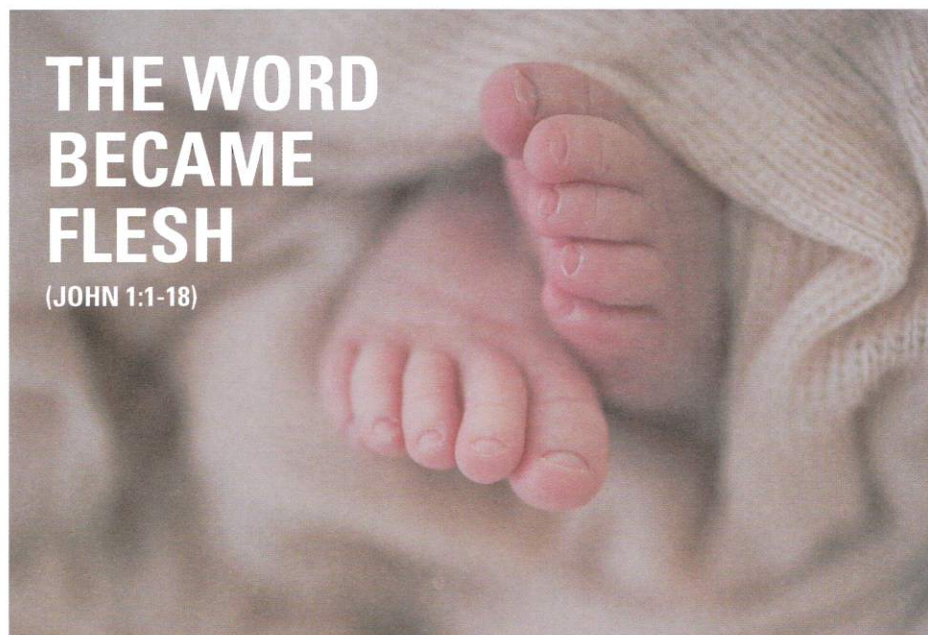


THE WORD BECAME FLESH

(JOHN 1:1-18)



Our Gospel passage today is one very familiar to us all. It consists of the opening verses of the Fourth Gospel and presents the incarnate Word of God in terms reminiscent of the figure of Wisdom in the Hebrew scriptures.

The Word was with God in the beginning and was God's agent in creation. The themes of light, life, believing, glory and truth will all feature prominently in the Johannine narrative.

The sentence which is particularly significant for us at this time of Christmas is "The Word was made flesh, he lived among us." There can be no stronger affirmation of the dignity of human nature than this, to say that God entered our world as one of us.

Word implies communication. The Christmas mystery is all about God reaching out to human beings in the most radical way imaginable. God is offering the chance of an intimate relationship. However, John's Prologue acknowledges that not all people will accept the Word, and that Jesus is rejected is another major theme in the story. Ultimately, everyone has to make a choice and on this judgement hangs. But at this time, the liturgy is asking us to consider the length to which God was prepared to go in reaching out to human beings. The crib is the artistic illustration of this belief. ■

SAY

The Word was made flesh, he lived among us.

(John 1:14)

LEARN

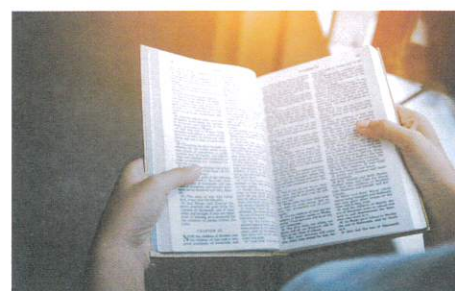
The *Logos* (Word) in the Prologue to the Gospel according to John corresponds to the female figure of Wisdom in the Hebrew scriptures.

The Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as conscious of his existence with God before his human birth.

The Prologue says, in some translations, that the Word "pitched his tent among us".

DO

Read John 1:1-18 (or the shorter version in your Missal or Mass book) quietly and let the text speak to you. This is one form of meditation.



REFLECT

Another important theme in John's Gospel account is that of Jesus as the revealer of God. God's purpose in revelation is to invite human beings, such as ourselves, into relationship that is characterised as friendship. This is the activity of Wisdom in the Hebrew scriptures and which Jesus carries out in his ministry.

A couple of years ago, a team of young footballers was trapped by rising flood water in a cave in Thailand. Their coach kept them calm until rescuers arrived by helping them to meditate. Someone

remarked that they were Buddhists, so there were accustomed to meditating: this implied that Christians would not do the same. But there is an ancient Christian tradition of meditation or mental prayer, which helps to bring us into contact with God and to see our life in a proper perspective.

