

## The Word Became Flesh – Mack Tomlinson

Everyone has their favorite Bible verse, that one text that has exerted on them the greatest and most life-changing influence. Mine is Psalm 16:11, followed closely by Zephaniah 3:17 and 1 Peter 1:8. But let me briefly share with you what I regard as the most amazing verse in Scripture. By “amazing” I mean incomprehensible, stunning, bewildering, beyond the capacity of the human mind to fully grasp. For me, it is John 1:14 – “The Word became flesh”! I can think of nothing more appropriate at this time of year than to meditate on this truly amazing assertion.

John’s statement is made all the more amazing when it is seen in the light of John 1:1 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Note the contrasts. In John 1:1 the Word “was”. In John 1:14 the Word “became”. In 1:1 the Word was “with God” whereas in 1:14 the Word dwelt “among us”. In 1:1 the Word was “God” but in 1:14 the Word became “flesh”. Eternal, unchanging God “became” “flesh” and dwelt among “us”. Amazing!

John doesn’t say that the Word became a “man” (although that's true). Nor does he say he became a “human”, or even that he took to himself a “body” (although both are again true). Rather, the Word became “flesh”, a strong, almost crude way of referring to human nature in its totality: true body, soul, spirit, will, and emotions.

We also note that the Word didn’t pretend to be a man or play at being human. The Word “became” flesh. The Word did not “beam down” in full bodily form. The Word did not enter into flesh, as if to suggest that there was a man, a human being, into which the Word made entrance. He doesn’t say the Word “dwelled” or “abided in” human flesh. What John means is that the eternal Word, God the Son, entered into this world by being born as a human being. Whatever else Christmas may mean to you it is first and fundamentally about the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word. The Incarnation means that two distinct natures (divine and human) are united in one person: Jesus. Jesus is not two people (God and man). He is one person: the God-man. Jesus is not schizophrenic. When the Word became flesh he did not cease to be the Word. The Word veiled, hid, and voluntarily restricted the use of certain divine powers and prerogatives. But God cannot cease to be God. In other words, when the Word became flesh he did not commit divine suicide.

When the Word once became flesh he became flesh forever. After his earthly life, death, and resurrection, Jesus did not divest himself of the flesh or cease to be a man. He is a man even now at the right hand of God the Father. He is also God. He will always be the God-man. Thus, we might envision Jesus saying: “I am now what I always was: God (or Word). I am now what I once was not: man (or flesh). I am now and forever will be both: the God-man.”

Take a deep breath and ponder what this means. Don't dismiss it as theological speculation. This is a truth on which your eternal destiny hangs suspended. This is a truth the beauty and majesty of which will captivate your attention and cause sin to sink in your estimation. Wherein lies the power to turn from iniquity and say No to sin? It lies in the power and irresistible appeal of an uncreated God who would dare to become a man!

The Word became flesh!  
God became human!  
the invisible became visible!  
the untouchable became touchable!  
eternal life experienced temporal death!  
the transcendent one descended and drew near!  
the unlimited became limited!  
the infinite became finite!  
the immutable became mutable!  
the unbreakable became fragile!  
spirit became matter!  
eternity entered time!  
the independent became dependent!  
the almighty became weak!  
the loved became the hated!  
the exalted was humbled!  
glory was subjected to shame!  
fame turned into obscurity!  
from inexpressible joy to tears of unimaginable grief!  
from a throne to a cross!  
from ruler to being ruled!  
from power to weakness!

Max Lucado put it this way:

"The omnipotent, in one instant, made himself breakable. He who had been spirit became pierceable. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl. God as a fetus. Holiness sleeping in a womb. The creator of life being created. God was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys, and a spleen. He stretched against the walls and floated in the amniotic fluids of his mother" ("God Came Near," pp. 25-26).

As Paul said in 1 Tim. 3:16, "great is the mystery of godliness: God was revealed in the flesh!" Stay with me for just a moment more. If it hasn't hit home yet, perhaps the following will do the trick.

Conception: God became a fertilized egg! An embryo. A fetus. God kicked Mary from within her womb!

Birth: God entered the world as a baby, amid the stench of manure and cobwebs and prickly hay in a stable. Mary cradled the Creator in her arms. "I never imagined God would look like that," she says to herself. Envision the newborn Jesus with a misshaped head, wrinkled skin, and a red face. Just think: angels watched as Mary changed God's diapers! Tiny hands that would touch and heal the sick and yet be ripped by nails. Eyes (what color were they?). Tiny feet (where would they take him?) that likewise would be pierced by nails. She tickled his side (which would one day be lanced with a spear).

Infancy: God learned to crawl, stand, and walk. He spilt his milk and fell and hit his head.

Youth: Was he uncoordinated? How well did he perform at sports? Perhaps Jesus knew the pain of always being picked last when the kids chose up sides for a ball game. God learned his ABC's!

Teenager: Jesus probably had pimples and body odor and bad breath. God went through puberty! His voice changed. He had to shave. Girls probably had a crush on him and boys probably teased him. There were probably some foods he didn't like (no doubt squash among them).

Carpenter: Calloused hands. Dealings with customers who tried to cheat him or complained about his work. How did he react when they shortchanged him?

Some are bothered when I speak of Jesus like this. They think it is irreverent and shocking! As Max Lucado has said,

"it's not something we like to do; it's uncomfortable. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. Clean the manure from around the manger. Wipe the sweat out of his eyes. Pretend he never snored or blew his nose or hit his thumb with a hammer. He's easier to stomach that way. There is something about keeping him divine that keeps him distant, packaged, predictable. But don't do it. For heaven's sake, don't. Let him be as human as he intended to be. Let him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let him in can he pull us out" (pp. 26-27).

The marvel of it all is that he did it for you and me! It was an expression of the depths of his love for you that the Word entered the depths of human ugliness, human weakness, human humiliation.

As you gather with your family this Christmas, meditate on the amazing implications of this most amazing verse:

He was conceived by the union of divine grace and human disgrace.

He who breathed the breath of life into the first man is now himself a man breathing his first breath.

The King of Kings sleeping in a cow-pen.

The Creator of oceans and seas and rivers afloat in the womb of his mother.

God sucking his thumb.

The Alpha and Omega learning his multiplication tables.

He who was once surrounded by the glorious stereophonic praise of adoring angels now hears the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the stammering of bewildered shepherds

He who spoke the universe into being now coos and cries.

Omniscient Deity counting his toes.

Mary playing "this little piggy went to market" on the toes of God (well, being Jewish, maybe it was "this little pony").

From the robes of eternal glory to the rags of swaddling clothes.

The omnipresent spirit, whose being fills the galaxies, confined to the womb of a peasant girl.

Infinite power learning to crawl.

Mary playing "patty-cake" with the Lord of Lords!

The Word became flesh! Amazing! Merry Christmas!

-- Sam Storms