

## Became Flesh

Nativity of our Lord – 12/25/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: John 1:1-18 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 14, [Literally from the original Greek, John says,] **“And the Word became flesh and tented/tabernacled among us, and we gazed upon His glory, glory as the only begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

### **Introduction**

- ✧ My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: They say great things come in small packages. Though it is certainly a cliché, it has never been truer than it is in our celebration this morning. Just look at Him there. Gaze intently and see how small He is. And yet when we look at this Child, lying there in the manger – as Paul says in Colossians 2:9, we see the One “in [whom] the whole fullness of the Godhead settles down in bodily form.” Or as you just heard John proclaim it in Holy Scripture, “The Word became flesh and tented/tabernacled among us, and we gazed upon His glory.”

### **I. God “Tabernacled” now In the Flesh**

- ✧ The Apostle John actually leaves the telling of the nativity story – that is the earthly side of Joseph and Mary’s journey to Bethlehem; the who, what and where of Jesus’ birth – including the shepherds; the visit of the Magi and Herod’s devious plots ... John leaves all of that to Matthew and Luke.
  - ➔ His role in the beginning of Jesus’ Gospel is to cut to the chase of what this first advent; this first coming of Christ in the flesh, really means – spiritually, theologically and eternally.
- ✧ So, what does it mean for John to say that “the Word became flesh and tented/tabernacled among us, and we gazed upon His glory?” (v.14)
  - ➔ It means that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity; the one eternal, indivisible God; of whom no one and nothing can ever be greater has, in Jesus, made Himself small, infant-small – even embryo-small at His conception – and wrapped Himself in swaddling cloths – all to give Himself for us and to us so that we might receive Him.
  - ➔ In fact, as both Priest and Sacrifice, Jesus came to offer Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice to atone for us; to set us right with God. As we are called to do in *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity! Pleased as Man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel!” (LSB 380:2).
- ✧ Of course, throughout Israel’s and Judah’s history, God had been “tenting” among His people in the Tabernacle; the tent of meeting, and then its more permanent replacement, the Temple. That itself was a remarkable thing – that the holy God would take up residence among unclean people to cleanse them.
  - ➔ Solomon knew how remarkable this was. At the Temple’s dedication he even asked, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!” (1 Kgs. 8:27). Yet God assured His people that there in the Temple they would see His glory; His holy presence. There He was present for them. There He even atoned for their sins and shared His holiness with them. This was how they became the holy people that He called them to be. Still, Solomon was right. Neither his temple nor all of heaven and earth could fully contain God.
- ✧ But now! Things have been ramped up to an entirely different level. Here God settles down among us in human flesh and blood; the Christ; the Word; the Son of God! This is a brand new temple, not of stone or wood, or fabric like the tabernacle. Those were just a shadow of what

was to come! Now the fullness of the Godhead has settled down forever in the flesh of Jesus. Now our human eyes can actually see the very Word of God in a real human body! Moses' tabernacle or Solomon's temple – they could never make that claim. God only inhabited those, but here He has become a part of humankind.

➔ It is truly a mystery for us to behold in real life and in faith. This is not the Word just stepping into flesh like a tent or a vehicle you can then step out of when you want. No, this is the glorious, perfect union of true God and true man in one human body. We call it the Incarnation! It's a mystery in which we rejoice; that we confess and adore and sing about as we do here today! As Jesus said in John 14:9, "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father," as verse 14 says, "full of grace and truth!"

## **II. Did God Take a Downgrade? Yes and No.**

✧ We'll return to that later. But for now, take a moment to fully consider how scandalous this fact sounds to all natural, human ways of thinking; to all so-called "logic". God a baby! God made something so feeble and small; so temporary as infant flesh and blood!

➔ Even Solomon's temple – made of stone – lasted like 400 years before the Babylonians destroyed it. And the second temple, renovated to such magnificence by Herod that it was the renown of the ancient world, lasted almost 600 years before the Romans destroyed it.

✧ From a worldly perspective, this looks like God has exchanged a more permanent; more lasting home for a lot more fragile one, doesn't it? So when the Son of God came in the weakness of our human flesh; when He was born of His virgin mother and became man, was God accepting a "downgrade" in His lodgings?

✧ Well, yes...and no. First, yes! Living in this world, we all have to admit that nothing our eyes see around us can last – nothing, except the ongoing cycle of death – one generation taking up the place of the one before it.

➔ Moses speaks of our fragile flesh and blood when he says to God in Psalm 90, "You return man to dust and say, 'Return, O children of man!' ... [We are] like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers" (Ps. 90:3, 5b–6). And then he tells us why: "For we are brought to an end by Your anger; by Your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence" (90:7–8). Yes, the sentence of death lies heavy on our fallen human race as generations come and go; separated from God by our sin; corrupted to the core of our being ever since the fall of Adam and Eve.

