

## 4 Jan – Word became flesh – John 1:1-5, 10- 14

*Sometimes, poet Godfrey Rust writes,  
words are not enough  
for everything we have to say.*

*Words can't beat like a heart.  
A verb won't sweat or bleed.  
A noun doesn't get thirsty.  
An adjective cannot feel pain.  
Something gets lost  
in translation into words.*

*So when God  
needed to express  
a love deeper than words  
he used body language  
of a kind not known on earth before.*

Each of the four gospel writers at the start of the New Testament speak of Jesus entry into our world in different ways.

Mark is abrupt and dramatic. The word repeated often is 'immediately!' Jesus' ministry is beginning, now - right now - and we must jump on board! Matthew and Luke tell the story, more conventionally, from the beginning of Jesus' life, preparing us for what will come by linking the stories of his birth to the ancient prophecies.

John, however, does things differently. John begins with the words we read this morning, part poetry, part theology, laying this gospel open to accusations of presenting a Jesus too transcendent, too removed from the reality and risk of human life, too heavenly to be any earthly good.

And yet then we reach the stunning conclusion of verse 14, *"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."* We realise that the writer's intention in exalting Jesus as the divine Logos or Word, in saying the Word was *'in the beginning'*, in echoing the words of Genesis, in saying the Word was with God and was God, in saying all this, is to reveal the wonder – the unfathomable wonder - that Jesus is God and God became human.

The two claims stand on each other. For Jesus to show us *the full picture* of God's grace and truth, he must be God. And for Jesus to show it *to us* he must become human. As Karl Kuhn writes, *"John's exaltation of Jesus to unimaginable heights of transcendence serves his even more crucial interest of proclaiming that in Jesus the barrier between the divine and the human realms are breached to a degree never before realised."*

As *The Message* version of the Bible puts it: *“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.”*

We struggle, however, with this idea of God having flesh and blood, and of God truly loving our flesh and blood.

Perhaps it goes back to the Greek interpreters of the Bible who divided the body and soul in ways Hebrew thinking did not. A divide widened by Western philosophy and the Protestant Reformation which, with all its wonderful discoveries, sowed into Christianity a suspicion of the material, of bodiliness, which the church has reaped in a terrible legacy of abuse of the vulnerable.

And yet, as the gospel of John says, our Christian story is that God became a body, and that God loves our bodies, in all their irregular splendour, with all their quirks, in all their frailty. And that it is in these bodies - there is no other way – that we give glory to God and reveal the glory of God.

The Episcopal priest and writer, Barbara Brown Taylor, points out that on Jesus’ last night on earth, when he gathered with his friends to celebrate Passover, he didn’t give his disciples something to think about when he was gone or something to talk about when he was gone. He gave them something to do when he was gone – washing feet and sharing a meal. *“Activities that are so real, so untidy, so up close and personal that they can never become purely intellectual exercises. Activities that require us to use our bodies and draw us unavoidably into each other’s lives...”*

*“Do this,”* he said. Not believe this but do this – *“in remembrance of me.”* In doing these things for one another, we become the love of God to one another.



In our bodies, caring for one another’s bodies, we become snapshots of the image of the love of God. We bring together – we re-member (as we remember) - the body of Christ.

This morning, at the beginning of this year, we gather to share a meal together; an act of nurturing our bodies and an act of nurturing this body, and then, throughout this year, we continue to nurture this body through all the acts of caring, helping, humbling ourselves, giving, feeding, encouraging, challenging and enriching one another.

*“We declare,”* the writer of 1 John 1 says: *“...what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...”* We declare that God reveals *“a love deeper than words.”* We declare that God uses, *“body language of a kind not known on earth before.”* We declare that, in Jesus, God has come to be with us so we can be with God.

## **Call to Worship**

A new year stands on our doorstep  
ready to enter our life's journey.

**Something in us welcomes this visitor:  
the hope and joy of new beginnings.**

Something in us rebuffs this visitor:  
the challenge of a year's good-bye.

**Something in us fears this visitor:  
the unnamed events of future days.**

A new year stands on our doorstep.  
with fragile caution we move  
to open the door for its entrance,  
and our hearts leap with surprise,  
for there beside this brand-new year  
stands our God with outstretched hand!

