

Christmas Eve Reflection “The Flesh Becomes Word” Luke 2:20

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

There are at least 2 versions of the incarnation – in the Gospel of John, it is a cosmic birth. The Word became Flesh, but not at a particular point in time. It was a moment outside of time that we can call the *eschaton* – the fullness of time. It is a spiritual experience of all things coming together, especially the coming together of God and humanity.

In the Gospel of Luke, the Word became Flesh at a very particular time, when particular people were in political power, and the Hebrew people were oppressed. It was a moment in Kronos time – a linear, chronological timeline. Jesus came into an existing, human timeline to make God’s glory manifest and to renew the relationship between God and mortals. The moment was an earthy, visceral, tangible, painful, and joyful birth.

The fullness of God’s eternal character, **God’s Glory**, we experience spiritually in the eschaton of the Word, and historically in the life of Jesus.

St. Francis of Assisi, Italy, a 12th century preacher, pushed the envelope of church tradition to communicate God’s spiritual and physical Glory. He began the tradition of a live nativity scene, complete with a baby and animals... and the accompanying mess of babies and animals! Furthermore, St. Francis was known for taking off his coat or shoes in the middle of the street to give them away to people who needed them, even if that meant stripping himself of all his clothes! In the nativity reenactments and in his radical giving, he made the Word become Flesh. Another way of saying this is that St. Francis embodied *the Glory of God in a way that people could see*.

In many ways it can be easier to show love and concern than to talk about it. When I lived in Texas, I often heard the adage: You may be the only Bible that someone reads. Our actions matter. You and I know how to give money and food and time and talents for the betterment of our community... for example, we will have a chance during the service today to contribute to Joseph’s Storehouse, the fund that supports rent assistance in our area.

It is ALSO our calling **and our challenge** to put **words** to our faith. As people of faith, we must learn and practice how to articulate what we have experienced and what we believe. We can find ways to make the flesh of our actions become words of witness to God’s glory. Imagine the experience of the shepherds hearing the angels of heaven proclaiming Christ’s birth in full voice (sometimes I picture a heavenly choir like Gladys Knight and the Pips!) They shepherds must have each had

their own understanding of what the angels proclaimed to them and what happened at the manger. The scripture said *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them*. They found words so that their in-the-flesh experience could become spiritual.

You and I can do the same; We can start simply. Physical flesh can become the spiritual Word by simply beginning with the words of our Advent preparations: **peace, hope, joy and love**. Let's practice – Repeat after me: peace, hope, joy and love. Peace hope joy and love. In this congregational moment, the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth was transformed into the spiritual words of Christ.

Words **are** important, despite what St. Francis is credited with saying: *Preach the Gospel at all times; use words if necessary*. In our day and time, words are necessary. People need to hear and internalize our expressions of faith.

You and I are equipped to express **in words** how Jesus didn't embody a new and improved Yahweh, distinct from the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus was the fullness of the *eternal* character of God, speaking the Good News **words** of redemption, freedom, forgiveness, love, hope, and re-creation. God's Word became Flesh and dwelt among us. In turn, our experiences, like those of the shepherds, can be a blessing to the world when the flesh becomes the Word.

Amen.