

# The Word Became Flesh - John 1:14

*Based on an outline from Ray Pritchard*

One of 1995's biggest singles was Joan Osborne's "One of Us." The song earned 7 Grammy Award nominations, and made a virtually unknown singer an overnight sensation. It's a song of spiritual questioning and about conceiving of God in a modern age.

These are some of the words of that song:

"If God had a name, what would it be,  
and would you call it to his face,  
if you were faced with him in all His Glory,  
what would you ask if You had just one question..."

Chorus:

"What if God was one of us?  
Just a slob like one of us?  
Just a stranger on a bus, trying to make his way home."

Those lyrics concerned some conservative Christians groups because of their irreverent tone, and because the song's popularity among young people seemed to imply a complete absence of faith in the God of the Bible. Now I'm not claiming that this song has any of the right answers.

But I believe it asks a good question, "What if God was one us?" That could very well be one of the most important questions ever asked this side of heaven.

Chapter one of John's Gospel introduces us to the "**Word**." Verse 1 says, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**" John tells us that the "**Word**," the eternal *Logos*, is both with God and is God. Verse 2 tells us He is co-eternal with God, "**He was in the beginning with God.**" Verse 3 tells us He is the creator of all things, "**All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.**" Verse 4 identifies Him as the source of life and light.

Now notice the contrast between verses 1 and 14. Verse 1 states that the Word "**was**" God. This is His essential nature and permanent condition. This is who the Word "is." While in verse 14 we see the Word "**became**" flesh.

John 1:14 may not seem like a Christmas text—but it is the truth behind the story of the angels and shepherds and the Wise Men and the journey to Bethlehem. Without this verse, the rest of the story has no meaning. Our text tells us what really happened 2000 years ago—and what it means for us today.

## I. Incarnation – The Word became Flesh.

The whole truth about Christmas is contained in the first phrase of our text—"The Word became flesh." John's approach to describing Christmas is much different than say the gospel of Luke. What takes Luke 2,500 words to describe, John

does with four. In one short, shattering expression, John unveils the great idea that is at the very heart of Christmas. He writes, "**The Word became flesh...**"

Who is this "**Word**" that John tells us about, the one who was God and who became flesh? We don't have to wonder about that. John tells us. Look at verse 14, "**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,**" and verse 17, "**For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**" So the person we are speaking of in these verses is known in the Bible and throughout the world as "**Jesus Christ.**"

"**Jesus**" was the name Joseph was told to give the child by the angel of the Lord because it means "*savior*." Matthew 1:20-21 says, "...**an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.'**"

"**Christ**" means "anointed one." It was the title that referred to the long-awaited King of the Jews who would give victory to the people and bear the government of the world on His shoulders. Later in John 1 when Andrew, Peter's brother, told him that he had met Jesus he said (in John 1:41), "**'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ).**" So the eternal Word who was with God and was God is Jesus Christ, the Savior and King.

Now John tells us that the "**Word became flesh.**" Theologians call this truth the Incarnation, a Latin word that literally means, "incorporated in flesh." The incarnation is the biblical truth that God became one of us. The Creator became a part of His creation by taking on human flesh. It is one of the essential yet incomprehensible doctrines of our faith. It is the truth that God the Son became a human being without relinquishing His deity. It is the truth that Jesus Christ is both 100% God and 100% human at the same time. He is the God-man.

Such teaching transcends human understanding. This is what God has done in Jesus Christ. He has reached down to us. He reached down to us deeply. He has become one of us. He became the least among us: a tiny, poor, helpless infant. We did nothing to bring Christ from heaven. He came without our invitation, without our preparation, without our decision, without our welcome. He was sent by the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary. And all this He did without consulting us, without our help. This is entirely God's doing, that the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

That is why Jesus Christ is God's ultimate revelation. The eternal Word, who was both with God and who was God, became flesh. He took on our humanity. God chose to reveal Himself ultimately in a real, historic person. The word became flesh. He identified with us by becoming one of us.

