

Sermon
December 24, 2019 Christmas Eve

Covenant Presbyterian Church
Rev. Zeta T. Lamberson

The Word Became Flesh
Isaiah 9:2-7; John 1:1-14

Something mysterious happened tonight over 2019 years ago. Something that had been in the works since the beginning of time. A mystery that the prophets had foretold of a great light shining in the darkness that would bring joy; of a child who was to be born and reign over the house of David. One who would be called *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. A mystery that writers, storytellers and musicians have been trying to describe and explain for centuries. A mystery that draws us to worship year after year on this night for we want to experience the mystery again and hear the story retold.

A story of a man named Joseph and a woman named Mary. A story of angels telling them of a child to be born who should be named Jesus. A story that takes place in the little town of Bethlehem in Judea. A story about a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger for there was no room in the inn. A story about angels proclaiming the birth to the shepherds in the fields watching their sheep. Of the good news they proclaimed of a great joy for all the people that *born this day in the city of David was a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*. A story of shepherds who went to see this thing that had happened and discovered Mary and Joseph and the baby in the manger just as the angels had said. A story that time after time reminds us of the mystery surrounding this birth. A mystery so profound that it changed the world.

And no where is this mystery more powerfully heard than in the first chapter of the gospel of John. “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*” God who spoke and created the world and all that is in it. God was the Word and the

Word was God. *All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.* This God who created everything was the Word and what came into being was life itself. God created life and that life was the light of the world. The light that shines in the darkness.

But the real mystery is that the Word - God - became life in the flesh. God took on a human form that we might come to know him more intimately. And God did not come as a grown human being - it wasn't like he beamed himself into our world - no. God chose to come through the laws of nature that he had created - in the womb of a woman, Mary. He chose Joseph of the house and lineage of David to be the child's earthly father. God chose to take nine months to form and shape this precious child in Mary's womb - one of the greatest mysteries of life. The Word became flesh, not in a king's palace, but in a simple animal shelter where his mother laid him in a manger to sleep. He cried. He cooed. He wet his diaper. He nursed at Mary's breast. The divine God became human. He had skin and bones as we have. He would bleed and scar just as we do. God loved us so much that he sent his Son in the flesh into the world. And we call this mystery the Incarnation.

Have you ever heard the story of the little girl who was frightened at night during a thunderstorm. She cried out to her Daddy, "Help me."

Her Daddy said, "Honey, God loves you and will take care of you."

Another bolt of lighting and clap of thunder caused the girl to cry out again, "Daddy!"

Her Daddy gave her the same response, "Honey, God loves you and will take care of you."

The storm raged again and the frightened girl yelled again. Her Daddy's response was the

same.

But the frightened girl replied, "Daddy, I know that God loves me, but right now I need someone with skin on."

God knew we needed someone with skin on. The baby Jesus is that person. Someone who could reach out and hold us, touch us and comfort us. Someone to be counted on. Someone who would be with us at all times. God knew we needed someone with skin on to give us hope and peace - to ease our fears and calm our nerves. To be present with us.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Greek word translated "dwelt" in this verse means literally "lived in a tent". It means to take up residence. In Scripture to dwell, or to tabernacle is a Biblical metaphor for God's presence for it is the word used of the tabernacle or tent of meeting where the Lord's presence dwelt in the wilderness. It was where the people went to encounter God. He "*dwelt among us*" implies that God himself was present in the flesh. What we are being told is that God moved in with us. He did not come as a guest or a visitor but he moved in - 100% lock, stock and barrel. And he hasn't left. He is still dwelling with us for Jesus has become the place where we meet God, displacing the tent or the temple. Jesus is the visible presence of God - the Word made flesh. We have seen his glory and when he dwells with us we know that he is God's Son. When we have seen the Son, we have seen the Father. When we know the Son, we know the Father. That is the mystery of the incarnation. God dwells with us in the person of his Son.

And the power behind this mystery is that *to all who receive him, who believe in his name, he gives power to become children of God*. Because the word became flesh and dwelt among us, if we believe, if we receive him into our hearts we have power as the children of God

- no matter what we have done, no matter who we have hurt, no matter how many times we have sinned. We are the children of God because the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us was full of grace and truth. All God asks is that we take Jesus into our hearts, seek forgiveness and ask him to dwell continuously with us to lead us and guide us.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and his life was the light of all people. His light shines in the darkness. It cannot be extinguished. So we come this night to light candles. To remember that the light shines in the darkness. His light is a reminder that he dwells with us for we are his children, his disciples, his followers. We are those who have received him, those who believe in him. His light leads us to his grace and his truth. If you have never received him into your heart all you need to do is ask. His light and life is ready to spark your life. But know my friends that his grace and truth came at a cost. But God was willing to pay the cost so that we might have life and light. That is the mystery that the Christ Child reminds us of this night.

During the first World War it was a custom in England for people to put a lighted candle in the window for every one of their sons who had gone into battle and had given his life to free us from fear and the threat of slavery.

One night after evening vespers an English father was walking home from church with his little son. As they walked the people began to place lighted candles in their windows.

“Why are they putting candles in the window?” The little boy asked his father.

“Well, you see, my son, that means they have given a son into the service of the war - men who die that you might live in safety and peace.”

The boy was greatly impressed, and as little boys will, he made a game out of counting

the lighted candles in the windows.

“Look, Daddy,” he cried out, “look over there. There are two candles in that window. They must have given two sons - and over there are three!”

As they walked along they came to a vacant lot; there was no house or trees, just a big patch of evening blue sky with the Northern Star shining bright and clear.

The little boy jumped for joy, clapped his hands and danced. “Look, there’s a light in God’s window - he too must have given a son.” (A Sign in the Straw, Richard Carl Hoefler, p. 124)

And he did. God gave his Son - *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth* - and he died that we might have life. That his light might continue to shine throughout the world as a reminder of that sacrifice. So the mystery continues - birth, life, death - but the light continues to shine in the night - the true Light that enlightens everyone reminds us that the Word made flesh dwells with us today and everyday.

As we light our candles in a few minutes from the Christ candle and we experience the power of light being passed from one person to another bringing light into our community may we reflect on the mystery, the story and the light. For they remind us that the baby born in the manger was the Word made flesh who dwells with us today and every day. Friends, may we spread the light to others so that all the world might receive the Word made flesh this night through the baby born in Bethlehem.