

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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INCARNATE

God enfleshed

by Drew Downs

Of the core elements of Christian theology, the heart of it all is this: that God saw it fit to join us in this mess.

Theologians would later fixate on how messy this mess is and why *that* matters. Among other things, of course.

From the beginning, however, this idea of divine participation in the human condition was animating and inspired many of our

beloved hymns, poetry, and and spiritual writing.

Today, "the Christmas spirit" and stories of sacrifice and giving provide the bulk of our soundtrack for the season. These are *also* fitting, of course.

Still, the image with the most resonance is that God would join us. Something unexpected and genuinely new.

CHRISTMAS

2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Christmas Joy

I love Christmas! And I always have. The lights, candles, greens! My Mom would decorate the living room, the mantle, the bannister. We'd eat and celebrate for days. Guests would come over, we'd go to church; the whole thing felt festive and *different*.

Recently, someone remarked that their church was going Christmas caroling on December 31. And while seasonally appropriate, they pointed out that it really is quite exhausting to be the only ones who actually care about that.

His comments really resonated with me. And I started wondering when caroling would *truly* make sense. This thing we did regularly when I was young, and tried to do when I was a young adult. It really doesn't work like it used to. It may not be about the day, but the caroling itself.

Christmas is a holiday full of such nostalgia, memory, and anticipation that we may not truly appreciate how much that stuff we valued fits into the moment that was. And that the present moment, full of its own attentions, hopes, and opportunities, may be attuned to something else.

I'm confident none of us will be caroling on Christmas Eve, with windchills below zero. And some may choose to stay home for the holiday. And we may miss out on some of what we find fun at Christmas time. But we need not miss out on joy. For all that Christmas does bring. That isn't dependent on anyone's calendar.

With love,
Drew

CHRISTMAS

2022

FOR SUNDAY

Christmas

December 25, 2022

Collect

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From John 1:1-14

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Reflection

And the Word became flesh.

This is a most evocative phrase. Far more alluring than "Jesus is the reason for the season" or any of the attempts at framing the Christmas holiday as important. The evangelist we know as John is telling us something profound, true, and engaging: something that compels us and draws us in.

The Word! It/He became flesh. What does that mean?

CHRISTMAS

From the earliest days, long before doctrine and dogma was written and heresies declared, those first followers saw Jesus as the Word enfleshed. *He is the Word of God.* This, of course, is a different idea than what we usually think of when we hear "the word of God." That refers to holy scripture.

Today, we might be tempted to say "it's both." Or, if you're like me, "it's complicated." But then, they would not have thought of it as two truths or two sides. It was a truth claim *about Jesus*. The scripture would certainly be known as "the word of God," but **we** declare that Jesus *is* The Word in the flesh.

They didn't see this as a puzzle. It wasn't complicated. This was the divine presence, manifested among them. Period. It is *we* who want it to be more complicated than that.

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,

Could there be a more profound claim than this? God came among us. Lived among us. And *we* have seen his glory.

Other gods are distant. This one came close.
They are perfect. This one became human.
We cannot behold them. We behold Jesus!

What we have in Jesus is God's new thing. When we are taught that gods never change.

Everything about this moment, the Incarnation, is a challenge to the status quo. In the first century and the twenty-first.

And we are witnesses called to behold it!

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