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Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

*Did You Get the Word?
The One and Only
John 1:1-14*

As I told you last week, when we come to the prologue of John's gospel we are standing on holy ground. This is the most important Christological passage in the Bible. John introduces us to a mysterious character called the Word... "Logos" in Greek. In the first five verses, John makes incredible claims about this person: He is the eternal, divine creator of all things—the omnipotent God. All of that in the five verses. Amazing!

But John is just getting started. Within a few more lines, we arrive at the most incredible, spectacular, breathtaking verse in the whole Bible. I know, I know... you hear that from me all the time. It seems like every passage I preach is the most "incredible, spectacular, breathtaking verse in the whole Bible." But truly—this is. See if you can spot it. [Read John 1:1-14]

Did you see John's description of the monumental moment in human history? Here's my favorite translation. Verse 14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

Why this is so amazing? Think back again to what John just told us about the Logos. He is the eternal, divine, creator of all things. No one, nowhere had ever used loftier language to describe the Son of God than John does here. As I said, when you read these words—this description of the Logos—you are standing on Holy ground.

Do you remember Isaiah's vision of God upon his throne? When he saw God he cried out, "Woe is me!" "I am doomed! No human being can look upon this kind of holiness and survive!" Well that's the magnificent description of the Logos that John crafts for us in verses 1-5. And then... the greatest shock of human history... verse 14. What did this eternal, divine, omnipotent creator do? He "became flesh." He took on human form. The creator became as the creation. Now this is very important... he did not stop being God. No, as God He takes on flesh. This Logos-God slips on human flesh. One commentator describes it as God incognito.

How many of you have ever watched *Undercover Boss*. The CEO of a large company like 7-11 or Waste Management goes undercover. They disguise themselves and go to work in the trenches to get an unfiltered look at their

company. At the end of the show, the boss is “unveiled” to the employees he worked with. The fun part of the show is watching those employees come into the boss’s office, one at a time... and seeing the shock of recognition as it hits them. They start replaying how they treated this person who they thought was a rookie but was, in fact, the CEO of the company!

John 1: 14 is the ultimate *Undercover Boss*. Do you know what the theological term is for “becoming flesh?” Incarnation... like chili con carne... chili with flesh! I know; it’s crude, but the reality of this passage is crude. What kind of God leaves the eternal spirit world of heaven and incarnates... becomes flesh? Well, our God does. Our God did. And may I tell you, the incarnation is the scandal of the Christian gospel... and its glory!

Why is the incarnation a scandal? Why would it be scandalous to a Jew or a Muslim? The idea that Yahweh... Allah... the Holy One... would take on corrupt human flesh? Detestable! The Greeks were scandalized because they considered only that which was spiritual to be good; they despised the physical world. The Hindu is scandalized because of the exclusivity of the claim: one God only instead of millions of gods? Arrogance! And the secular humanist is scandalized because there is no god; there are only natural causes. A man claiming to be god? Come on! That’s purple Kool-Aid talk! The incarnation is the scandal of the Christian faith. It is why Jesus was killed—this claim of His that He was God in the flesh was blasphemy!

It is also the glory of the Christian faith. Because if it is true... if the all-powerful, all-holy, eternal, creator God who is as far from us as brilliant light is from cave darkness, if that God chooses to put on human flesh so that He can come visit us, it tells us that we and our flesh matter. It tells us that we are loved. How glorious is that? And how amazing!

And how clever John is to deliberately spring this trap on us. “The Word became flesh...” But he is not done shocking us. Do you see the word, “dwelt” in verse 14? NIV translates it, “...made his dwelling.” Do you know what a better translation is? [Unfold tent] “The Word became flesh and pitched his tent in our backyard.”

You know, it is shocking and scandalous enough to make the claim that God became flesh. But if He did, the very least He could do was take up residence in a palace. At least give Him a 6-star suite with a killer view. Can you imagine the Queen of England calling Ellis and Rachel and saying, “Children, we miss you over here. I want to visit and see how this Mark Toone fellow is treating you there in the colonies.” And Ellis replies, “Your majesty, we would be honored to host you. I’ve got a lovely pup tent that I’ll just set up in the backyard. You and Prince Philip will have plenty of room to stretch out!”

“The Word became flesh and pitched his tent in our midst.” Amazing! But there’s more... are you ready? The actual Greek word is “tabernacled.” Do you remember

when Moses led his people out of Egypt? Every time they stopped, the first thing they did was set up a tent which was called "the tabernacle." This was their portable temple where they worshiped God, made sacrifices and lit incense. But most importantly, this was where God came down to meet with them.

Listen to the very last verses in the book of Exodus. 40:34: "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels.

Did you hear that word, "glory?" The Jews called it "Shekinah," the brilliant, awesome, powerful presence of God. The Shekinah was so overwhelming that when Moses was with God on Mt. Sinai, God had to cover him because if Moses looked into His glorious face, he would die. The Shekinah was so overwhelming that when it filled the tabernacle, Moses could not even go inside. It was just too much. Too glorious!

