

“The Word Became Flesh” (When God Got Personal)
January 5, 2025
Second Sunday of Christmas
Psalm 139:1-6,13-16 & John 1:1-14
Preached at Messiah Lutheran, Joliet Illinois
by Pastor David Nygard

All Bible passages are taken from the New International Version (NIV)

Psalm 139:1-4, 13-16 ¹ You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely... ¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; **all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.**

John 1:1-14 ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ **He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.** ¹¹ **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.** ¹² **Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...** ¹⁴ 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.**

Grace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. I hope that you had a merry Christmas. Happy New Year. Our church looks so beautiful this morning, the Christmas trees, the red poinsettias, the candles and wreaths.

Best of all are the Christmas hymns. If you need some peace and faith in your heart, try listening to your favorite Christmas carols. I love the chorus **“Emmanuel”**. “Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His name is called Emmanuel; God with us, revealed in us; His name is called Emmanuel”.

(Bob McGee, © 1976 C.S. MUSIC, The Hymnal, WORD MUSIC, p.134) Jesus is Emmanuel, “God with us”.

My sermon is called “The Word Became Flesh” (When God Got Personal).

Every Christmas I feel sorry for the atheists. I feel sorry for anyone who doesn't believe in a God who takes a personal interest in you, me and everyone. It's often true that individuals who find it difficult to feel close to people, also find it challenging to feel close to God.

The big reason that I feel sorry for the atheists is that they don't have any good holiday songs. What do they sing? Maybe they sing “Joy to the world, nothing happened.”? Instead of “Away in A Manger” they sing, “No way in a manger...” They might sing, “Angels We Have Heard On High – we don't believe in them either.” How sad that so many doubters celebrate Christmas without believing in Jesus the Savior. Christmas without Jesus is like piano music without Rose Ann.

Some people don't believe there is a God. Others think that he plays hide and seek. Some feel that God is too busy to bother with us. Other religions teach that the universe is filled with many gods; all of them petty, angry and impossible to please. Many cynics can't see God because all the hypocrites get in their way.

But in the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John paint a different picture. Did you know that there are three Christmas stories in the Bible? Matthew tells us about God's promise to Mary and Joseph, the birth in Bethlehem and the arrival of the Wisemen. Luke shares the promises given by an angel to Mary and Elizabeth, the birth in a stable and the joy of the shepherds. These stories are much loved.

It is in the introduction to John's Gospel; John 1:1-14, that we read a deeper, richer, more cryptic version of the Christmas story. It is usually read at Messiah on Christmas Eve. The church lights are turned off. The candles are lit. The light passes from person to person. We read from John chapter 1 and then sing “Silent Night”. **John tells us five ideas about Jesus that might surprise us.** It's all about when God got personal with you, me and everyone.

We read **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the**

beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:1-3)

Idea #1) Jesus was alive before time began. Before there was the universe, the sun and the stars, there was the Word. Jesus is the Word. Through him all things were made. Cryptic words.

Simply said, Jesus is more than a carpenter. He is more than a good teacher. Do you remember in the book of Genesis, how God said, **“Let there be light”** and there was light? The words that left God’s mouth created the light, the heavens and the earth. This creative power is called the Word. We read the “Word” was with God and the “Word” was God. Jesus is the Word. When pastors preach the “Word” on Sunday, Jesus creates faith within our hearts.

Why is it important to know that Jesus was physically and spiritually alive before time began? It’s important because that is when Jesus first loved us. He knew us by name. He made plans for our lives.

Paul explains, **“For he (God) chose us in him (Jesus) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight...” (Ephesians 1:4)** Long before we thought about Jesus, he began the plan to die for our sins, and to rise from the grave. Not one of us is an afterthought to God.

We read, **“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5)**

Idea #2) Jesus is the source of life and light. He is the author of life. One day, through Jesus we will live forever. Jesus is a light shining in the darkness. The darkness has not extinguished that light.

We live in a beautiful world that is often filled with darkness. An insurance CEO is murdered by a stranger in the street. Thousands of people flood the internet saying that he deserved it; healthcare doesn’t work, our premiums are too high. Our culture teaches us to demonize people who disagree with us and call them haters. Our children are surrounded by bullies and addiction. Yet even in this darkness the light shines. In this darkness, Sunday after Sunday, Jesus teaches us to love our enemies. He teaches us to share our blessings with others and to forgive people as God forgives us. By God’s grace we have hope.