**God smiles and gently asks of us:  
can we walk this year together?**

— adapted from the [Sisters of Saint Martha of Antigonish](http://www.sistersofstmartha.org.uk/) website.

## **Time with Children**

Fran Mathey – glittering mohawk of bling/cut snake  
Pom poms, lattices, cartwheels

## **Opening Prayer**

At the dawn of a new year,  
we come to look for, to pray for, to hope for hope for a new world.  
Let the darkness lift, to welcome a dawn of plenty,  
with enough for everyone and people ready to share.  
Let the day begin, with new energy for the work  
of celebrating and nurturing new life and caring for the vulnerable.  
Let the light shine, to open a path to safety  
for all who are seeking home and longing for life.  
Let the sun rise on new resolve  
to end shooting and bombing and terror and to find solutions that will last.  
At the dawn of a new year, we come to look for, to pray for, to hope for  
to declare our hope,  
and to welcome a new world.

~ adapted from prayer written by Susan Durber, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>

## **Prayers of Intercession -Prayer for the New Year**

Loving God, at the beginning of this new year  
we look back and we look forward.

In the year that has passed there were joys and sorrows;  
there were blessings and challenges,

And here in this place  
we are reminded that you were present through it all;  
that we are never alone; that nothing can separate us from your love.

So at the beginning of this new year, we pause to reflect on the year that has passed.

We remember the things from this past year we are most thankful for;  
where we felt happy and alive,  
and where we gave and received the most love. (*silence*)  
Thank you, God, for being with us in those times.

We also remember the things from this past year we are least thankful for;  
where there was sadness and pain,  
and where we gave and received the least love. (*silence*)  
Thank you, God, for being with us in those times too.

Loving God, at the beginning of this new year, we know you will be with us still;  
when we are thankful and when we are not;  
when we are happy and when we are sad;  
when we feel alive and when we feel drained;  
when we give and receive love and when we do not.

God, the world we live in is messy and challenging,  
it is a world of conflict – we hold up to you the country of Venezuela this morning, we hold up to you the situation in Iran, we hold up to you the people of Nigeria, we hold up to you ongoing conflict and suffering, we hold up to you the grief in Switzerland and the grief and fear being felt here in Australia.

Yet, God, you are with us always, giving us grace and courage to live faithfully in this imperfect world

To care for one another – for Rod and Marilyn in hospital – to support Johnson and Fredah and pray for Johnson's mother, Hannah, in hospital in Nigeria.  
To celebrate the wonderful, faithful and full life of Dawn Waterhouse, to rejoice in the safe arrival of Lila Rose and to surround her and Ally with your blessings, to give thanks for 60 years of marriage and partnership and friendship for Thorwald and Jill.

Remind us always of the promise of your kingdom, emerging around us and through us. Through our lives and by our prayers may your kingdom come.  
Amen.

### **Benediction Prayer**

Eternal God, you call us to ventures, where we cannot see the ending,  
by paths yet untrodden and perils unknown.  
Give us faith to go out with courage, not knowing where we go  
but only that your hand is leading us,

## **Invitation to Communion**

We are here because Jesus invites us – new and old, young and not so young, strangers and friends, those who come here regularly and visitors, believers and those who are only just hearing Jesus' call...

So, let us join in this meal, let us re-member the one who calls us  
Not because we understand, but because we are understood.  
Not because of how we feel, but because God has food for us.  
Not because we deserve a place, but because Jesus invites us as we are.

### **Let's pray:**

*Loving God, we come to this table with gratitude, faith and hope...*

*Christ died for us: accept our thanks and praise.*

*Christ is here: give us faith to know this presence.*

*Christ is coming again: may this hope lighten the dark world.*

*With thanksgiving we remember,  
with joy we welcome our risen Lord,  
with confidence we know that the future is yours. Amen.*

### The story

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, *"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

Let us take this bread, remembering Christ together.

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, *"This cup is the new covenant relationship in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

We will hold our cups and drink together, remembering Christ together.

**As those invited to this table, we share this meal.**

**Remembering Christ coming to us. Remembering Christ together.**

Peace be with you. (And also with you!)

Let us share – by clasping hands or with a nod – whatever you are comfortable with – the peace of Christ with one another.