

## Christmas Day

Christmas can be a wonderful distraction from Jesus. Instead of thinking and talking about who he really is we can do other things. A combination of warm feelings and a misreading of the Bible that gives a false impression. And we are all part of this. We give gifts and we sing familiar carols. We send cards showing snow on the ground. A star in the sky. A straw-filled stable. Sheep and shepherds. Three kings on camels.

Think for a moment about the words of some familiar carols.

*'How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given'* (but whenever was human birth a silent matter?);

and what about *the cattle lowing the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes* (but how human is a baby that doesn't cry?).

And what about *'See amid the winter snow* (yes, occasionally it does snow in Bethlehem) but not very often. And that snow covers some harsh realities that we would rather not think about.

That's why it's so good that every three years the church gives us the opening words of the gospel of John to hear today. No angels, no Mary, no Joseph, stable, no shepherds, no baby wrapped in cloth lying in a manger. Rather, something apparently quite different.

This gospel for today is something to read and take our time chewing over. It is altogether surprising, encouraging, wonderful and shocking.

We focus on just one verse – the last one – verse 14.

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*<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.<sup>1</sup>*

This is worth learning off by heart! Why?

Amongst other things it tells us answers to our deepest questions.

Firstly:

### **Is God real? I mean, really real?**

This verse says: “Yes! A thousand times yes!!”

Some people accuse Christians of being deluded. They poke fun at us, accusing us of worshipping “the flying spaghetti monster”.

Or that we are psychologically needy and want God to depend on, so we invent a father-figure we never had.

Or there just isn’t any evidence.

But the Bible says: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

Remember? John’s gospel starts off by speaking about “the Word”. It says, *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*

John is remembering all the ways in which God demonstrated in bygone days that he is real. He did this in the pages of the Old Testament. He expressed himself, which is how you demonstrate you are real. He expressed himself by speaking.

Who can forget Genesis, “and God said. . .”

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 1:1–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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And things happened when he spoke. He created everything that is. He revealed what he is truly like. He is not silent.

He rescued and delivered his people. He cares. And all this he did by speaking. By words. By a word.

But now people can really see this word is real. "*He is God*" says John – NOT "it is God" but "he" - the Word is a person, not a force.

But he is also *with God* – that is, the Word is alongside God. What?

We know how this puzzle is solved as we find out that John is talking about God the Father and God the Son. Not two gods, but one, yet two persons.

Keep hanging in there!

But how do we know all this?

Because the Word became flesh. God the Word took on meat, skin, bones. And became human – fully and completely human.

Now, we here today can't see, touch or listen to him directly. But we could have if we had been in the right place at the right time. In Israel in the first century around Galilee and Judea. We could have seen God in human meat, skin and bones. We could have touched him, seen him and heard him.

We didn't - but others did – and wrote down what they heard and saw – for us. And did it so we might know God in the person of the Word made flesh every bit as much as they did.

Which brings us to our second question.

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### Is God concerned?

Again, this gospel passage gives a very loud yes!!

<sup>14</sup> *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* <sup>2</sup>

It says *he made his dwelling among us.*

Old Testament folk had built a tent for God and then a temple. They had both been destroyed. But people knew that God the Creator had not stayed far away. In this picture of dwelling with them they understood that God had the deepest of concern for them.

To give them assurance of his love. To bless them with a beautifully enjoyable life as they depended on him. To protect them and provide for them. To be there for them. Tent and temple were the physical reminder that he had promised *“I will be your God and you will be my people”*.

But those pictures – the tent then the temple – 3 of them – had failed. They didn't last. God had something even better and more eternal.

He would actually become one of them. So we get, *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

This is just mind-blowing. No wonder our forerunners in the faith spent centuries working out what it means and gave us those marvelous creeds which say it so clearly.

Jesus – the Word of God, was filled with compassion for a world suffering the ravages of sin, its rejection of God. That's why the writer of the letter

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 1:1–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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to the Hebrews says, “*He was made like us in every way, yet was without sin.*” Is God concerned? The answer is here.

Thirdly,

### **Is God powerful?**

We don’t need to list all the problems and difficulties we and all others in our world face. Is God powerful to be able to deal with them?

Yes! Says the Bible:

Listen to the rest of the verse.

*We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*<sup>3</sup>

People had asked to see God – but it was not ‘til that Baby in a manger that their wish was fully granted.

There’s a lovely modern Christian song that has the line

*“Mary did you know . .*

*That when you kissed your baby boy*

*You kissed the face of God?”*

That’s God in her arms!

God in the manger!

But the gospel message is more than just that at a particular time and in a particular place, God was made human.

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 1:1–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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Our verse says:

Because of the glory of Jesus; because of grace and truth.

Which is John's way of talking about the cross.

For in the apparently upside down way of Christianity the glory of Jesus, the weightiness/importance/real significance of Jesus is in the cross.

It was there, he says himself, that he was glorified. His real importance demonstrated.

Graciousness/love was there in the Old Testament under Moses but only in a shadowy form. It is there in its infinite fullness at the cross.

Mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, freedom, heaven.

All humanity's problems are dealt with by the power of God in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends,

Let's give ourselves again to this One, God made Man, for us and for our salvation.