

## Sermon Notes

### *Advent Meditations: Flesh & Fellowship*

John 1:10-18

December 20, 2015

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#### **Introduction: *By common confession***

If someone was to ask you to give a summary of the faith, what would you say? What about summarizing part of the faith? This is a peek back at our Epistle reading, and it is something of a “common confession” of the Church, and it is also about “the mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. 3:16).

This is a confession in which we see our Lord’s delight in confounding the wisdom of that age and this age. This is a confession which begins with God showing Himself in the flesh—through the incarnation—and doing so in a way which is *most human*: His advent as a baby. That which surrounded the birth of Jesus was all “very fleshy.”

#### *The place*

The birth of the King did not occur in Rome or even in Jerusalem, but rather in Bethlehem. The Hebrew prophet Micah even referred to the city as a “little” or insignificant city. If it was on the map, it would receive a small dot. Still, it was a *place*; one inhabited by flesh and blood.

#### *The announcement*

The announcement of the birth of Jesus was not made with fireworks or a parade, but to shepherds, on the night shift, who worked upon the dirt of the earth.

#### *What about that word “mystery”?*

In Paul’s day, and in our own, plurality and pantheons dotted the landscapes of the minds and land. Each religion would have its own mysteries, devotions, and devotees. The mysteries of most other religions would be vague, foggy, fuzzy, and could not be grasped with the hands or bumped into. Paul speaks of the mystery of godliness (which starts with the incarnation) and declares that it is open to the world; it was visible; touchable. This mystery is not found in a passage, it is found in a person.

The opening line of this confession is: “God was manifested in the flesh.”

This is the incarnation, the “en-fleshing” of the 2nd Person of the Godhead, Jesus, eternally existing as God, and He takes upon Himself—flesh. Real flesh...

“Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body—which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on human body...” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*).

The Christian message boldly declares that the One who made flesh, entered and became flesh. To deny this is to be wearing the cloaks of an antichrist (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). This flesh was such real flesh that Jesus was able to suffer and die.

#### ***Advent Meditations: Flesh & Fellowship***

This series about some of the “things and themes” of Advent and Christmas (gifts, lights, music & songs) tends to receive some uumph in this season, and are of interest to children of all ages. Our goal is to think through these “things and themes” biblically. And now coming to flesh—the incarnation—here are some observations:

#### *Astonishment*

We ought to join Mary and partner with the shepherds, and with the saints of all ages in our astonishment. Augustine packaged it well:

“Maker of the sun, He is made under the sun. In the Father He remains, from His mother He goes forth. Creator of heaven and earth, He was born on earth under heaven. Unspeakably wise, He is wisely speechless. Filling the world, He lies in a manger. Ruler of the stars, He nurses at His mother’s bosom. He is both great in the nature of God, and small in the form of a servant.”

#### *Our Text: John 1:10-18*

It is clear that the One who made the world came into the world, and came unto His own. Although some did not receive Him, He did—through His work—receive others.

#### *Contrary—the unexpected*

From the angelic announcement by the angels, in the fields, to the shepherds, in a small place, we may also cast our eyes to the “contrariness” of all of this, and how our Lord’s invasion of Himself is offensive to ancient and modern “sensibilities.” In the incarnation, our God submits Himself to His own ways, even His own creation.

#### *Dealing with sin and evil*

Our Lord entered into and dealt with sin and evil; not by removing it, but through transformation. He didn’t wipe the slate of sinful humanity out and start over, nor did He “stop the Crucifixion; He rose from the dead” (Dorothy Sayers).

#### *Advent & Easter*

His was a very real and fleshy birth; not a “spirit in the air”, a feeling, or an idea. Once we allow the reduction of the birth of Jesus to be something of our own whims—and something *other* than a real birth—we have also reduced the bodily resurrection to an idea, a notion, a mere concept of hope...something quite alien to the reality and the biblical message.