

Greetings from God our Father and from Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and from the Holy Spirit. Amen

Christmas Day

The Word Remains Flesh

John 1:1–14

“Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain [Him]; how much less this house that I have built!” (1 Ki 8:27). That’s what Solomon said when he dedicated the first temple. Would God dwell in a place conceived in the mind of an architect and drawn up on blueprints, in a building constructed with carpenters’ squares and plumb lines, in a temple made by human hands? The answer came in the form of a cloud—the visible manifestation of the glory of the Lord—so thick that the priests couldn’t even minister in the temple. Yes, God would dwell on earth. Yet that was only for a time. Solomon’s temple was destroyed; a new one was eventually built in its place, but without the former glory.

Solomon’s temple was only a prelude for what would follow: the Word that was with God and that was God Himself, and the Word by whom God

made all things, this Word came into the world. “The Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14)—a temple made without hands—conceived in Mary’s womb, constructed with genes and blood vessels. God became man, a real historical human person, body and soul, complete with a human nature, personality, will, and intellect, having a name and a birthday. Just like you. Will God really dwell on earth? Today the Church answers with a resounding yes. Yes, God has taken up residence on earth in the Word made flesh.

In Jesus Christ, God Has Come to Stay.

This is what it means to say that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (v 14): God has chosen to share permanently in our humanity. There will be no “For Sale” sign or foreclosure on this dwelling; God will not un-become man. What God had intended from the beginning—for heaven and earth to be united—He does finally and permanently by becoming man in Jesus Christ. Mockery, beatings, crucifixion, and even death: God will not move out; the incarnation will not cease. As Jesus said, “Destroy this temple”—the temple of his body—“and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19). Two natures, divine and human, united in the person of Jesus Christ

at his conception, never again to be separated; at once fully man and fully God.

In the person of Jesus Christ, in his flesh, the apostles beheld, heard, and handled the eternal God, the one who has life in Himself and from whom all life proceeds. As they said, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands” (1 Jn 1:1). Even in Bethlehem, the eternal God could be heard, seen, and touched: wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The human nature was permeated by—not replaced or swallowed up by—the divine nature. From conception, Jesus Christ was the all-knowing, all-powerful, omnipresent God. As John said, “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14). The glory of God that once dwelt in Solomon’s temple had returned to Zion in a permanent dwelling—as a man, Jesus Christ.

God did not come to earth merely to look around, for sightseeing or tourism or “experience,” in the way that we might travel to London or Berlin or Cairo. The human nature that he assumed wasn’t a mask or camouflage. He came with a human nature like ours, to bear sins and burdens and sorrows like ours—even *your* sins, *your* burdens, and *your*

sorrows. The Word became flesh because we are flesh, subject to pain and misery like us, able to suffer the effects of human depravity and sin—and the abandonment of God the Father. He assumed sinful human existence, with all its frailties and failings and consequences, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This was no joy ride or ego trip. Love moved God to become man, love for us sinners *because* we are sinners. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born in human flesh because God's will is that we should be saved.

“The Word became flesh . . . full of grace and truth” (v 14). The eternal God dwells with man *as man* not for God's own sake but for our sakes. It is an act of generosity, undeserved by us. If you want to know who God is, then look at Jesus Christ. In him you truly see God: not a tyrant or judge or boss, but the God who gives, who loves, who dies for you without condition. Publish this good news: God is a baby, God is crucified, God is for you. Seek out the babe of Bethlehem, for there is God in the flesh, full of grace and truth.

God has not ceased to be man in Jesus Christ, so God has not ceased to be your advocate and Savior. Wherever Jesus is present, He is present as true God *and* true man, divine and human natures inseparably

united. Referring to our Lord's ministry, St. John said, "We have seen his glory" (v 14). God's glory was seen and continues to be seen in the person of Jesus Christ. We believe that the Holy Sacrament is truly the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ—because He says it is—and therefore the glory of God Himself is here. This is truly the body of Jesus Christ that was given for you and His blood that was shed for you. It is, therefore, God's body and God's blood, for Jesus Christ is truly God. And because it is the body and blood of God, it is able to save you, to cleanse you of all sin, to conquer death, hell, and the devil. In Him is life; therefore, you have life, eternal life, through this Sacrament. So we can confess, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory" (v 14).

Now, through this Son of God, you also are God's children. The birth of Jesus Christ is your birth too—born not in the regular way of dad and mom but born of God through water and the Spirit. You have all the rights that belong to God's children, because God became flesh in the infant Jesus. You can even call God your Father, just as Jesus himself said, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father" (Jn 20:17).

Will God really dwell on earth? Can the creation contain the Creator? Is the finite capable of the infinite? "The Word became flesh and dwelt

among us” (v 14). The answer is yes, finally and decisively yes in Jesus Christ. “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3). God dwells with man *as a man* in order that He might remove and atone for our sin. The incarnation will never cease; neither will God’s love for you, a love enfleshed in Jesus Christ.

Christmas, then, is not only a celebration of what God once did, but it also celebrates what God has continued to do and will one day bring to completion. The infant Jesus is God’s permanent investment in humanity, even in you. In Jesus Christ, God has come to stay.

And may the peace of God, which is beyond all human comprehension, keep your hearts and minds through your faith in Christ Jesus. Amen