

Not the Spirit of Christmas, But the Flesh

What do you have left when you take away the packages, the decorations and expectations, and every other thing society says you have to have at Christmas?

You have what John 1:14 tells you: "*The Word became flesh and lived among us.*" The Word didn't stop being what He was, namely, true God. But He also became true man, a real human being. He became incarnate, in the "flesh." The Word took on human nature and received the name Jesus. He was born in the flesh like every human being, complete with human emotions, human frailties, human needs. In His life, therefore, we will see Him weep and sleep and eat and hurt and die. That's what you have.

Our culture wants to celebrate a "spirit of Christmas" which is all about happy feelings. But spirits disappear. Our troubles do not take a holiday because the calendar says they should. Cultural Christmas can be ruined.

Christians celebrate the Flesh of Christmas - the God in the flesh who lived among us. He lived on this earth along with other human beings. Significantly, the Greek says that He set up His *tabernacle*, or tent, among us. For the student of the Bible, that phrase strengthens the meaning of this passage. One can hardly miss seeing a parallel with the tabernacle God had the people of Israel build in the wilderness. Of that tent the Lord said to Moses, "*Have [the Israelites] make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them,*" (Exodus 25:8). When the tabernacle was completed, Moses reports, "*Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle,*" (Exodus 40:34).

Accordingly, when Jesus Christ was born, the LORD (Yahweh, or Jehovah) came to dwell in person among us. He was Immanuel, God-With-Us.

So we know nothing can ruin Christmas. Not sticks, not stones, not broken bones. Not drunkenness, nor neglect. Not old grudges nor fresh wounds. Not bad news from doctors, nor bosses.

The Lord will not be stopped. Not even the lack of room at the inn could stop Him. Not even the lack of room in our hearts, not the years of our refusal to forgive has stopped Him. God as Man - as a Baby - has placed Himself into the manger, a feeding trough. And that is appropriate because the Lord has given Himself as food for selfish people who behave worse than animals. He is the Bread of Life who gives Himself to taste buds that are deadened by evil words.

The Word became flesh that could be nailed down so that our weak flesh could escape corruption. His light shines from the Cross through the empty tomb to drive away sins like the sun burns fog off.

Don't get me wrong. I am not telling you that you have no reason to be sad. Other people might demand, "It's Christmas, so you can't be upset, you can only be holly and jolly." But we still live this side of Heaven at Christmas. Try to sweep conflict under the rug, and you will trip over it. Our hearts still feel the touch of anger, frustration, and grief.

Yet Jesus is still Immanuel - God's Flesh in the midst of us. That is reason even for joy in the midst of sadness, life in the midst of death, hope in the midst of despair. Still He forgives those who desire His mercy. Still He shepherds His flock through death and into life. Until we receive Christ's reward in Paradise, we wait in peace with God. For Christ is our peace, the only stable thing, the only thing that does not age, wither or break in all of Creation. And nothing can ruin that - therefore, nothing can ruin Christmas. The Word became Flesh. We have a Saviour. Thanks be to God!