✧ But today we celebrate the sinless Son of God becoming man. The Word becoming flesh – weak, mortal flesh and blood that, some 30-years later, was tortured and hung lifeless on a cross. In fact, He came in our flesh so that He might bear our griefs; carry our sorrows; and be crushed under the weight of our guilt. The sinless...dying for the sinful. God the Son bearing the full, divine wrath against your sin and mine, so that we may never face that wrath for ourselves!

➔ It's true, the Word made flesh became withered grass and died...for us. So, yes. God downgraded His "lodgings" – He degraded Himself – for you; for me.

✧ But also, no. Because three days later, that same flesh-and-blood-Jesus rose to life – indestructible, immortal, divine, eternal life! Heaven and earth will pass away, but not this flesh and blood; not this Word made flesh for you! Even Solomon's and Herod's temples were both destroyed. But not this Temple! Not the resurrected, glorified, incarnate flesh-and-blood Christ. "Destroy this temple," Jesus said of His own body, "and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn. 2:19).

➔ And so, as usual, God turns the way we usually think about what is permanent and enduring upside down. This human flesh of Jesus lasts longer than the strongest stone; never ever to die again – ever! What you and I see in Jesus is the true, enduring, permanent, indestructible sanctuary of God, “the habitation of [God’s] house and the place where [His] glory dwells” (Ps. 26:8)!

### III. We Gaze Upon His Glory & Eternal Life – Now!

✧ John says it this way, “we gazed upon His glory, glory as the only begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The Greek word (θεάομαι, theaomai) translated there means much more than just to “see” something. It speaks of an extended gazing and contemplating upon something supernatural.

➔ Peter, James, and John all got a glimpse of that glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Remember: Jesus’ appearance changed; His clothes became dazzlingly white; His face shone like lightning. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus and in that moment, Peter pipes up – not knowing what he’s saying – and suggests that the disciples build three tents, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus.

✧ You see, what Peter did not put together yet was that with God now residing forevermore in human flesh, there could be no more tenting for God! The true Tabernacle of God was right there; before them in the very person of Jesus.

➔ And so, when the blinding light faded, whose face, alone, did Peter, James, and John see? Only the face of Jesus – the very Glory of God; veiled not by curtains but in the flesh of Jesus. He is the One of whom the Father said from heaven, “This is My beloved Son; listen to Him” (Mk. 9:7)!

✧ And that Glory would go down into the deepest and darkest of places – to places of suffering and pain and death; to crucifixion! Because this flesh-and-blood of Jesus cannot be separated from Jesus. From the moment of His conception, He never loses His true human nature. He is fully man and He is fully God forevermore. Where Jesus is, there is the full glory of God!

➔ We all struggle with this truth though. So often we are tempted to think that we must look somewhere other than Jesus to gain access to God. Like Peter, we think we can contain the Glory of God in ways that we make; that we control; outside of what God has given and commanded.

➔ We try to measure the fullness of our “God’s-glory-experiences” by how wonderful it makes us feel or how dark things seem to be. Simply put, we want God on our own terms. But God, the Father sets things straight when He points us to Jesus in human flesh and says, “This is My Son; listen to Him!”

➔ You see, the fullness of the glory and truth of Jesus-in-the-flesh is never diminished by whatever valleys or suffering or darkness we are going through, neither can it ever be increased by our mountain top, this-is-the-best-day-ever events and experiences. NO, wherever Jesus is with His people, there is the Glory and Presence of God in its fullest! Want proof? Think of the darkness of Gethsemane or the cross. It can’t get any darker. Or the brilliance of Easter morning or Christ’s ascension – the fullness and glory of “God with us,” veiled in the flesh of Jesus – it is the same in every instance.

✧ So, my dear people of God, His glory has settled down with you in your incarnate Lord, Jesus. The veiled “glory...full of grace and truth” comes to you and me here and now – eternal, indestructible. He’s the One who baptized you; who incorporated you into His holy Body, the church. He gives you His own resurrection life – indestructible, immortal, eternal, divine life – so that as Job declared, “in your flesh you shall see God” (Job 19:26).

- ➔ Yes, we wait for the day when Jesus appears again, for good. And when that Day comes, we will gaze upon His glory in the flesh and it will be plain to all. On that day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; the fullness of God in the flesh!
- ✘ For now, His glory is with us here. It's His voice that we heard earlier in the God-breathed Scriptures that were read. And very soon He will again come to you in His flesh and blood; according to His promise: "This is My body. This is My blood!"
  - ✘ So rejoice! Confess, praise, sing joyfully that Jesus, the Word made flesh, has come infant-small for us; wafer-small, sip-of-the-cup-small. And all to give Himself to us; to settle down and tent with us, today and forever. Amen.