

**John 1:1–18  
Christmas I  
December 31, 2017  
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**“And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

**The fullest statement of the Incarnation is found in the elegant Christological hymn of the Prologue to John’s Gospel. The phrase “the Word became flesh” is one treated with special reverence by Christians. It is the formula for the mystery of the Incarnation, the distinctive Christian claim. In the Word made flesh, God takes on not only actual flesh but also and most importantly the human condition.**

**John opens his Gospel by asserting that from the beginning the divine Son had a direct and creative role in shaping the physical order. By using the language of Genesis and the language of the beginning to shape his readers’ understanding of the person and work of Christ, the evangelist also rooted this world in the transcendent and timeless. He has come to dwell not only among us, but in us. The inclusion of this passage on the First**

**Sunday After Christmas emphasizes that Christmas is much more than the recitation of a birth story in Bethlehem.**

**Whereas the synoptic infancy narratives focus on the earthly origins of Jesus, John is concerned with the heavenly existence of the Word – “in the beginning” – outside the human constraints of time and place.**

**The real meaning behind Christmas is found in the cosmic reality underlying the nativity. In John, God’s incarnate son is one with the Divine. Christmas is, finally and ultimately, the extraordinary proclamation of the Incarnation, of God-with-us in the person of Jesus Christ, and of all that tells us about the nature of our God. The majestic hymn that opens the Gospel of John sets the stage for a whole new order of life, forged in the beginning of Creation with the presence of the Word, now made flesh among us, full of grace and truth. The essence of divinity is invested in our flesh; by God’s own action, God is not remote, but irrevocably enmeshed with us. God has chosen to act for our restoration by becoming human, fulfilling all that we hoped for, removing the barriers between us. Goodness has thrown in**

**its lot with us. Hope will never again be a stranger to us.**

**Heaven will never be closed to us again. If the Word is made flesh in us also, how can we not live as Jesus lived, and care for the suffering and work for reconciliation as he did? We serve them through our diverse ministries but we must ever be aware of what's left undone.**

**This past Thursday the Church commemorated the Feast of the Holy Innocents, the children Herod ordered slaughtered in an attempt to kill the newborn King of the Jews. Now, as was true then, the self-indulgence of those who will not see, is paid for out of the flesh of the innocents of the world. These are our brothers and sisters in Christ - we are the communion of saints. John's hymn is a love song, full of increasing light, celebrating the relationship between God and God's only child and then extending that intimate relationship to embrace all of humankind. These are powerful words that speak to us about the one who comes to us in power to make all things new for us - the exiles, the inhabitants of darkness. God loves a broken and fallen world, consumed with itself. And God sends his**

incarnate son to show that love, and to ask for our love in return. We are invited into relationship with the divine Logos or Word through which the world is both created and sustained. Now and again, we get a glimpse of what God is doing among us. Now and again the light shines so brightly in the darkness that nothing can dim it. Now and again people feel an upwelling of joy in their hearts, and they don't even know from whence it came.

The Fourth Gospel echoes Genesis with its opening, "In the beginning," as with the contrast between light and darkness. The latter, a frequent theme in John's Gospel and recalls the creation of day and night. The light Jesus brings cannot be overcome by the darkness. In the midst of our lowliness, in the time of our testing, the Lord appears among us. God enters our hearts with a love that cannot be extinguished. God offers us a guide to faith and salvation that no economic collapse can erode or cheapen.

The coming of Jesus presents us with a choice. We can be transformed by the power of the gospel to be God's people,

walking in God's way. Of we can reject him and continue business as usual. Business as usual means sitting in the darkness, shielding our eyes, and turning away from the life-giving light. In the words of priest and preacher Barbara Brown Taylor we have substituted liturgy for justice, fasted without offering the untouched food to the hungry, put on sackcloth without removing the yoke from the neck of the oppressed. We are not up to direct encounter with God. We want to be warmed, not burned, except with God there is no safe fire. Safe fire is our own invention. It is what we preach to people who, like us, would rather be bored than scared.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'We have become so accustomed to the idea of divine love and of God's coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God's coming should arouse in us. We are indifferent to the message, taking only the pleasant and agreeable out of it and forgetting the serious aspect, that the God of the world draws near to the people of our "little earth" and lays claim to us. The

coming of God is truly not only glad tidings, but first of all frightening news for everyone who has a conscience.

Only when we have felt the terror of the matter can we recognize the incomparable kindness. God comes into the very midst of evil and of death and judges the evil in us and in the world. And by judging us, God cleanses and sanctifies us, comes to us with grace and love.

God wants always to be with us, wherever we may be – in our sin, in our suffering and death. We are no longer alone; God is with us. We are no longer homeless; a bit of the eternal home itself has moved into us. We know that God's goodness will once again draw near. Jesus comes in judgment and grace....”

May we have the grace to bear our words of witness steadily and joyfully and humbly, and to incarnate those words in the flesh by active intervention for good, so that the light that we celebrate in this season may be known to those who know us

**and even those who don't, until the day we see that Light face to face and praise God for all eternity.**

**Amen.**