

THE WORD MADE FLESH

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SCRIPTURE: John 1:6-14 (Inspired Version)

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came into the world for a witness, to bear witness of the light, to bear record of the gospel through the Son, unto all, that through him men might believe. He was not the light, but came to bear witness of that light, which was the true light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world: even the Son of God. He who was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; only to them who believe on his name. He was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the same word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

When the angels over Bethlehem's plains announced to the shepherds, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord," they proclaimed a miracle. The child that was born in Bethlehem that night was both God and man. The Son to whom Mary gave birth was miraculously conceived by the Holy Ghost; he was the Son of God, the revelation of God to man. Yet he was contained in a human body, born of a woman of the lineage of Abraham and David.

Too much useless speculation about this miracle of incarnation may very easily blind the philosopher or even the theologian to the utter reality which is so simply stated in the scriptures -- that Jesus was the Word, the Logos, the God of creation, made flesh and sent to dwell among men for their salvation. The basic fact which the Christian accepts on faith and proves in his experience is that Jesus was both God and man -- that he was the Word made flesh which dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

Jesus was a unique, a miraculous combination. He was perfect God and perfect man. He was in the beginning with God. He partook fully of the nature of God -- of God's creative powers of his eternity, his might and glory, his love, his mercy, his wisdom, his eternity. He was in no sense inferior to God, save for the self-imposed limitations of the human flesh. He was made, Paul tells us in the brightness of God's glory, and in the express image of his person. In him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And although in the flesh Jesus always was subject to the will of the Father, there is no sense of inferiority in the subjection. "My Father and I are one," he said. He claimed for himself all the prerogatives of Deity -- power over life and death, power to forgive sin, power over Satan and the forces of evil, power to see past, present, and future as one.

If there was no deity in Jesus, then our whole Christian philosophy is based on a false premise. If Jesus was only a good man, a great teacher -- if his divinity differs from the divinity in us only in degree, but not in kind or quality, then he had no power to overcome death and sin and hell; and we are still dead in our sins, without hope for the here or for the hereafter. The mission which Jesus came to accomplish -- could have been accomplished only by a supernatural being, by Deity in human flesh.

It is necessary therefore that the Word should have been made flesh, and dwelt among us -- that in one man there should be united the personality of God and the personality of man. There are at least five reasons why this incarnation of Deity was necessary. First, because of the fall of Adam, sin had become a part of the inheritance of the human race. The tendency of sin is born into every human being; death

exists in every human body simultaneously with life. Even though man is made in the image of God and a little lower than the angels, the inborn tendency to sin is in every man. But no man is completely successful in the battle to overcome. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. It was necessary then that the Word be made flesh in Jesus Christ, to demonstrate to man how to live without sin in human flesh. Jesus was the only man who ever lived who completely overcame sin -- who never succumbed to temptation -- who was never guilty of personal sin.

Our of Jesus' victory over sin grows the second reason why the incarnation of God in Christ was necessary. Because the wages of sin is death, and all men have sinned, all men are helpless to escape death or overcome its power. As a manifestation of the power of Deity, as "very God of very God" (as one of the ancient creeds says) Jesus lived without sin; and because he owed no debt or penalty to sin, he could therefore voluntarily lay down his body in death and take it up again. By the power of Deity which was in him, Jesus overcame death for all men. He could not suffer death in the body without being incarnate in the body. He could not rise from the dead to break the power of death without himself becoming subject to death. But only because Jesus was both God and man could he rise from the dead by the power of his Deity.

Jesus need to live as God in the flesh for a third reason; because man needed to know God. In his sinful, mortal state, man could not bear the full glory of God, or comprehend his light, or power, or wisdom, or love. He could not approach God's presence and live. Christ was "veiled" in human flesh, so that man could see and comprehend. We are told that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," but by his incarnation in Jesus Christ God was brought within the bounds of man's perception and comprehension. There had been other revelations of God -- in Nature, through the prophets, through angels; but in Jesus was the climax, the zenith, the fulness of God's revelation to man.

The fourth reason for the appearance of Jesus in the flesh is that in fairness to man, God needed to experience humanity -- not for God's sake, but for man's sake. God, the Creator of man, has always known man. The Psalmist has written: "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." But man is not sure that God knows. He needs the assurance that God knows, that God has actually experienced the pains, the temptations, the pulls, the urges, the sorrows and privations and frustrations of human life -- that he has an advocate with the Father who was tempted in all points as we are tempted, yet was without sin.

The fifth reason why Jesus came in the flesh was that man needed to know what his own potentialities are; what he himself could be at his best. Jesus was a perfect example of human life lived at its best. His life was fully human, and fully divine. He was the first to live human life as it ought to be lived -- full, perfect, and in complete harmony with God. He could live this kind of life because it was God's life dwelling in him. In the same way we live at our best only as we surrender and let God's life live in us.

One more point, and we have finished. As Jesus brought Deity to humanity, so he also brought humanity to Deity. When he ascended to his Father, he took with him the glorified, perfected human body in which he had lived on earth. He was the culmination of the faith of Job, who said many centuries before, "Though my skinworms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." With death and sin and decay cast out of the body, it, like the spirit, shall again be restored to the presence of God as it was in Jesus Christ.

During this Christmas season, let us ponder anew the miracle of the Word made flesh, and again give thanks to God for his unspeakable gift of the Christ, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.