

John 1:1-14

God became flesh

On this day of celebration, I bring to you grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Each of the four gospels begins with an account of Jesus' origins. Mark jumps straight to the beginning of the ministry of the man from Nazareth, with a brief introduction by John the Baptist to prepare the way. Matthew and Luke begin earlier, connecting Jesus' conception and birth to the prophecies of old and the generations that have gone before. John, however, is a little different. He takes us back further, right back to the beginning of time itself. Before anything was created, the Word existed. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

This carefully crafted statement uses the Greek word 'Logos', meaning 'word', and simultaneously identifies the Word as God and describes the Word as "with" and thus in some way separate from God. And this Word is present at creation. So John's gospel begins not with the conception of Jesus, but the conception of the cosmos. Before Jesus can be born into creation, creation itself must happen.

According to Genesis 1, God creates through the Word. God speaks, and the Word brings each created thing into being. In Ancient Greek thought, the Logos, the Word is the logic that permeates and structures the universe, the divine reason that orders and gives meaning to all that is. This divine Word is present throughout all creation. In and through all creation, in all parts and places, so the world is full of God and he fills all things, but without being encompassed or consumed by it. God is still at the same time outside and above all creatures. And then God takes on human flesh.

In John's account, there are no angels, no swaddling clothes, no shepherds and sheep entering the scene to draw attention from the essential point. Just God, through whom the world was created, the one who gives light to all people, become a human being. God has always been present in his creation, but now he is present in a special way for just one part of his creation. The Word became flesh and lived among us. Not just another creature, but flesh. Meaning human like you and me. Not similar to a human or appearing to be human, but real human flesh. God lived among us and died among us.

In this one human being, out of all the billions who have lived, God's own glory shone with life-giving light. In this one human being, the fullness of the divine nature was present. This primordial Word, the Logos, which was in the beginning with God, a partner in creation, in relationship with God and who is God, has now become human. The Word became flesh and lived among us, or dwelt among us, took up residence among us. And this dwelling of God is a deeply intimate, personal claim and assumes God's commitment to and continuity with God's people. Now God not only goes where God's people go but is who they are. And so God's Word has become not just a concept that's perceptible to human minds or a sound perceptible to human ears, not just a spiritual reality, but flesh.

Later in this same Gospel Jesus will use this same word flesh when he says, "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh". And two verses later: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you". This has been a point of challenge to the tendency of some Christians to emphasise the spiritual realm at the expense of the physical. At different times throughout history, leaders in parts of the church have dismissed earthly life and even the human body itself as unimportant, distracting, or even dangerous. But this human flesh of ours was good enough for Jesus. God chose to live a human life in a human body. And that body becomes the place of revelation where the glory of God is seen.

John's gospel makes the point that to Jesus is to see the Father. This is shown most clearly at Easter when Thomas finally meets the risen Jesus and declares, "My Lord and my God." The Word became flesh lets flesh see God. This is our Christmas good news of great joy for all people. And as children of God, we are invited to participate in that joyous news. Through us, in some small way, God's light shines, God's presence is made known. Not in the same way as the Word made flesh, but each in our own way, in our own corner of the world. The light of Christ shines at Christmas, and this same light shines through us, to the glory of God the Father.

So may this light shine in the dark corners of creation so that all the world may know that the Word became flesh to dwell among us, and to restore us and all creation. Thanks be to God. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.