

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Danish Theologian, Soren Kiergaard, told a fairytale about a king who fell in love with a maid. For the longest time the king struggled with a question: “How should I declare my love? So he invited the wisest people in the kingdom to come with answers to his question. “Your highness,” said one of the wise men, “nothing could be simpler. Your majesty has but to appear in all your glory before the humble home of the maiden and instantly she will fall at your feet and be yours.” No said the king. I do not want to overpower her. I want her to share my love. “Then take her” said another wise man, “You are the king! Let her learn to love you.” “No,” said the king. “Forced love is no love at all.” The problem was that he was the King and she was a maid. The gap between the two seemed insurmountable. The king searched and searched for an answer until at last he knew what he had to do. It was the only think he could do.

So late that night, long after his counselors were asleep, the king slipped out of a side door in the palace and appeared before the humble home of the maid dressed in the clothes of a servant. Said Soren Kiergaard; “He came to us as one of us.”

It is not hard to see the point of the story. It is the same point that John is making in the first chapter of his Gospel. It is the reason why we are gathered here on Christmas morning to worship and to lift up our hearts. He came to us as one of us! And that is what I want to think about on Christmas day.

John said: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Allow me to explain.

One of my responsibilities as pastor is to perform weddings. That includes premarital counseling where I try to help couples understand what they are getting into. It also includes the wedding rehearsal which helps everyone know what they are supposed to do. One of the things that I am always careful about is the part of the service where I pronounce them husband and wife. During the counseling I say: “I will pronounce you husband and wife” or at the rehearsal I say: “Tomorrow I will pronounce you husband and wife.” Because according to Hebrew thought, if I were to say “I pronounce you husband and wife,” then they would be husband and wife. Call the bridesmaids and call the groomsmen, no need to get together on Saturday because if I say it before Saturday then you are married.

It is the pronouncement – it is the word that creates and makes it so.

This goes all the way back to the ancient Hebrews and you can see this reflected in the Bible. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... God said: “Let there be light and there was light... God said let there be water and there was water... God said let there be sky... land... and living creatures.” God spoke the Word and it was so. In Greek the word for Word is *logos*. And in our passage of scripture this morning John

begins his Gospel by telling us that in the beginning this *logos* – this Word was with God. This transcendent, creative, wonderful, awesome, glorious power was and is God.

The good news – the great news that we celebrate and proclaim on Christmas morning is that God has come to us as one of us. Do you know what that means? It means that God has made Himself known.

Years ago I was driving down I-85 and pulled over to the public rest stop and when I came out a very nice lady walked up to me and said: “God loves you very much.” Then she started talking religion to me. I asked: “How do you know that God loves me very much?” She said, “Well, it says so right here.” She showed me a book and explained that it was written by Guru so-in-so. Obviously she was a Hari Krishna. She was very nice and I was as nice as I could be to her. I said, “With all due respect, what Guru so-in-so said about God is not authoritative to me. It may be interesting. It may be insightful. He might be right. But it is not authoritative because I am a Christian. That means I believe that God has made himself known to us. If you ask me, what is God like? I believe He is like Jesus Christ. Would you like to hear about Him?”

Friends, the world struggles to understand God. The world can be an ugly, hateful, and misguided. There are times when the world can be a very dark place. Wouldn't it be wonderful if God himself came down to us? Wouldn't it be wonderful if God told us the truth – and showed us the way the truth and the life. What would it be like if God revealed himself to us? And the answer on Christmas morning is: he has.

John said: “In Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness. But the darkness has not overcome it.”

God has revealed himself to us! John said: “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only.” God has come to us as one of us and the truth of God is now known. It also means that God knows about us.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a Russian intellectual who spent eight years in a Soviet Prison camp and was then exiled until the fall of the Soviet Union, all because he wrote a private letter to a friend that criticized Joseph Stalin. It is hard for us to imagine what it would be like to be in a Siberian prison camp, but if you want to know you should read his books. It makes me cold just thinking about it. He experienced loneliness, bitterness, isolation, and almost died during those years of imprisonment. Of course, out of these experiences his writings challenged the Soviet Union's system of atheism, he called for a return to “Holy Russia,” and in his writings he shared his own personal struggle to reject his upbringing and discover what it means to be a Christian. He was raised an atheist, but his horrible imprisonment forced him to struggle with questions of faith. Is there a God? If so, does God know who I am and what I'm going through? Does God know? Does God care?

The answer is yes! God knows and God deeply cares, because God knows what it is like to be rejected. John said, “He was in the world but the world did not recognize him. He came to his own but his own received him not.” I hope that none of us will ever know

the kind of difficulties and rejection that Alexander Solzhenitsyn went through, but the good news on Christmas morning is that the Lord knows what it is like to be one of us, because he came to us as one of us. The old song says “No body knows the trouble I’ve seen” – then we look at the cross and say, “no one knows but Jesus.” He knows about me and you, and he deeply cares.

Finally, and most gloriously, John tells us that even though the world rejected him, even though the world received him not, the good news – the great news of the Christian faith – is that to all who receive him, (and there are still those who have not received him today) to all who believe in his name, he gives us the right to be children of God.

In 1998 the Washington Post asked their readers to submit stories of their faith journeys. The September 19th edition ran the story of Wendy Anderson who said: “If someone had asked me three years ago if I were more likely to become President of the United States or a Christian, I would have started singing ‘Hail to the Chief.’” Wendy Anderson is a Washington lawyer who works for one of our countries leading independent law firms. In the article she talked about her childhood feelings of inadequacy and low self-image, how she over-compensated by trying to tackle the world on her own, and the stress of it all. She began seeking when a loved one died and she, for the first time in her life, seriously considered what lies beyond this life. Her seeking led her to Church and then to Bible Studies and a realization of what was missing in her life. The greatest barrier to her faith was the question: “Can I really surrender control of my life to Christ?”

Her sister from Texas came to visit and after staying up that night talking about faith, Wendy Anderson surrendered. “Since that time everything has changed,” she said. “I still work at the same law firm but I now have a new direction. It is difficult to describe the radical way my perspective has changed. “I do not understand God completely... (who does?) but I know that God loves me. I know that He cares for me. But most of all I know that I have been forgiven. I didn’t become a Christian to feel good, but knowing that I belong to God feels wonderful.”

John said, to those who receive him. To all who believe in his name, he gives us the right to become children of God. Not children of biological descent, but rather he gives us the power to be born again of God.

I close with the words of James Allen Francis:

“He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home, he never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college or... traveled beyond 200 miles from where he was born. He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself....

The tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners

gambled for the only piece of property that He had on earth – his coat. He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Twenty long centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that we ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of humanity upon this earth as powerfully as that of one solitary life.”

Today we lift our heart in praise and worship and celebrate his birth. Merry Christmas, and happy birthday to our King!