

Christmas Day C 2021
John 1:1-14; Isaiah 52:7-10
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the one true God, now and forever. Amen.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. Let's pray...

What comes to mind when I say, "the work of Christmas"?

Shopping, wrapping presents, decorating, cleaning the house, buying groceries and cooking Christmas dinner? Getting ready for Santa and opening presents? Getting to church or the computer on time for the start of the Christmas service? I know for some it's a lot of work just getting through these days. Hard days of grief, sadness, depression. For some, the work includes planning liturgies and preparing sermons. We do a lot of work leading up to and in anticipation of Christmas.

But what's the real work of Christmas? Here's one suggestion by the poet, Howard Thurman:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart. ("The Work of Christmas" by Howard Thurman)

Maybe “the work of Christmas” is what it means for the Word to become flesh and live among us (John 1:14).

Maybe the Word becoming flesh and living among us only happens in the moments when “the work of Christmas,” is being done. There’s no question it’s about a particular person, Jesus Christ, but could it be more?

I think most of us hear about the Word becoming flesh and living among us and we immediately assume it’s about Jesus. Correct assumption. We see Jesus enfleshing the Word of God throughout his life; embodying forgiveness, love, mercy, peace, gentleness, nonviolence, wisdom, compassion, generosity. That’s his way of being and living.

So, yes, I do believe the Word became flesh in Jesus. But I also believe that the Word never stops becoming flesh. Jesus is the one in whom the Word became flesh, but like the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus extends his ministry by inviting us to participate in carrying his message of love to all corners of the earth. To find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among brothers, to make music in the heart - in summary: To feed people with his gospel of saving love. And that goes for animals too. Think of St Francis of Assisi and his sermon to the birds; God’s concern for the animals in Nineveh (Jonah 4:11), and God’s steadfast love, faithfulness, and righteous judgement in saving humans and animals alike (Psalm 34:5-6).

So, there’s my thesis. The Word becomes flesh in us, too.

Maybe the Word can and is intended to become flesh in us to enable us to continue Christ’s work of reminding the world of the Father’s love for his creation. Maybe that happens every time we show compassion, mercy, love, gentleness, peace, kindness, generosity - in every moment when we do “the work of Christmas.”

Have you ever loved or forgiven someone? Have you ever reached out to someone with compassion or gentleness? Have you ever responded with nonviolence and peace? Have you ever fed the hungry or cared for the sick? Has someone ever done those things for you?

If you answered yes to any one of those questions then you could also say, “And [once again] the Word became flesh and lived among us.” That’s part of the Christmas story.

It’s Christmas Day and

... the song of the angels is stilled,
... the star in the sky is gone,
... the kings and the princes are home,
... the shepherds are back with their flock.

So, where do we go from here? What do we do with this Word living among us?

Isaiah says, *‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns”’* (Isaiah 52:7).

Saints, Isaiah’s message was about the restoration of Israel; the end of their captivity in Babylon. Though doubts lingered about the power of the God of Israel, the soul-reviving message to God’s people from Isaiah was, “Your God reigns.” For us, Isaiah was prophesying the ultimate message of salvation and the eternal reign of Jesus Christ. Christ is the one who broke the chains of bondage to sin. Christ is the one who brought an end to the captivity experienced by those with no hope because of their alienation from God. Christ is the one who brought true freedom. Freedom from the eternal consequences of sin and freedom to experience life here to the fullest and life forever with him in heaven. Hallelujah! Jesus reigns, and through faith in him, we share in his kingdom!

Those who bring this good news, the message of salvation by grace through faith for the sake of Jesus, can be welcomed with great joy because of the message they carry. But this isn’t restricted only to pastors. All Christians are members of the royal priesthood of believers. All Christians are called to be messengers, with the message shared, the main event.

For Israel, the captivity experienced in Babylon was real. It hurt. It was destructive. It weighed heavily on their peace, happiness, and hope for the future. But the return to Zion was glorious! The message of God reigning was greeted with great joy and anticipation.

It's not so different for us. Sin is still real in our lives. It's destructive. It can cause deep hurt and brokenness. It can make us lose hope in forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption... And then God sends a messenger with the beautiful message of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection bring us forgiveness, peace, happiness, freedom, and hope through faith. And we are again reminded that the Lord Jesus reigns and loves us. A beautiful message, indeed!

Saints, be blessed this Christmas by the Word becoming flesh in you, and give thanks and praise that you've been chosen to participate in God's grand mission of spreading his infectious love throughout the world. The real work of Christmas is God's burden of becoming incarnate, taking on human flesh and living among us, obediently succumbing to the cross for our sins, and rising again to rebuild his temple among his chosen people. May we always treasure our Lord Jesus, and follow in his footsteps from the cradle to the grave and life beyond. Merry and blessed Christmas to you all. It's time "to make music in the heart" and sing for joy that God's Word became flesh and lives among us - his glorious Son, Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.