Do you remember the movie "O God" starring George Burns and John Denver? While the movie was theologically distorted and disturbing, there is one scene in

the movie where Burns, who plays God, appears to this supermarket assistant manager (Denver) wearing tennis shoes, glasses, and a fishing hat. When asked why he looks the way he does, Burns answers, “I picked a look you could understand.”

And that is what happened in the incarnation; God picked a look we can understand. He became one of us. While Jesus probably did not wear tennis shoes and a fishing cap, he did live as a human among humans. His hands were calloused from years of handling lumber. His skin tanned from the Middle Eastern sun. He hung around other humans and ministered among them. He grew tired, hungry, and thirsty. He was tempted, tried and troubled. God picked a look we could understand. He became one of us.

Ponder that for a moment. The Almighty power of God moved in a human arm. The unending love of God now beat in a human heart. The all-surpassing wisdom of God now spoke from human lips. The tender mercy of God reached forth from human hands. God has always been a God of love, but when Christ came to the earth, love was wrapped in human flesh. Jesus was God with skin on.

And think about how God did it. Read the Christmas story again. Instead of flash and splash, there is an exhausted mother, a frightened fiancé, a dirty stable, rags for diapers, and a feeding-trough for a cradle. There He is. The Messiah, the Savior of the World, God in human flesh--ignored by the mighty and powerful—a tiny, helpless baby. Immanuel—God with us.

It’s so simple that you know it must be true. Only God would have done it that way. One of the verses of a famous Christmas carol says it very well:

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord.  
Late in time behold him come, offspring of the Virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the God-head see; hail the incarnate Deity.  
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.  
Hark, the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”

## II. Habitation – God lives with Mankind.

I love the way Eugene Peterson translates the first part of John 1:14, “**The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.**” For 33 years God moved into our neighborhood. The NIV says that he “**made his dwelling among us.**” Some translations say that he “**pitched his tent among us.**” That’s actually a very accurate translation because word for “**dwelt**” literally means to pitch a tent. It’s the same word used for the Tabernacle in the Old Testament, which was a tent where the glory of God dwelt in the days before the Temple was built in Jerusalem. The Tabernacle was sometimes called the “Tent of Meeting” (Exodus 33:7) because it was the divinely-appointed meeting place between God and man.

The Tabernacle was the place where God and man met together. If an Israelite wanted to draw near to the LORD he had to come near to the door of the Tabernacle. When Moses would inquire something of the Lord, he would go into

the door of the Tabernacle. He had to go to that place of meeting between God and man. When the Word was made flesh, God and man met together in one, they became one. Jesus is the place where we meet God today.

And not just for now, but for always. Jesus is how we meet with God. The same word for “**dwelt**” is also translated as dwell in REV 21:3. See the beautiful harmony, the significance of the word dwell. **"And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."** (REV 21:3) God came to tabernacle with men in Jesus Christ.

### **III. Manifestation – We See His Glory.**

John next speaks of the manifestation of God’s glory: **“We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father.”** In case that’s a little unclear, let me give you Eugene Peterson again, *“We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son.”* I can understand that because I am a son and I have a son. Something of my father rests in me even though it’s not a perfect reproduction. A few years ago when I visited Dad we went to church on Sunday at the Methodist Church we attended when I was growing up. Several people thought that I was my father. Some even said, “You remind me of your father,” which I suppose is one of the highest compliments I have ever received. Sometimes people say that they see a lot of me in my son—which may or may not be such a great compliment, but there it is. Even on earth we understand the principle of *“like Father, like Son.”* But with Jesus that principle is taken to infinite perfection. Jesus is the exact image of his Father. Jesus would say, **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”** (John 14:9).

When John says, **“we have seen,”** he uses a word that means to gaze intently upon, to study as in a laboratory. It’s the word from which we get the English word “theater.” As Jesus walked on the earth, people could see God’s glory shining through him. The shepherds saw it, and so did the angels and the magi. So did the teachers of the law who interviewed him when he was 12 years old. When Jesus turned the water into wine at Cana of Galilee, John tells us that **“he thus revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him”** (John 2:11). The glory was seen in a major way at the Transfiguration. And ultimately His glory was seen in His death and resurrection.

