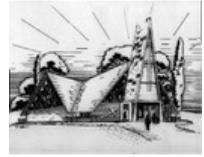




Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for Christmas Day (Proper B) 2017

The Word became Flesh!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

The Word of God for this Sermon is written in John 1, 1-18:

•^{ESV} **1**In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was turned toward God, and the Word was God. **2**He was in the Beginning, turned toward God. **3**All things came to pass through him, and apart from him not one thing came to pass. What has come to pass **4**in him was life, and the Life was the Light of men. **5**Indeed, the Light continues to shine in the darkness, and the darkness has not been able to put it out.

• **6**There appeared a man having been sent as a messenger from God. His name was John. **7**This man came for witness, that is, to bear witness to the Light, so that all might come to believe [the Light] through him. **8**He himself was not the Light, but [he came] to bear witness to the Light. **9**[The Word] was the real Light, who, coming into the world, casts light upon every person. **10**He was in the world, and the world had come to be through him, and yet the world did not acknowledge him. **11**He came to his own land, but his own people did not accept him. **12**But as many as received him, to them he gave the authority to become children of God, that is, to those who believe in his Name, **13**who [were begotten] not by natural descent nor from carnal desire nor from the will of man, but were begotten from God.

• **14**And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory that belongs to the only [Son] from the Father, “The Full Gift of the Truth.” **15**John bears witness to him and cries out, saying, “This is the one of whom I said, ‘He who is following me has become my superior, because in comparison to me he was [always] first.’ ” **16**For from his fullness we have all received, indeed, a gift in place of a gift. **17**For the Law was given through Moses, [but] the gift of the Truth came to pass through Jesus Christ. **18**No one has ever seen God. The only [Son], himself God, who exists in the bosom of the Father, he is the one who has made [the Truth] known.

• **Let us pray:** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds so that we will see the light as we hear the Word become Flesh speak to us. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of God!**

• Whilst Matthew and Luke wrote about Jesus' birth explicitly, the Gospel of John goes back right to the beginning, even before the beginning of Creation and reveals to us where Jesus came from.

- Where did John get this revelation? John was the youngest of Jesus' Apostles. He got this revelation knowledge directly from Jesus Himself. So, here we have words which only Jesus has given His disciples. He is the only one who was with God the Father and the Holy Spirit before the beginning of Creation.
- What does it mean when the Gospel of John says, *"in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God!"*
- First of all it says that God is a being who speaks, who communicates. God is, and has always been, in a conversation with the Word. This speech, this conversation, this Word of God became flesh. Here we need to be precise: This is not the same as God calling a human being through whom He speaks, like He did with John the Baptizer, the voice in the wilderness. The Word became flesh is: The eternal Word of God became flesh. So, from the start we have two natures becoming one person.
- Therefore, Jesus is much more than a witness of God- He is God Himself, God in the flesh. Here is the act of God all people wished for, that God would reveal Himself. Well, that is what He did!
- Jesus, the Word of God, was born through Mary. In Bethlehem, amongst the nation of God, in a manger. Nobody expected God to enter our world in such a "normal" such an "everyday" kind of way, if one only looked at the birth apart from the Word of God. Who was Mary? Young girl from Galilee? Who were the Jews? They were oppressed by the Romans. Then, the birth, so completely unspectacular!
- God revealed Himself, but nobody recognised Him. He came to His own people, but they did not accept Him! Right there we see the blindness of sin. Our natural concept of God is so far removed from who God really is! His own people did not recognise Him.
- The real God comes to earth and people start complaining, because He is not as they assumed God would be. They want the real God, they cry out for Him to come down and show Himself, yet when He comes, authentically, in person, they don't like what they see! On the one hand He is too common, looks like a real human being, seemingly born like all of us. On the other hand, when He does and says things which go way above our heads, humankind shakes its head and says, we cannot measure what you say with our instruments! We have no proof of the things you are saying and doing.
- However, such a god which would measure up to our standards, which would be adored by the world, which would immediately be accepted and recognised by all people, such a god is also mentioned in the Word of God, namely idol. Idols are very popular in the world today, "as long as you believe" ... In what? Whatever you choose! That's idol worship.
- Interestingly, such idols fit nicely with other idols. Every idol for itself! You have

your idol, I have my idol, as long as we are all happy. And if you are tired of your old idol, you can go for an upgrade, do some idol-shopping on the internet until you find the next idol, who answers your questions.

