

**Christmas Day
Holy Comforter Church
The Rev. John E. Shields
December 25, 2009**

“The word became flesh and lived among us...”

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Our gospel this morning tells us that the eternal word of God has become a human person.

The word became flesh --- the church calls it ‘Incarnation.’

Incarnation = the ‘en-fleshing’ of God.

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria is credited with saying: “He (Jesus) became what we are that he might make us as he is.”

“The word became flesh and lived among us...”

These are pretty words. This is a lovely concept. We are used to hearing them --- perhaps we are so used to hearing them that they have lost something. Perhaps we have just taken it for granted as one of those things we don’t really have to think about.

“The word became flesh and lived among us...”

Do you remember a few years (maybe more than a few now) the movie: “The Last Temptation of Christ”?

The movie is based on the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis.

If you remember the movie, you may recall that it was considered very controversial – You see Kazantzakis has Jesus being tempted in ways that made some folks uncomfortable.

I remember going to see this movie and there were pickets outside denouncing the movie as blasphemous.

Kazantzakis has Jesus being tempted as you or I might be. His Jesus is very human, and let me tell you something; a lot of people, particularly religious people, did not like it.

Jesus was tempted --- even on the cross --- with the possibility that he could marry, have a family, and live a good and comfortable life.

This depiction of Jesus did not fit the notion of Jesus to which many had become accustomed, and it made them angry to even consider a Jesus who might feel and act this way.

Jesus had real feelings and longings – he was truly human – too human for comfort.

“The word became flesh and lived among us...”

It’s a problem.

“The word became flesh and lived among us...”

The eternal Word of God, creator of all that is: “The vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses and this fragile earth our island home.”

This God became flesh and lived among us.

It is a notion that we have a hard time really believing --- we just can't 'get hold of it' we can't 'get our arms around it.'

It is an idea, a construct, a theology, call it what you will, that is difficult for us.

It is less difficult picturing a sweet baby in a manger – that is nice and we really don't get too bogged down in details – we overlook them because we love the warm fuzziness that we have come to associate with that image.

But God as a grown man with all the emotions and desires and temptations that we have as adults – I'm not too sure about that.

It seems that the Orthodox – Greek, Russian, i.e. the Eastern Church --- it seems that the Orthodox like Kazantzakis have less problems with Incarnation than we Western Christians. Perhaps we have something to learn from them – even if it makes us uncomfortable.

Don't get me wrong – we say all the right things “Jesus was truly man, tempted in every way as we are, yet with out sin.” Its just that our images and worship of Jesus have him so 'deified' that we emotionally at least deny his humanity.

Do you remember Athanasius? We mentioned him earlier – he is the one who said: “He (Jesus) became what we are that he might make us as he is.”

Athanasius also said: “What Jesus did not assume, he cannot redeem.”

“The word became flesh and lived among us...”

“What Jesus did not assume, he cannot redeem.”

That may well be the most powerful affirmation of Jesus’ humanity that I have ever heard.

Jesus, our savior; Jesus our redeemer; Jesus the only son of the Father; Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords – this Jesus, by being fully human assumes all that we are.

Jesus has every emotion, urge, and temptation that we have, and therefore can redeem those very things in us.

“He (Jesus) became what we are that he might make us as he is.”

This Jesus, our Savior and Lord came among us. Jesus, the eternal Word, became a human person and lived among us.

He came that we might get a glimpse of the possibilities available to us. He came that we might know that love is possible.

“He (Jesus) became what we are that he might make us as he is.”

“...that he might make us as he is.”

And how is he?

Remember that Jesus seemed partial to the poor and those on the margins...

Remember that Jesus seemed to always find where the sickness, pain and fear were residing in order that he might free those who were captured and afflicted.

Remember that this ‘word made flesh’ seemed to have particular concern for those whom the world did not favor. He is said to have associated with outcasts – prostitutes, tax collectors. He favored the sick and those in trouble. He healed those who were mentally ill and spiritually sick.

And he told those who would follow him, “When you have fed, clothed, visited, cared for the least of these, you have done it unto me.”

“And the word became flesh and lived among us...full of Grace and Truth.”

“He became what we are that he might make us as he is.”