

THE PERSON OF CHRIST
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany, 2021
John 1:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Starting today and then over the next three Sundays leading up to the Transfiguration, after which the season of Lent will begin, we are going to devote our time to studying the great doctrine of Christ. Today, we shall dwell on the Person of Christ, then over the next coming Sundays will learn more of Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and King. God willing, this will better prepare us for that season of the year when we follow our Lord on His journey to the cross. Therefore, our text for today is John 1:14: **The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son – He is full of grace and truth.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When we turn from the pages of the last chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 4, to the first chapter of the New, Matthew chapter 1, we pass over a period of four centuries; a time often referred to as the “silent centuries.” These four centuries abounded with historic, religious, and social developments – the most important being that the prophets ceased to speak.

No doubt much happened in that period of 400 years, and during these silent centuries, world control had passed from the Persians to the Romans. The West was now in control instead of the East. In the days of Malachi, the population was scanty; the cities were heaps of rubbish; the land everywhere bore the marks of desolation, and the poverty of the many was aggravated by the greed of the few. Yet when we come to the early New Testament days, Judea appears as one of the most densely populated parts of the Roman Empire. Its cities are crowded, and its hillsides are cultivated. The merchants of the eastern Mediterranean share in and largely control the trade of the Mediterranean world. At the end of the Old Testament period, Aramaic had become the way of communication of the Persian Empire; now Greek was universally used throughout the Roman Empire and is the language of the New Testament. It was into this world that when the time had fully come, God sent His Son Jesus.¹

While it is from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that give us information surrounding Jesus' birth, today, from our text, John also announces the arrival of Jesus. However, he uses words that are as grand as they are mysterious. He mentions nothing of the events leading up to Jesus' birth, or even the actual birth itself. Instead, with four words, he simply writes, “**The Word became flesh.**” The Son of God assumes human nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is quite evident that John is speaking of Christ because the whole section from which these words are taken is designed to inform us of the *Person of Christ*. John employs the term “**the Word**” in speaking of Him, denoting that just as the human word emanates from us and makes known our thoughts to others, so Christ is born of the Father in eternity and reveals to us what we are to know of God.

“**The Word became flesh.**” This statement further implies that Christ Jesus was in existence *before* He had become flesh. Jesus, who was known as the Son of the carpenter and the Son of Mary, dated His existence not merely from His birth on earth, but from eternity itself. At one time, Jesus was speaking to the Jews, who had made the point that their father Abraham was greater than Jesus. In His discussion with them, Jesus said, “*Truly, truly, I tell you, before Abraham came into being, I am*” (John 8:58), thus declaring His eternal pre-existence. These words reinforced the claim of John who tells us that this Word had been in existence when the world was created²; yes, that through this Word everything was made that was made; that it was not merely with God, but that this Word *was* God.

This is the first great fact we must remember if we wish to understand Christ, that He is the true God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, of one essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is the great truth which the Church teaches in speaking of the *divine nature* of Christ. We see that in speaking of Him we must all fall on the ground in adoration.

¹ Galatians 4:4

² John 1:1-3

As we look upon politicians and leaders of the world, both past and present, we study and criticise. In the lives of the saints, the prophets, and apostles, we find faults and blemishes, and we do not hesitate to point to them. We even find fault amongst those closest to us, our family and friends. But the Person of Christ we can look at only in wonder and with songs of praise on our lips, for He is the great God in whom we live, move, and exist.³

“**The Word became flesh.**” Leaving eternity, our gaze is now directed to the event that occurred in Bethlehem in the days of Caesar Augustus. The Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son, assumed human nature. “**The Word became flesh**” means He became a man. This did not signify that He ceased to be what He was before. John does not say that He was changed into a human being, or that He was a created being, as the Jehovah Witnesses like to teach. A favourite passage of the Jehovah Witnesses is Colossians 1:15 which reads, “*He is the Image of the invisible God, the First-born of all creation.*” They misuse the term “First-born” to teach that Jesus was a created being. But this isn’t what this passage says. Jesus is “First-born” not “first-created” as is their understanding. There is a difference. The correct meaning of “First-born” is that Jesus is superior to every created being. He is before all creatures in time, because He is eternal, and He is above all in rank. Besides, Paul goes on to say a couple of verses later that all things have been created through Jesus who has been before all things, and all things hold together in Him.⁴ When John writes that “**The Word became flesh,**” he is merely indicating that having the divine nature, Jesus now takes in addition the human nature into His Person. He is not a created person; neither are there two persons in Him, but only one. But since His birth in Bethlehem, He has two natures.

