

25 December 2008
Christmas Day

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Word Became Flesh”

Text: John 1:14

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word became flesh.

He didn't have to. Nothing obligated the Father to send His only-begotten Son into our flesh. Nothing required the Son to do His Father's bidding and knit His divine nature to our human nature. Nothing forced the Spirit to come and overshadow the virgin Mary and conceive the Saviour in her womb. God didn't *have to* do any of it. But today, John tells us, He did.

The Word became flesh.

The eternal God took upon and into Himself our flesh and blood, body and soul. He didn't send another, He came Himself. And He was not belittled by doing so, we were exalted.

The Word became flesh.

The early church father, St. Bernard, pondered this mystery and thought that it was this wonder that caused Satan to fall - that he had foreknowledge of God's eternal resolution to become a man in time, and was offended. Insulted that God would become a man and not an angel. And so envious of mankind, and begrudging man the high honor of the incarnation, he despised God and was driven from heaven. The *holy* angels, however, as we heard last night, rejoiced in the goodness of God and could not be held back in their hymn of praise to the shepherds.

The Word became flesh.

He didn't have to, but was compelled to by His love for you. For He didn't just love men, or mankind - that's too general. He is incarnate because He loves you. Sinful you, unloveable you, rebellious you. *You who live as if God did not matter and as if you mattered most. You who have not honored our Lord's name as you should, and whose worship and prayers have faltered. You who have hurt others, failed to help more, and soiled your thoughts and desires with sin.* (from Rite for Individual Confession)

and Absolution, *Lutheran Service Book*, p 292) What the Creator made in love He does not discard; the Maker does not disown what He has made. He loves you still, and so He comes. *Of the Father's Love Begotten*. (LSB #384)

The Word became flesh.

Not just to live with us as one of us, **but to die for us**. He takes our human nature not to be an example for us and show us our potential, but to be our substitute. To take our place under the Law, under that dreadful sentence spoken to Adam: ***On the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.*** (Genesis 3) And so while we join Adam and indulge in what is forbidden in the midst of plenty, the Son of God leaves His plenty to become poor and lowly and hang on a cross. Giving His sinless life into death that we who are dead in sins might live.

The Word became flesh.

And is flesh still, for our Saviour is our Saviour not just for a time, but for eternity. Our flesh He did not leave in the grave - as if He were done with it after His crucifixion. No, for then the grave would have won and we would still be bound and captive to it. But the Son of God who was *born* as the God-man Jesus, now *lives* as the God-man Jesus forever, that in Him we too may live forever. His body raised to life eternal, that our bodies too will one day rise and live.

The Word became flesh.

And is flesh still as our Lord comes to us in that same body and blood today on this altar. That dreadful sentence once spoken to Adam has been reversed - and now the fruit of the Tree of Life is ours once again. And so while Adam ate and died, for you and me it has been proclaimed: *the day you eat of this, you shall surely live!* For the Word made flesh gives His flesh to you. **This is My body, this is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.** And we prodigals are welcomed home, given the seats of honor at the head of the heavenly Table, and feast upon the Lamb of God.

The Word became flesh.

And so St. Bernard rejoiced: *"Now I can see that God my Lord is not angry with me; for He is my flesh and blood and sits at the right hand of the heavenly Father as Lord over all creatures. If He were ill-disposed toward me, He would not have taken on my flesh and blood."*

The Word became flesh.

That's John's Christmas story. No angels, no journey to Bethlehem, no shepherds, no kings or wise men. For John, the Son of God made the journey down to us; He is both the Shepherd and the Lamb; He is the King of kings, and the wisdom of God. Take everything else about Christmas away, and you still have that. Even if all the carols, the lights, the trees, and the gifts disappear, ***the Word became flesh.***

Today, God has bared His holy arm and the devil has been put to flight.
Today, the Light has shined upon us who live in darkness and the shadow of death.
Today, the hopeless are given hope.
Today, the glory of God lies wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger.

Because today, ***the Word became flesh,*** and in Him we are forgiven.
In Him we have peace with God.
In Him, we are ***children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

The Word became flesh. And His name is Jesus, for He has saved His people from their sins. To Him be glory, honor, and adoration forever and ever. Amen.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.