

*In the Flesh*

**John 1:14**

John Breon

A preacher's family was on the way to church one Christmas. One of the kids asked, "Dad, can we enjoy Christmas today or are you going to try to explain it?"

Most of us would rather celebrate and enjoy Christmas than to listen to an explanation of it. And yet, a little explanation, a little understanding, can help us celebrate and enjoy it even more. So I won't promise not to do any explaining, but mostly I want to awaken your imagination to what Christ's coming means and celebrate God's coming to us in Jesus. Since the gospel writers used hymns to do that, I'm going to let poets and songwriters be more prominent in what I say today.

Also, I want to focus mainly on v. 14. This is the Christmas story: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." In whatever ways and times the eternal Word had come to the world, only to have the door slammed in unbelief, now it's clear that a new and marvelous move has been made. The Word has come in flesh to live among us and to make God known to us. This is John's way of telling Luke's manger story and affirming Matthew's Emmanuel, God with us (Craddock).

Verses 1 and 14 are the only two verses in this section that mention "the Word" specifically. In v. 1 we read that the Word *was*; in v. 14, that the Word *became*. In v. 1 we see the Word *in God's presence*; in v. 14, we see the Word *among us*. In v. 1 the Word was *God*; in v. 14 the Word *became flesh*.

The Word is God's self expression, God's communication to us.

You and me we use so very many clumsy words,  
The noise of what we often say is not worth being heard.  
When the Father's Wisdom wanted to communicate his love,  
He spoke it in one final perfect Word.

He spoke the Incarnation and then so was born the Son.  
His final word was Jesus, He needed no other one.  
Spoke flesh and blood so He could bleed and make a way  
Divine.  
And so was born the baby who would die to make it mine.

And so the Father's fondest thought took on flesh and bone.  
He spoke the living luminous Word, at once His will was done.  
And so the transformation that in man had been unheard  
Took place in God the Father as He spoke that final Word.

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And so the Light became alive  
And manna became Man.  
Eternity stepped into time  
So we could understand.

He spoke the Incarnation and then so was born the Son.  
His final word was Jesus, He needed no other one.  
Spoke flesh and blood so He could bleed and make a way  
Divine.  
And so was born the baby who would die to make it mine.

(Michael Card, "The Final Word," *Immanuel* 19)

God's eternal Word, the eternal Son of God, became flesh. He became human. He was one of us and one with us. God's Son becoming human dignifies and affirms humanity as part of God's good creation. The body is not a prison-house or a tomb, as some have taught. And salvation is not escape from the body, but redemption of the whole person.

In Christ's Incarnation, the Creator becomes a creature. The Author writes himself into the story.

Ever since the time of John's Gospel, this truth has amazed all who see it. St. Augustine said it this way:

He lay in a manger and yet the world rested in his hands. As an infant, He was wordless and yet He was the Word Itself. Him whom the Heavens couldn't huddle, the lap of a single woman could easily cuddle. She was toting about on her hip Him Who carries her about the universe. (*Sermons to the People*, translated by William Griffin 60)

The Word became flesh/human and dwelt among us. The word for dwell there means "to pitch a tent." He pitched his tent with us.

When we think of pitching a tent, we probably think of camping trips. Most campers probably have at least one story of things going wrong, of the discomforts involved. Most campers probably wouldn't want to live in their tents all the time. Even when they have a great time camping, they are glad to get home.

The summer Nancy and I met, we were working as youth directors at her home church in Moore, OK. One of our events that summer was a youth camping trip. We took thirty-some kids and some adult sponsors to Jellystone National Park near Branson. Nancy had done lots of camping growing up. My only previous camping experience was a couple of Boy Scout overnights and staying outside in a friend's back yard.

On the way to Branson, one of our trailers had a flat tire. One of the other drivers stopped to help, but the other went on. When we got to the campground, it was dark and starting to rain. We finally found our campsite and somehow got the tents set up well enough to get to sleep. My admiration of Nancy began to grow as I saw how well she handled that situation. It turned out to be a great trip. And those adult sponsors liked to take some of the credit for Nancy and me getting together.

The eternal Word of God pitched his tent among us. Sent by the Father from the realm of glory on a mission to save us, he camped out with us. He lived here as one of us.

But the tent he pitched among us was not just any old tent. The word here refers to the tabernacle, that portable worship space the Israelites carried around in the wilderness. God's always been looking for ways to make his presence known to us, to dwell with us. The creation story in Genesis recalls descriptions of temple construction. Creation is God's

dwelling with God's image—human beings—set in it to represent God. Later, in the wilderness, the tabernacle was God's dwelling, the meeting of heaven and earth, in the midst of the people. Still later, the temple in Jerusalem was intended to be God's dwelling, where God's presence was made known. The glory of God—the shining light of God's presence—was seen dimly and temporarily in the tabernacle and the temple. Now it has come to stay in Jesus. The glory of God shines in and through Jesus. God makes himself known. Jesus is the coming together of heaven and earth. He is the tabernacle where we see God's glory. He is God's presence among us. He is God with us. In relationship with him, we, all of us together, are God's temple, God's dwelling. Someday, heaven and earth will be fully united and there will be no temple because God will dwell among his people fully and unhindered.

The birth of Jesus starts the process of new creation that finally leads to reunion with God and all creation flooded with the the glory and love and presence of God.

The eternal God, the Lord of the universe, squeezed into a human cell, grew inside a mama, and was born a human baby in a stable. Those who know him see his glory. And that glory shows us grace and truth. When God revealed his glory to Moses (Ex. 33, 34), God showed his *steadfast love* and *faithfulness*. Jesus embodies God's love and faithfulness, God's grace and truth.

Let's praise him. Let's adore him. Let's welcome him into our lives. Let's give ourselves to him in loving commitment.

Charles Wesley is Methodism's poet. One of his lesser known Christmas hymns celebrates the reality of the Incarnation and calls us to join in:

Let earth and heaven combine  
Angels and men agree,  
To praise in songs divine  
The incarnate deity,  
Our God contracted to a span  
Incomprehensibly made man.

He laid His glory by.  
    He wrapped Him in our clay,  
Unmarked by human eye,  
    The latent Godhead lay;  
Infant of days He here became,  
    And bore the mild Immanuel's name.

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He deigns in flesh to appear  
    Widest extremes to join;  
To bring our vileness near,  
    And make us all divine:  
And we the life of God shall know,  
    For God is manifest below.

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                    (Cited in William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*,  
                    218)

Sometimes it's best to sing and celebrate rather than to explain.  
Here's one more quote from Augustine at Christmas:

So after all this sermonizing, may the world rejoice in those who believe all this!

To save these lucky folk, He came through the one the world had made.

The Creator of Mary is also the Son of Mary.

The Son of David and the Lord of David.

The seed of Abraham before there was an Abraham.

Maker of the earth and made on earth.

Creator of the heavens and created under the sky.

He's "the day the Lord has made" (Ps 118:24).

"He's the light of my heart" (Song of Songs 3:11).

Let's stroll in the light of His aura!

Let's rejoice in His presence!

Let's be truly glad He's here with us today, of all days! (Griffin, 78-79)