In Jesus, God was not invisible nor was He obscure. When you look at Jesus, you see the face of God. In the words of a Christmas hymn by Martin Luther,

He whom the world could not enwrap  
Yonder lies in Mary’s lap  
He is become an infant small  
Who by his might upholdeth all.

### **IV. Invitation – We receive His Grace.**

Finally, this text ends with a powerful word of invitation. It tells us that Jesus came to the earth **“full of grace and truth.”** These verses are saturated with grace language. V. 14 declares that we saw his glory, full of grace and truth. V. 16 speaks of the fullness of God’s grace and the fact that we have been given grace upon grace. V. 17 refers to the fact that grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

Grace and truth. These two words explain why Jesus came to the earth. They go to the very heart of the gospel. Jesus completely full of truth and grace.

Everything that Jesus did reflected truth and grace. Jesus taught us the truth of God not because we paid our tuition or because we had the right to know the truth, but he taught us truth because of God’s grace. Jesus healed people, not because they earned or deserved it, but because of His grace. Jesus offers salvation to those who receive Him, to those who believe in His name, not because we earn or deserve it, but because of His grace. Jesus forgives sin not because we deserve it, but because of His grace.

Because he is full of truth, we can come in complete confidence that He will keep His promises. When He promises a complete pardon for your sins, He means it. You can take that to the bank.

Do you need a trustworthy Savior? Fear not. Jesus is full of truth.

Do you need a forgiving Lord? Come to him for He is full of grace.

Paul Harvey, some years ago, penned a parable that describes this:

“This is about a modern man, one of us, he was not a scrooge, he was a kind, decent, mostly good man, generous to his family, upright in his dealings with others. But he did not believe in all that incarnation stuff that the Churches proclaim at Christmas time. It just didn’t make sense to him and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just could not swallow the Jesus story about God coming to earth as man. “I’m truly sorry to distress you,” he told his wife, “but I’m not going with you to church this Christmas Eve.” He said he’d feel like a hypocrite. That he would much rather stay home, but that he would wait up for them. He stayed, they went. Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall.

He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier, then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound. Then another and another. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. Well, when he went to the front door, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They had been caught in the storm and in a desperate search for shelter they had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

Well, he couldn’t let the poor creatures lie there and freeze. He remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter -- if he could direct the birds to it. He quickly put on his coat and galoshes, trampled through the deepening snow to the barn, opened the door wide, and turned on a light. But the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in and he

hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow making a trail to the yellow lighted wide open doorway of the stable, but to his dismay the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them, he tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms -- instead they scattered in every direction except into the warm lighted barn.

Then he realized why. They were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature, if only I could think of some way to let them know they can trust me, that I'm not trying to hurt them, but to help them. How? Any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him. If only I could be a bird myself he thought. If only I could be a bird and mingle with them and speak their language, and tell them not to be afraid, and show them the way to the safe, warm barn. But I'd have to be one of them, so they could see and hear and understand.

At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sound of the wind. He stood there listening to the bells. *Adeste Fideles* (All Ye Faithful). Listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And understanding the incarnation, he sank to his knees in the snow."

That is why "**the Word became flesh and lived among us.**" He pitched his tent with us for 33 years that he might save us from our sin and ourselves. We stand here this morning as helpless and hopeless as those birds. Then the Lord Jesus Christ steps down from heaven to earth, lives as one of us and dies for all of us.

This is why Jesus came. This is the real meaning of Christmas. In just a few days Christmas will arrive and families will gather to open their gifts. God has a Christmas gift for you—wrapped not in bright paper and with fancy ribbon—but in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. It is the gift of his Son. It is for you. The gift is still there. It must be personally received.

You can never truly enjoy Christmas until you can look in the Father's face and tell him you have received his Christmas gift. Have you done that?

In his carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem," Phillips Brooks has a stanza that is a delight at this point:

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given;  
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven!  
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive him still, The dear Christ enters in.

So He does! May that be your experience this Christmas season.