Perhaps the best way of considering our Gospel passage today might be to take it and reflect on it slowly and quietly and let it speak to us. It tells of the existence of the Word before the incarnation, of the Word's part in creation and of glory being

revealed, which will happen at Cana in Galilee and on the cross.

The Word addressed to us looks for a response and the Prologue foretells the double answer from human beings. One purpose of the liturgy is to help us grow in our appreciation of our faith and what it should mean in our daily life. If our Christmas devotions leave us at a sentimental level about the infant Jesus, they are not helping us develop an adult belief in God and God's place among and within us. It is worth meditating on this reading. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

When a profound silence covered all things
and night was in the middle of its course,
your all-powerful Word, O Lord, bounded
from heaven's royal throne.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
splendour of faithful souls,
graciously be pleased to fill the world with
your glory,
and show yourself to all peoples by the
radiance of your light.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2, 8-12

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus.
Wisdom speaks her own praises,
in the midst of her people she glories in
herself.
She opens her mouth in the assembly of the
Most High,
she glories in herself in the presence of the
Mighty One.

"Then the creator of all things instructed me,
and he who created me fixed a place for my
tent.
He said, 'Pitch your tent in Jacob,
make Israel your inheritance.'
From eternity, in the beginning, he created
me,
and for eternity I shall remain.
I ministered before him in the holy
tabernacle,
and thus was I established on Zion.
In the beloved city he has given me rest,
and in Jerusalem I wield my authority.
I have taken root in a privileged people,
in the Lord's property, in his inheritance."

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 147

Response:

The Word was made flesh,
and lived among us.

or
Alleluia!

- O praise the Lord, Jerusalem!
Zion, praise your God!
He has strengthened the bars of your
gates,
he has blessed the children within you. (R.)
- He established peace on your borders,
he feeds you with finest wheat.
He sends out his word to the earth
and swiftly runs his command. (R.)
- He makes his word known to Jacob,
to Israel his laws and decrees.
He has not dealt thus with other nations;
he has not taught them his decrees. (R.)

SECOND READING Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Ephesians.

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ, who has blessed us with all the
spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Before
the world was made, he chose us, chose us
in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live
through love in his presence, determining
that we should become his adopted sons,
through Jesus Christ, for his own kind
purposes, to make us praise the glory of his
grace, his free gift to us in the Beloved.

That will explain why I, having once heard
about your faith in the Lord Jesus, and the
love that you show towards all the saints,
have never failed to remember you in my
prayers and to thank God for you. May the
God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father
of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and
perception of what is revealed, to bring you
to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten
the eyes of your mind so that you can see
what hope his call holds for you, what rich
glories he has promised the saints will
inherit.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Glory be to you, O Christ, proclaimed to the
pagans;
glory be to you, O Christ, believed in by the
world.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

John 1:1-18

(For shorter form, read between > <)
>A reading from the holy Gospel according
to John.

In the beginning was the Word:
the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came to be,
not one thing had its being but through him.
All that came to be had life in him
and that life was the light of men,
a light that shines in the dark,
a light that darkness could not overpower.<

A man came, sent by God.
His name was John.
He came as a witness,
as a witness to speak for the light,
so that everyone might believe through him.
He was not the light,
only a witness to speak for the light.
>The Word was the true light
that enlightens all men;
and he was coming into the world.
He was in the world

that had its being through him,
and the world did not know him.
He came to his own domain
and his own people did not accept him.
But to all who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God,
to all who believe in the name of him
who was born not out of human stock
or urge of the flesh
or will of man
but of God himself.
The Word was made flesh,
he lived among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory that is his as the only Son of the
Father,
full of grace and truth.<

John appears as his witness. He proclaims:
"This is the one of whom I said:
he who comes after me
ranks before me
because he existed before me."

Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us,
received –

yes, grace in return for grace,
since, though the Law was given through
Moses,
grace and truth have come through Jesus
Christ.

No one has ever seen God;
it is the only Son, who is nearest to the
Father's heart,
who has made him known.

>The Gospel of the Lord.<

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Sanctify, O Lord, the offerings we make
on the Nativity of your Only Begotten Son,
for by it you show us the way of truth
and promise the life of the heavenly Kingdom.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

To all who would accept him,
he gave the power to become children of God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Lord our God, we humbly ask you,
that, through the working of this mystery,
our offences may be cleansed
and our just desires fulfilled.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.