

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

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The Season of Epiphany speaks to us of what it means to say, as we say each and every year on Christmas Day during the reading of John's Gospel, that "*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*"

Each week through Epiphany we enter more fully into the story that the Incarnation; the incredible never-before and never-since story of how God entered, fully and completely, into the reality of human life that he might, fully and completely, redeem all of humanity.

*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*

Each week through Epiphany we see how, first as a child and later as an adult, Christ manifested divine wisdom and divine power and divine glory in his humanity - whether the divine wisdom of a child amazing the doctors and teachers of the Law in the Temple in Jerusalem; or the divine glory of the Trinity at his baptism by John in the Jordan; or his divine power in changing water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana.

These are the stories that challenge us to move beyond the image of a new-born infant lying in a manger to think about who this new-born child really is; and why this child was born in the first place; to think about why it was that God entered into his creation in the humanity, in the flesh and blood reality, of Mary's child. In every possible way, God himself literally became flesh; and, in every possible way, God himself literally dwelt among us.

*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*

So, seen in that light, the two stories that are found in this week's Gospel fit perfectly into the Epiphany story. They fit perfectly in this extended reflection on the Incarnation; on the Word of God made Flesh. As we heard in this week's Gospel, Jesus comes down from the mountain and is met by a man suffering from leprosy; who is healed by the touch of Christ. Then Jesus is met by a centurion, a Roman soldier, who comes to plead on behalf of his servant; a servant who is healed with nothing more than Christ's word.

So in very clear, very obvious ways we see divine power manifested in the flesh and blood reality of the Christ; the Word of God made Flesh. Just as we saw last week when Jesus turned water into wine. Just as we will see again next week when Jesus stills the winds and waves of the Sea of Galilee. And if that's all we hear from these stories, then that will be enough. To know that Christ has the power to heal that which is broken and to order that which is disordered is to know a lot.

But there is something more that we can see here. Because in both of these stories Jesus does more than just heal broken bodies. He does more than just heal physically. Because in both cases he also heals relationally. Which may be even more important.

The story that we find all the way back in the Book of Genesis is perfectly clear. It's the story that we see play out in every age and every place: the story of how human disobedience and sin inevitably lead to human suffering. In so many cases that

suffering is found in broken bodies: in illness, disease, and death. That is the reality of the human story. But just as often, and maybe more, that suffering is found in broken relationships: in brother rising up against brother; and nation rising up against nation. In resentment and bitterness. In apathy and greed. In rejection and isolation and division. That too is the reality of the human story. That is our story: your story and mine. It is the illness that, in one way or another, we all suffer from.

So when Christ heals a man suffering from leprosy by reaching out to touch him, he's saying loudly and clearly that he seeks to heal not just that man's body but also the rejection and isolation and fear that kept that man out of the community; that forced him to live away from his sisters and brothers. And when Jesus starts to go to the home of that Roman soldier he's saying loudly and clearly that he seeks to heal not just his servant's body but the social and political divisions that set them apart as enemies. And if we see how Jesus does all of that in this week's Gospel, then we have to see how the Incarnation is God's way of healing human brokenness on every possible level and in every possible way. Not just making whole broken bodies but calling us to make whole all the broken relationships of our very broken world.

Like God, we are inherently relational. As we saw in the story of Christ's Baptism, we have been made and remade in the image of the Trinity; and if the Doctrine of the Trinity tells us anything at all it tells us that God exists as a community of love; that his entire existence is relational: a Father forever loving the Son, and the Son forever loving the Father, and that union of love existing forever as the Holy Spirit. Three persons existing forever as one God; and one God existing forever as three persons.

That's a story larger than all the many stories that make up our lives; because we have been made in the image of this Triune God; because we've been called to live all of life as images of the Trinity. And the sad temptation that comes from living in a broken world is the temptation to see ourselves solely as free and independent individuals; rightfully choosing our own course, regardless of its effects on those around us; regardless of our responsibilities to others. And we have the profound social fragmentation of our world to show for it: it's my life; it's my choice, as we hear people say.

But, whenever we see ourselves outside of our relationships; whenever we insist on our own way, our own wishes, our own desires, regardless of our responsibilities, we fail to grasp our own fundamental nature; we fail to acknowledge our inherent inner connectedness; and we dishonour the image in which God has made us; the image which is renewed in us at our own baptism.

That's why this week's Epistle speaks of how we are called in Christ to "live peaceably with all;" to never return "evil for evil;" to feed our enemies when they are hungry and to give them something to drink when they thirst. Because we cannot overcome the brokenness of our very broken world with even more brokenness. We cannot overcome division with more division; or resentment with more resentment. Humanity has tried that for millennia and failed. Over and over again.

Which is why it's so incredibly important for us to think about what it means to say, as we say every year on Christmas Day, that the "Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us."