The Babe lying in the manger is a true human Child, having body and soul. Thirty years later, we see Him walking about in Galilee teaching people, a real man, whom we can hear talk and eat and drink. He dwells among men, being one of them, but this is only one side of His being. There is an invisible, majestic, ineffably greater side - *this Man is God also*. “**The Word became flesh.**” Through the action of the Holy Spirit He was born from the Virgin Mary, as other passages of Holy Scripture declare. It was thus that Deity assumed humanity. Who can understand this? We cannot. The best we can do is worship Him, and trust what through His Spirit He tells us about His Person. He alone has carried the sin and guilt of the whole world, and so once again, let us all fall on the ground in adoration, in all simplicity receiving the instruction which He offers about Himself.

Christ did not cease to be divine when He became a human being. This fact is clearly established when we see John write, “**and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son.**”

This refers to the life of Christ here on earth when He was called Jesus by the people that knew Him and conversed with Him. He was a true human being, and yet those who observed Him could well notice that He was more than a human being. Every now and then they would catch a glimpse of something in Him that far transcended human wisdom and power. On occasion, divine glory flashed forth. This took place when He performed His miracles, such as opening the eyes of the blind, cleansing the lepers, and raising the dead. This occurred, too, when He was transfigured on the mountain before Peter, James, and John. This divine glory was especially seen when He rose from the dead and in a supernatural way, appeared to His disciples before vanishing again. The glory to be seen was that “**of the Father’s only Son,**” who is true God Himself, the glory which He, the human Christ, receives from the Father.

It is evident that the miracles of Jesus had an important function to perform. They were intended to testify of His divine nature, telling all those who had come into contact with Him that He was not only the Son of Mary, but the “**Father’s only Son.**” As we read of His great works, may there always be found in us the conviction that He was more than a perfect man, that He is the true God!

Finally, John says of the Person He is describing that “**He is full of grace and truth.**” The words are few, but they are heavy with meaning. He, the God-man, is full of **grace**. Thinking of His deity, we have to tremble because we are poor sinners, who have often transgressed His divine commandments; but He is full of grace, that is, of kindness, toward us unworthy beings, freely giving us the help we need, forgiving all our sins, and sending His Holy Spirit in the Word and Sacraments to make us new creatures. This God-man has suffered and died for us, bearing all our sins, and thus exhibiting His grace.

He is also full of **truth**. He radiates true information about God, the decrees of the Trinity for our salvation, the way to heaven, the blessed hereafter awaiting God’s children. Whoever listens to Him will learn the truth, and the truth will

³ Acts 17:28

⁴ Colossians 1:16-17

set him free.⁵ In Him, there is satisfied the longing of human beings for knowledge about the unseen world. What a marvellous Being He is! - on the one hand, he has accomplished our salvation and on the other has taught us the mysteries of God.

Dear friends, such is the Person on whom Christianity is built. Our salvation rests entirely on Him. As we look around us today, it seems as though the whole fabric of society is quickly falling apart. Thanks be to Jesus because our salvation does not rest upon this earth. We must be entirely trusting on Him. Jesus was present at creation, and nothing happens without the will of our heavenly Father. As the world continues to crumble, be assured that even the gates of Hades will never overpower the church.⁶ We are safe in the hands of Jesus because **“The Word became flesh”** for us. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Almighty and ever-living God, You have given the light of Your truth in Jesus Christ that we may be rescued from the darkness of sin and unbelief, and have life in His name. We thank You that You have made us alive through faith in Him, and lavished on us so many gifts of Your grace. Grant that we may treasure in our hearts the truth that Jesus, Your unique Son, is our revealer of Your will, our sacrificial Lamb, our Messiah, our King, and the Son of Man, who was rejected, crucified, and rose again for us.

