus could reveal the fullness of God’s glory, for only Jesus was God! Only the one described as “the only begotten of the father,” or perhaps even more accurately, “the one and only from the father.” Only he could reveal the fullness of the glory of God. We read further, in,

v.18

Only Jesus was at the Father’s side, an expression referring to the most intimate of relationships. Only Jesus knows the inner being and purposes of God. We read this about God in,

1 Tim.6:15 “...He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”

Unapproachable light. Inaccessible light. Whom no one has ever seen or can see. Because of the glory of that light. Because of the fullness of the glory of that light.

v.16

No one has seen God but God himself. No one has seen God the father except God the son. So for us to know God, someone must tell us about him. For us to understand and comprehend who God is, someone must tell us. That is why God revealed himself in Jesus, and the Apostle Paul says this about Jesus in,

Col. 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in

heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

So the knowledge of God is intimately connected with salvation. With reconciliation. God was pleased to have the fullness of his glory dwell in Jesus, so that in Jesus, he might reconcile us to himself. And save us from our sins.

This is not merely doctrine. It is certainly not empty doctrine, but rather doctrine that is necessary for life. For eternal life. To know God, you must know Jesus. To come to God, you must know Jesus. To be reconciled to God, you must know Jesus. For in Jesus, in the flesh, God revealed the fullness of his glory so that we could see and behold that glory. And so I declare to you that this was the most significant event in all of human history. God became man in the person of Jesus Christ.

And our great hope as God’s people, the great promise of Scripture, is that what happened temporarily at the incarnation will become permanent at the end of this age. In other words, at the end of this age, Jesus will live with his people forever. He will not tabernacle with them, or tent with them, in any temporary sense. The principle of Immanuel will not be a temporary experience. But a permanent one, and the fullness of all of God’s promises regarding the salvation of his people.

Rev.21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the

first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”

The permanent presence of God living with his people--that is our great hope for eternity. That is the very definition of heaven! And notice how that permanent presence of God among his people is further described,

Rev.21:22 “But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. 24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. 25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).”

Rev.22:5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”

No night. No darkness. Ever. For the presence of God with his people will be permanent. The light of the world will be the light of the world. And the incarnation was the firstfruits of all that. God with us. God became man in the person of Jesus Christ.

But let me ward off a common error in that.

II. JESUS CHRIST REMAINED GOD, EVEN AS A MAN.

There have been all sorts of heresies in the history of the church in this regard. From one extreme, those who believed that

Jesus ceased being fully God, gave up his essential nature as God. Man, but not fully God. To the other extreme that taught that Jesus, as God, was not really or fully a man. That he just appeared, or seemed to appear. That his incarnation was similar to the pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus in the OT. God, but not fully man.

The origin of those errors is easy to understand, for this is a hard doctrine. It's hard to me to explain, even after all these years of studying it. But I will openly declare the truth to you. Jesus Christ, "the eternal son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person forever."

Those words I quote from our WSC, written in 1647, four centuries. But actually, the fullest and most accurate definition of the two natures of Christ goes all the way back to the Council of Chalcedon, which met in 451 AD. 1572 years ago! And that definition has never been improved upon. The simple truth is that Jesus Christ remained God, even as a man.

A. As a man, Jesus remained the eternal son of God.

John the Baptist certainly understood that.

v.15

"He comes after me," says John, with obvious reference to chronological age, as well as in the progress of his ministry. John, a few months older than Jesus in the flesh, was the ministry of preparation. His ministry came first. Jesus came after him. But, "he ranks before me." He is preferred before me. He has a higher rank than I, as the NASB translates it. Jesus ranks far above John in power and glory. And John perfectly understood that.

v.27

Matt. 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

And John understood why that was the case, as well. Back in, v.15 "He was before me."

Jesus was born later than John, in the flesh. But he existed before John. From eternity. He was the eternal son of God.
v.1

Jesus would emphasize that eternal existence in his confrontation with the Pharisees, those self-righteous Jews who thought their human ancestry in the line of Abraham was all they needed to be counted among God's children. Jesus greatly offended them.

John 8:54 Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. 55 Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." 57 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

John understood that. He comprehended that. And that was why he could say so bluntly,

John 3:30 "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Jesus must always increase. We can never think highly enough of him. We can never exalt him too high. He is the eternal son of God, who remained the eternal son of God even

when he became man.

Which magnifies his humiliation all the more, for he voluntary gave up the right to exercise his authority in his humanity. He suffered and died, though he had the power to stop it. He took the form of a bonds slave, coming in the likeness of men. He humbled himself. Unto death. Though he still had the power of God!

