

And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us. That is the whole meaning of Christmas. The Word of God, who is God, took on human flesh, to reveal God to us, to live with us, and to redeem us.

At the end of the Book of Exodus, the people of Israel had completed the tabernacle. Everyone had made offerings of precious metals and precious stones for the furnishings of the tabernacle. Moses oversaw the people as they set up the tent, and placed the furnishings within it. Moses and Aaron completed the ritual for cleansing. Then, in the very last paragraph of the Book of Exodus we are told, “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

Even Moses, the one who spoke to God as one speaks with a friend, was not able to enter the tent of meeting when the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, only Moses and then, the high priests were allowed to enter the Holy of Holies where the mercy seat of God was placed. The high priest was only allowed to enter once a year after he completed all of the rituals for cleansing. There was almost a complete separation between God and humanity.

The Prophet Isaiah recognized this problem. In the Fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah we read, “Seek the Lord while he wills to be found. Call upon him when he draws near. Let the wicked forsake their ways, and the evil ones their thoughts, and let them turn to the Lord, and he will have compassion, and to our God for he will richly pardon.”

That sounds like good advice. Seek God, turn from evil, and God will have compassion. The next line points out the problem. Through the prophet, God says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

There is something in the human heart that compels us to seek God. It is a common memory from before sin entered the world. It is a hunger for that relationship that we were created to have with God. How can we find that relationship when His thoughts and ways and our thoughts and ways are so far apart? How can we seek God when he draws near if Moses could not enter the tent of meeting when the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle?

Isaiah went on to give us the solution. He said, “As rain and snow fall from the heavens, and return not again but water the earth, so is [God’s] word that goes forth from [his] mouth.”

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” We could not reach God, so God came to us. We could not approach God in His glory, so the Son of God humbled Himself, taking on the form of a servant.

In Jesus Christ we do not have just another enlightened teacher. In him we do not have just another prophet. In Jesus Christ we have God incarnate, God in person who can clarify what He has been saying from the beginning of creation. He can clarify that we were not created to be servants of the Sabbath, but that the principle of the Sabbath was given so that we might find

rest. He can clarify that in the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, God demonstrates that He will continue to provide for us, so we do not need to hold so tightly to what we have. Most of all, Jesus can clarify that God's desire is for us to be His children and not His slaves, that God's grace and mercy are greater than our sins. Because the Word became flesh, and lived among us, because God became incarnate, we can be certain that we know Him in the person of Jesus Christ.

Of course that is not the end of the story. St. John tells us, "The world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." There are honest misunderstandings when we truly do not hear what someone is saying to us. There are also times when we make a choice to misunderstand or when we choose to ignore the words spoken to us. It is possible for us to know what God has said and done in the person of Jesus Christ and refuse to accept Him.

There are some who find the notion that God will provide what we need to be a threatening idea. They have built their self-worth on the notion that they are the masters of their own destiny. They have grown proud of what they have accumulated for themselves. They draw pleasure from the deference of others who have less than they have. If they acknowledge that all that they have has come as a gift from God, they will lose themselves, they will lose what separates them from others.

There are some who would rather be slaves of God than children of God. The slave is obedient to earn the approval of the master. The child is obedient because they have the approval of their parent. The slave's value is found in what is produced. The child's value comes from his relationship to the parent. There are those who would rather try to earn God's favor than receive His love. They reject the Word that God has spoken in Christ and choose slavery over love.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. In Jesus Christ we have a full revelation of what God has been saying from the very beginning of creation. Often, the difficulty is not so much that we do not understand, but that we choose to hear something different. When we are confronted with the Word made flesh, we have a choice to make. We can choose to receive Him or reject Him, to see goodness or capriciousness in creation, to be children or slaves of God. St. John writes that the point of all that is to follow is to show us that Jesus is the Word incarnate and that He is the revelation of God. This is not just a nice story. It is not just one among many ideas about what God might be like. The Gospel of Christ is the revelation of God Himself. The Gospel of Christ is God speaking to remake men and women in His image once again. Will we choose to see God's goodness in creation? Will we choose to accept His invitation to become His children? If we receive Him, He will make us children of God.