Heavenly Father, make us who are Your people shining lights in this world's darkness. Send out preachers and teachers of Your Word, that many more may know Your mercy and love in the gift of Your Son and His Gospel of grace and forgiveness. Strengthen all of us in the fellowship of Your Church to join hands in love and zeal to do the work set before us. We praise you for Your various spiritual gifts. Grant that we may use them for the common good of the members of Christ's body. Make us loyal in serving our Lord, patient in every trouble, and joyful in our promised hope. Make us eager to hold on to what is good, to help our fellow Christians, and be ready to share with all people in need. Free us from the deceptive designs of Satan and every kind of falsehood, and give us the ability to distinguish false spirits. Grant that we who have been called out of darkness into Christ's marvellous light may in this way proclaim His saving love and power.

Bestow a special measure of Your grace on our homes.

Give stability, peace, and tranquillity to the nations of the earth. Deliver people everywhere from famine, disease, fire, flood, storm, earthquake, and every danger. In every test that You send, help all people to lift up their eyes to You, and to know Your power and care.

We ask Your mercy on all who are in any special need of body or soul. Show them the comfort of Your love; give them hope instead of despair, joy and gladness instead of grief, and a song of praise instead of sorrow.

We thank You for the recent rain that has been sent, but ask that You may continue to give us seasons that are appropriate to our needs.

Save us all from the dangers that surround us. As the world continues its struggle to contain covid-19, be with all those doctors and nurses who are serving on the frontline.

Defend us, in body and soul, until that moment when we see the ascending and descending angels linking earth and heaven permanently, when You call us from this life to live in Your presence for ever. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, Your Son. Amen.

⁵ John 8:31

⁶ Matthew 16:18

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

1 Samuel 3:1-20

¹ The boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The Word of the LORD was rare in those days. Visions were infrequent. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out and Samuel was lying down in the Temple of the LORD, where the Ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am."

⁵ He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. For you have called me."

However, Eli said, "I have not called you. Go back and lie down!"

So, Samuel went and lay down. ⁶ Then the LORD called again, "Samuel!"

Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am. For you have called me."

Eli answered: "I have not called you, my son. Go back and lie down!"

⁷ Samuel did not yet know the LORD and the Word of the LORD was not yet being revealed to him. ⁸ Then the LORD called Samuel again, a third time. Samuel got up and went to Eli and said: "Here I am. For you have called me."

Then Eli realised that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore, Eli told Samuel: "Go and lie down! If He calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening!'"

So, Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Then the LORD came, stood there and called as He had called at the other times: "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel answered, "Speak! For Your servant is listening."

¹¹ Then the LORD told Samuel: "Look! I am about to do something in Israel and the two ears of everyone who hears about it will tingle. ¹² On that day, I shall carry out against Eli everything I have spoken about his family, from the beginning to the end. ¹³ I have told him that I shall condemn his family for ever for the guilt about which he has known. For, although his sons were calling a curse down on themselves, he did not restrain them. ¹⁴ This is why I have sworn concerning Eli's family that no sacrifice or offering will certainly ever atone for the guilt of Eli's family."

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until the morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. However, Samuel was afraid to tell Eli about the vision. ¹⁶ Then Eli summoned Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!"

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

¹⁷ Eli asked: "What is the Message that He has told you? Please, do not hide it from me! May God treat you harshly and even worse if you hide anything from me out of the Message that He has spoken to you!"

¹⁸ So, Samuel told him everything and did not hide anything from him. Eli answered: "He is the LORD. Let Him do what He thinks is right!"

¹⁹ As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and He did not let any of His Words remain un-fulfilled.

²⁰ All Israel from Dan to Beer-Sheba knew that Samuel was a reliable prophet of the LORD.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

¹² "All things are permissible for me" — but not all things are beneficial. "All things are permissible for me" — but I shall not be brought under anyone's control. ¹³ "Foods are for the stomach and the stomach is for foods" but God will put an end to both it and them. The body is not for sexual sin but for the Lord and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴ God has both raised the Lord and will also raise us by His power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them the members of a prostitute? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one body with her? For God says: "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ However, he who is united with the Lord is one spirit with Him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual sin! Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body. However, the person who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your bodies!

John 1:43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip. Jesus told him, "Follow Me!"

⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the One about whom Moses wrote in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus, Joseph's son from Nazareth."

⁴⁶ Nathanael asked him, "Nazareth — can anything good come from there?"

Philip told him, "Come and see!"

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him. He said about him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no deceit."

⁴⁸ Nathanael asked Him, "Where did You get to know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

⁴⁹ Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel."

⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "You believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."

⁵¹ Then He told him, "Truly, truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man."