- What does this God, who speaks to us through the incarnate Word, what was *His* main mission, what did *He* come to speak to us about, what did *He* come to do? We can also ask, what Glory distinguishes Him from all idols and false gods?

- Now, if you want to come to know another being, what's inside that person, there is only one way to find out, and that is you have to listen to what that other person says. In this case it is John speaking to us about what He had received from Jesus listening to Him:

- ^{ESV}[14]: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

- We have seen His glory, writes John. Can we also say that? Have you seen His Glory? What is God's Glory? This is a crucial question. In OT times the Glory of God was revealed by the Torah, the Law of God, which was a gift God gave through Moses to His people of the Old Covenant. But that was the fore-shadow, pointing forward to the Grace and Truth that came to pass, that was fulfilled in Christ.

- So, Christ is the Glory of God. In what way? The incarnate “Word” is the “full” and complete expression of divine love and faithfulness that is granted as a gift to those who believe. We can summarise by saying, Jesus is “The Full Gift of the Truth.”

- In other words, the Law of God given to Moses revealed the Glory of God to Israel. Moses' face was shining after receiving the Law of God.

- However, the person Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, is Himself the fulfilment of God's Glory. In Christ the full gift of God's truth was present on earth and the fullness of God's glory was present in Him.

- Jesus was filled with Grace and Truth of God. At the beginning of the universe, at the beginning of Creation, we have God full of Love and Grace creating the heavens and the earth. The Word of Grace lies at the beginning of everything. The Word of Grace fulfils the Law and order of God. The Grace of God is at the centre of all. And Jesus is that Word of Grace becoming flesh.

- And now, we have to press forward and ask, what is the Glory of God then, in real terms, concretely, because John said, they had seen the Glory of God. What was he referring to? Did he mean the miracles Jesus did? To be sure, the miracles are signs of something even more glorious. They reveal the Glory of God, they participate in the Glory of God by pointing to something else which is the main manifestation of the Glory of God!

- In chapter 12, when Greeks came to see Jesus, Jesus takes this as a sign that *“the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!”* [Joh 12:24.] The Glory of God is

fulfilled in the Death of Jesus, as He is lifted up on the Cross to be glorified!

• This is crucial, because, amongst many things, this reveals most prominently, that as fallen human beings we are looking for God's Glory in all the wrong places. This shows, how wrong we are about God. What seems to be the greatest fall, the greatest shame, of God, is His most glorious Glory. He didn't die for Himself! He died for us. He died for you. Here again, His death alone wouldn't have helped us, if it hadn't been for the Word of God who spoke and gave His disciples the right understanding of what His death is, what it accomplished for us.

• So, to come back to our question, can we also say that we have seen His glory? Yes, we can, because we believe His Word. By realising that there on the cross, Jesus revealed and fulfilled the Glory of God, for us. The Grace of God shines forth. The immense Love of God towards us fallen human beings, which drives and keeps the whole universe alive, until the Last Day, is revealed to us. Do you see the Glory of God?

• This is why Jesus took the lowly humble road, since His birth, because the Glory He came to reveal, that what distinguishes the real God from other idols and prosperity ideals, was not to be found beyond the incarnate Word, was not to be experienced outside the Word of the Cross, but inside the incarnate Christ and by hearing the Word of the Cross! All other miraculous works of God where signs pointing towards the most glorious Glory of God.

• This is what God wants to speak to us about! This is His main theme and what we need to hear the most. This is God's gift, His full gift of the Truth, to us. Receive it with joy! Blessed Christmas! **Amen.**

• *The Lord Jesus Christ says: "Surely I am coming soon.'Amen. Come. Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you." Amen.*