Now, keep that in mind and let's return to our text. "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us... and we have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

When the Shekinah—the GLORY of God—came upon that first tabernacle in the wilderness, the people had to look away! Even Moses had to avoid it because to be in the presence of God's unfiltered holiness is like being a slug in the presence of salt. We just can't bear it. It burns. It is too much! But when the Logos puts on human flesh... He puts on a filter that allows us to look straight at Him! We can behold His glory, the glory of the One and Only who is the perfect combination of God's immense grace and His piercing, eternal truth. The most "incredible, spectacular, breathtaking verse in the Bible..." The Creator God came a callin' on His creation!

So when that happened, how did we respond? How did the world respond to this humble act of divine self-revelation? Did we throw a party... mount a parade... gather in a stadium to offer praise and worship? How did we welcome God in the flesh? ¹⁰"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own [people] did not receive Him."

The scandal of the Incarnation continues. But this time, it is our scandal. Because the Logos—the eternal, divine Creator—who deigned to take on human flesh and visit the world... the Logos came a 'callin...and we did not recognize Him.

How many of you recognize this guy? [Photo of Joshua Bell] Well, you are in good company, because the people in this Washington D.C. metro station didn't recognize him either. He looked like any other busker, trying to make a buck by playing music for the commuters, only this wasn't any other busker. This was Joshua Bell, one of the foremost violinists in the world, and he was playing a \$3½ million violin. He was playing music that he normally performs to sell-out audiences in Carnegie Hall, but when the maestro appeared in this unlikely place disguised in this unlikely outfit, no one recognized him.

Bell played for 45 minutes and, out of the 1,070 people who hurried by seven people stopped for at least a moment to take in the performance. And 27 people gave money... a total of \$32 and change for a guy who usually makes \$1000 a minute and is idolized the world over... if he is recognized. But he wasn't!

The Creator of the world came to the world, and the world did not recognize Him. But it gets worse. He also came to his own people—his chosen Jewish people—the people whom he had called out of obscurity and entrusted the privilege of blessing the rest of the world with God's truth. For hundreds of years, prophets predicted that this would happen... this God-sighting. If anyone should have recognized him—through His teaching, His power, His miraculous acts—it should have been His own people. But His own people did not receive Him!

Sad; it is one of the darkest statements in scripture. But then comes this wonderful word of invitation: ¹² "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

Where will you find greater words of welcome than this? "...to all who received him [who welcomed him, who recognized and put their trust in him] he gave the right to become children of God." Children of God, adopted into God's family. I know what it is to grow up in a family where I was loved and valued. My children know how that feels. Many people never experience that sense of belonging on this earth. And yet, John says that the God of the universe longs to adopt you as one of His children. All you need to do is welcome His one and only Son... Believe in him; receive him.

"The Word became flesh..." What do we do with this holy truth? For one thing, we marvel at it! Realize that when we are looking at Jesus—the one who stooped down to be with us, who condescended to become one of us—when we look at Him, we are looking full on at the glory of God. And it doesn't blind us; and it doesn't destroy us. God's glory full of grace and truth there to be received! Marvelous! But the Son doesn't want us just to marvel. He wants us to believe! He wants us to do what his own people did not do... welcome, believe and receive him.

The other thing we can do is live as Jesus lived. The incarnation meant that Jesus was willing to go where His people were. Because He loved them, He went to

them, got His hands dirty, shared in their suffering. If the eternal God can stoop in such a way, surely we who call ourselves “His” can do the same, can’t we? Last week I told you about Linda Brewer and invited you to serve and give. You responded overwhelmingly. So many offered to get their hands dirty... we had to say “No” to some. (By the way, we need another work crew next Saturday... and that afternoon, we are going to unveil the upgrades to the Brewers!) And as for the offering, it was the largest special offering we have ever received. So generous that not only will all of the improvements be taken care of—including the septic system—there will be extra left over to help with the costs of medical care and supplies.

That was an incarnational moment; when this church put on its work clothes and dug into its pockets and met someone right where they were with the love of Christ. Everyone it seems—even folks who don’t normally support their church financially—were captured by this vision of incarnational ministry. We were Christ with skin on.

So let’s not stop! Something powerful happens when we agree to be the fleshly hands and feet of Jesus... when His Holy Spirit empowers us, when we are filled with his grace and truth. Something powerful happens when we find out our neighbor can’t pay her electric bill, and we help her out... when we watch the kids so a couple can have their first date in six months... when we share the gospel with a co-worker. Each of these acts—when the Holy Spirit of Jesus inspires and empowers us to represent Him—is a tiny incarnation. And the world gets a glimpse of their God! “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. What are you learning about the "Logos" in the first 14 verses of John 1 that you did not know before? What difference does this knowledge make?
2. How did Pastor Mark translate verse 14? What does that say about God's heart for his world?
3. Who best typifies an "incarnational ministry" in your own life? How should this model of ministry impact the way WE live out our witness to the Logos/Christ?