

The Word Became Flesh John 1:14 Christmas Day 2016

So if you are going to see close relatives, or have them with you today, you know what I'm talking about when I say being there is better than a phone call. And even it's a video call, being there is still way better than that. So you understand if Cheryl and I might just a bit eager today to see, hear, and hug our grandchildren this week. Maybe after a week the hearing part may not be all that wonderful, but being there is still better than not being there.

God thought so too. He loved all the people in this world so much that he wanted to do more than just tell them through prophets and do telekinetic miracles that brought down fire, stopped the sun, raised up manna in the morning and rained down quail at night. It wasn't the same as being there. So he stepped out of his paradise and decided to be here with us.

Our Lord entered time and space and took on human flesh. What we call the second person of the holy Trinity did that. Being of the same nature as God, or God's son, he was conceived by the Spirit of God in the womb of his human mother Mary.

This makes the God we worship unique in all religions. No other so-called deity can lay claim to such a miracle. No other so-called God loved his people so much that he decided it was better to be with them rather than just above them.

We marvel not only that He did come to us in the flesh, but also at how he chose to do so: Not in a flaming chariot descending on the sky to toss lightning bolts at sinners. In fact, not in a way that would be at all alarming or fearful. Paul put it this way in his letter to the Philippians: *"though he was in the form of God, Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

He came humbly, sacrificially to serve, to be God's spokesman to the world. His Words were at first spoken in calls to repent and words of forgiveness and compassion. But ultimately, he acted them out, making his warning and compassion stick. He bore His cross, showing by his sacrificial death as punishment for sin, both the serious of sin and his love for sinners.

I like to imagine that when Jesus was asked how much he loved the world, he said, "This much" as he stretched out his arms wide so his hands could be

nailed to the cross. That Jesus was born that isn't nearly the best part of Christmas. That He was born to die is the main point. He was born for a mission that wasn't complete until he died, was buried, and rose from the grave. He was born to give us rebirth.

But it is the beautiful Christmas card view that captures our thoughts and holds our awe. We might wonder what it would have been like to see this in person. Or we might yearn for Jesus to be as real and with us now as he was when he first came in the flesh.

But the Good News is that He is still with us. Where two or three or gathered in my name, there am I, he said. Ask anything in my name, and you will receive it. Ask, seek, and knock, and it will be given to you, you will find, and the door will be open to you. Take eat, this is my body, take drink, this is my blood. Does that sound like Jesus is absent or present? He rules everywhere, but makes himself known to His people in the means of prayer and praise and word and sacrament.

A pastor tells the story of an 87 year old nursing home resident named Hattie. He writes, "Our visits were genuine and stimulating. As her pastor, I was one of her few contacts with the outside world. Of course there were a few church people who visited. Most of her family lived far away and rarely visited. Curious, one day I asked her, "Why do you always want to see me?" "Because you come for God."

That's what Christmas is. Jesus coming for God, delivering forgiveness in person by word and deed. Luther said Jesus is the "mirror of the Father's heart". Does God love you. He came down in person to tell you. How much does He love you? This much? (arms stretched). Amen.