B. As a man, Jesus retained all his authority as the son of God.

He had a higher rank than John. And he retains that highest rank today. He is the LORD Jesus Christ, and the demands of his lordship are upon every one of you who names the name of Jesus as your savior. He is your Lord, ruling and governing you and all the circumstances of your life with all the authority of the eternal son of God.

That Jesus, and only that Jesus as he is revealed so clearly in Scriptures, that Jesus is your savior. And he is the one before whom you must bow you knee and to whom you must submit yourself--your mind, your will, and your bodies. It is this Jesus, who is and was, and will forever be, the eternal son of God, it is he whom you must worship. It is he whom I call you to worship this morning. It is before his throne that I call you to bow. For he is God, and there is no other.

One final point about Jesus that is emphasized here, repeated in these verses,

III. AS A MAN, JESUS CHRIST EMBODIED GRACE AND TRUTH.

Those are the two words which the Scriptures use here to define who Jesus was, the two words which define his character and his mission. Grace and truth.

v.14

v.16-17

We'll look first at grace. Grace is unmerited favor. Undeserved blessing. Grace is that which causes you to receive something that you do not deserve and something that you have not earned. It's a gift. By definition, not the just compensation or wages paid for your own efforts.

In the context of the covenant, grace is the release from the curse of the covenant which we have in Christ. It is being freed from the condemnation of the covenant, the curse of the covenant inflicted upon covenant breakers. Specifically,

A. Jesus reveals God's grace which sets us free from the curse of the law.

And it is unending grace! Grace upon grace, as John writes in verse 16.

There was nothing wrong with the law, but it was preparatory in character. It revealed man's lost condition and it also foreshadowed his deliverance. But there was something that the law, as law, could not do. It could not provide grace so that transgressors could be pardoned and helped in time of need. The law, as law, could condemn a sinner. But it could not redeem him.

Gal.3:10 "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."

And so the revelation of grace was needed. The fullness of

grace. Grace which frees us from that curse. That's what came with Jesus Christ. Only in Christ is that condemnation of the law removed. Only in Christ is there freedom. Freedom to be called children!

Gal.4:4 "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Jesus Christ embodied grace. He is grace, in the flesh. And he is truth.

v.17

v.14 "...full of grace and truth."

And that truth also sets us free.

John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 8:36 "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

And what is the nature of that freedom? The freedom from the slavery to sin.

B. Jesus reveals the truth which sets us free from the bondage of sin.

The truth is extremely simple, and yet equally profound. Even life-changing. Jesus reveals the truth, he is the truth, which sets us free from the bondage of sin. A Christian, one truly born again by the power of the holy spirit, is not under the bondage of sin. You can resist sin.

Nor is the Christian under the curse of the law. You will be forgiven, even when you do sin. Can you think of a greater gift? Freedom from the power of sin and as well, from the condemnation that those deserves deserve. "The truth shall set you free." And, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Therefore, to any who would still be separated from Christ, to any who have not embraced Jesus Christ and have received him as your savior, to you, I would say this--these are the words of life. If you are trusting in yourself, in your own efforts or your own works, to get into heaven, you will fail. If you are attempting to live a good life and do what is right in order to please God or even to atone for your own sins, you will fail.

Your sins will condemn you to an eternal punishment of flaming fire and burning sulfur, in a place the Bible calls hell. And there is only one way to escape that just punishment which your sins deserve.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Surrender your life to him. And accept the gift of eternal life as it is given freely in him.

There is no other way.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

v.14

v.16

v.17

And that is why we recognize this holiday we call Christmas. Yet, we, too, all too often exchange the truth of this doctrine of Christ's incarnation for trivial substitutes. If you really think about it, Christmas gifts are quite trivial. When placed in the light of

eternity, when compared to the eternal glory that awaits you in heaven, whatever lies beneath your Christmas tree is of little importance or value. And those gifts that will sit under my Christmas tree are of little importance or value.

Oh, they have value to bring joy to the hearts and faces of our children, but not nearly the joy that Jesus can bring. You see, the world hasn't just taken the name of Jesus out of Christmas, it has taken Jesus out altogether. And in his place, we find a cheap substitute. A very trivial matter. In Jesus' place in the hearts and lives of so many people in our age of consumer greed we have placed the god of mammon. The god of materialism. The god of enjoyment and entertainment and recreation. The god of play has replaced the God of glory.

And so I proclaim to you with unashamed conviction and confidence the revelation of God among men. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Thus, by faith, people of God, may you continue to behold his glory. And worship him fully.