

Christmas Day, A ✕ D 2008

John 1:1-14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 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 bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 A story from Dr. Luther: "The following tale is told about a coarse and brutal lout. While the words 'And was made man' were being sung in church, he remained standing, neither genuflecting nor removing his hat. He showed no reverence, but just stood there like a clod. All the others dropped to their knees when the Nicene Creed was prayed and chanted devoutly. Then the devil stepped up to him and hit him so hard it made his head spin. He cursed him gruesomely and said: 'May hell consume you, you boorish bum! If God had become an angel like me and the congregation sang: "God was made an angel" I would bend not only my knees but my whole body to the ground! Yes, I would crawl ten ells down into the ground. And you vile human creature, you stand there like a stick or a stone. You hear that God did not become an angel but a man like you, and you just stand there like a stick of wood!' Whether this story is true or not, it is nevertheless in accordance with the faith (Rom 12:6)." (Sermons on the Gospel of St. John AE 22:105)

2 If God became man, everything is different. If the Son of God became the Son of Mary, everything is different. If the eternal, Divine Word of God, the Word who was in the beginning, who was with God, who is God, through whom everything was created, took human flesh and dwelled among His creation, everything is different.

3 So the Church has for centuries genuflected—bowed to the knee—or bowed profoundly during the Nicene Creed's confession that God came not as an angel but as a man. He humbled Himself and permanently joined the fullness of His divinity to the fullness of humanity. God and man are joined together perfectly, neither sacrificing part of His divinity nor failing to assume any part of humanity. God became flesh: fully divine and fully human.

4 Everything comes down to the Incarnation, the taking-on-of-flesh of God. And it didn't begin at Christmas. The Incarnation began 9 months before Jesus was born, when, at the Angel Gabriel's announcement, the Word took flesh in Mary's womb. The Word took flesh and dwelled in the womb of the Virgin, the Word took flesh and dwelled in a manger, the Word took flesh and dwelled in Nazareth, the Word took flesh and dwelled in the midst of humanity, the Word took flesh and dwelled among us for one specific reason. God took human flesh, not so you could get a nice Christmas morning bounty, but so that you could receive eternal treasure. The flesh He took was like yours in every way—He cried when hungry, when He messed His swaddling clothes, or when He scraped His knee. His flesh was just like yours in every way except one—His flesh was completely human; yours is not.

5 Humanity was created sinless. Flesh never knew the corruption of sin and death until the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden. But Jesus' flesh is uncorrupted by sin. And so He was not destined for death, at least, not because of His own sin. But a victorious life was not the goal of the Incarnation. Jesus wasn't born to show you how to live a better life. He was born because you cannot live a better life. He was born, not to show you the way out of sin, but to take your sin upon Himself. The Incarnation happened so the Crucifixion could happen. God was born with human flesh to die the sinner's death.

6 God descended to His creation because you could not ascend to Him. So with the Lord's gift of faith in the Incarnate Jesus may you descend to the ground and genuflect in the Creed. It's an act of worship, and an act of confession, acknowledging God's holy condescension to save humanity from sin, to save you from sin and death.

7 It's the same reason we genuflect during the Lord's Supper. We genuflect during the consecration to worship Jesus who is truly present because of His words. He doesn't wait until you bring your lips to the table; His Body and Blood are present when He says He's present—at the consecration. And those of you whose knees will still allow double genuflect—you kneel—when receiving this precious Body and Blood. The same God who took flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the same God whose birth was so that He could die for your sins, comes to you this day with His same flesh and blood. This flesh and blood, as real as the flesh and blood in the womb of the Virgin, as real as the flesh and blood placed in the manger, as real as the flesh and blood nailed to the cross, as real as the flesh and blood that died and yet rose victorious over death, He gives to you to eat and drink today.

8 Don't feel guilty if your joints don't permit you to worship the Lord with knees bent. And don't feel constrained if the pew in front of you only permits a bow and not a genuflection (although, there's plenty of room to genuflect if you sit in the front pew). But don't be so proud that you're unwilling to worship this infant Savior, born to die for you, and the Body and Blood of the Crucified Savior, present on the Altar and placed in your mouth, both with your lips and also with your body. God became man so that man might dwell with God eternally. Merry Christmas.

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer

Hope, Jerseyville