We read, **“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.” (John 1:10)**

Idea #3) Jesus came into the world to become one of us. He wanted to know us better. But the people of this world didn't know him.

Do you ever feel alone, forgotten, anonymous? The psalm writer said, **“You have searched me, LORD... You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar... Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.” (Psalm 139:1-4)**

God knows our words before we say them and our thoughts before we think them. He knows what we are doing every moment. He knows the length of our life. But that wasn't enough. Jesus became one of us, to know us firsthand. He felt loneliness, fear, love and joy. When he was a teenager there were days when he couldn't unlock his school locker. But the world put him on a cross.

We read, **“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” (John 1:11-12)**

Idea #4) Jesus gives us the power to become children of God. Even if we reject Jesus, he never stops knocking on the door of our heart. He gives us the courage to say, “I believe in Jesus as my savior. I want to live for him.” If it hasn't happened to you yet, you are next!

We read, **“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.” (John 1:12-13)**

Idea #5) How do we know that the Word became one of us and lived with us? John and all the disciples were eyewitnesses. John writes **“We have seen his glory...”**

They heard Jesus preach. They saw him die on the cross and rise from the grave. Every disciple except for John died a horrible death defending their faith. All of them could have saved their lives, just by saying “We made it up.” No one dies for a lie. But you might be willing to die for the truth.

Today, we celebrate that the Word became flesh. It happened when God got personal. I have a story to share. It reminds me how personally Jesus watches over us.

I was in my first year in college. I lived in Saint Paul Minnesota. About twenty church friends were going to spend the weekend at the cabin of someone's uncle in Grantsburg, Wisconsin.

We loaded up five cars with food and people at the church. I was one of the drivers. When I stopped at the water fountain, Marsha was there. When I loaded up the luggage, Marsha was there. When people got into the cars, my friend Jack sat in the front with me. Marsha sat in the back with Claudia.

I knew that Marsha wasn't interested in me. We were dating other people. But I didn't know why she was following me. I always tell Karen not to worry about the girls that I dated in Minnesota. They are either dead, in prison or they became nuns.

I was driving the fifth car. When we got out of Saint Paul we should have taken the highway to the right that led to Wisconsin. But I thought that the other cars went straight ahead. I kept thinking, "We will catch up to them."

But a few hours passed by. We were lost in the middle of the state. This was before cellphones and GPS. I found a map and we drove several hours towards Grantsburg. When we got there, the sky was pitch black. The streets were empty.

We didn't know the name of the cabin owner, his phone number or address. It was then that I thought "Oh, Oh".

Anyone with any smarts would have parked the car on the main street under the brightest streetlight. But I drove several blocks off the main road and down a street that had no lights. I stopped the car.

The four of us talked. Then I said, "Maybe we should say a prayer and ask God for help." I said a short prayer. Jack said a prayer. Claudia said a prayer. Marsha didn't say a word. That didn't bother me because not everyone likes to pray in public.

We waited a while. Then we prayed a second time. I prayed. Jack prayed. Claudia prayed. Marsha didn't say a word.

I said that sometimes we have troubles or setbacks because we have unconfessed sins in our lives. Maybe we have problems because we don't give them to God.

Jack said "That's true. I read a Bible story last night about the armies of Israel having victory after victory. Suddenly they lost every battle. It happened because one soldier was stealing captured money. When he confessed his sin, the army won every battle." Jack got out of the car.

I said to Marsha, "Is there something bothering you?" Marsha said "Oh, Dave, when I saw you today, I knew that I had to tell you."

I don't remember her problem. I just said "Let's bow our heads. You tell God, your sin or problem. Say a silent prayer." We closed our eyes. Marsha said her prayer. The very moment that she said "Amen", Jack shouted, "There they are."

The very moment. We were parked in a dark street, three blocks from the main road, in a town that we had never seen before.

For all our friends knew, we had gone back to Saint Paul. But the very moment that Marsha said "Amen", they turned the corner and found us. I am not the hero in this story. I am the guy who kept getting lost.

Our friends found us for one reason. It happened because the Word became flesh and God got personal. There is not one thing that you or I go through that Jesus isn't there with us. Jesus is Emmanuel. Praise the Lord. He is God with us. If you believe it, say Amen. Amen.