

Christmas Day, December 25, 2016
The Word Became Flesh
Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:1-14
Rev. Dorothy Cottingham
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Tigard, OR

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Who do you look like? Your mom? Your dad? Your great-aunt Bertha? The family tells me I look like my mom and sound like my sister.

Have you ever wondered who Jesus looks like?

Martin Luther said this about the prologue to the fourth gospel: “this periscope is the most important of all the Gospels of the church year, and yet it is not, as some think, obscure or difficult. For upon it is clearly founded the important article of faith concerning the divinity of Christ”.

Luther loved John’s Gospel because the evangelist makes it clear that “Whoever has touched Christ’s skin has actually touched God”. Have you ever touched Christ’s skin? Oh, yes you have! Listen again to the opening words of John’s gospel

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word WAS God. Are echoes of Genesis 1 ringing in your memory? Jesus WAS in the beginning, with God. All things came into being through “the Word”

Remember that before creation there was a formless void. Darkness covered the face of the deep, and God spoke light into being. God separated the light from the darkness.

Jesus IS the Word. The very Word God spoke at creation. In him was life and that life was the light of all people. And, if Jesus was present when God spoke light into being, Jesus was also present when God created humans in God’s own image. You are created in the image of God. I am created in the image of God. You touch the very flesh of God when you share the peace with one another here; when you hold the hands of a sick or grieving friend. You touch the very flesh of God when you take the bread and wine at the table. Perhaps this **Parable of the Birds by Louis Cassels** will help to clarify things.

Now the man to whom I’m going to introduce you was not a scrooge; he was a kind, decent, mostly good man. He was generous to his family and upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn’t believe all that stuff about God becoming a man, which the churches proclaim at Christmas time. It just didn’t make sense, and he was too honest to pretend otherwise.

“I’m truly sorry to distress you,” he told his wife, “but I’m not going with you to church this Christmas Eve.”

He said he'd feel like a hypocrite and that he would much rather just stay at home. And so he stayed, and they went to the midnight service. Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier. Then he went back to his fireside chair to read his newspaper.

Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound. Then another and another — sort of a thump or a thud. At first he thought someone must have been throwing snowballs against his living room window.

But when he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.

Quickly he put on a coat and galoshes and then he tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in.

He figured food would entice them. So he hurried back to the house, fetched breadcrumbs and sprinkled them on the snow. He made a trail to the brightly lit, wide-open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the breadcrumbs and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them. He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them and waving his arms. Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.

And then he realized that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me — that I am not trying to hurt them but to help them. But how?

Any move he made tended to frighten and confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed, because they feared him. "If only I could be a bird," he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see and hear and understand."

At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow.

"Now I understand," he whispered. "Now I see why you had to do it."

This happened.

God was revealed in a unique way –
not in tablets of stone,
or in an angel,
or in a cloud,
or a pillar of fire or a dream.

Not in a vision, or in a spiritual feeling – none of these.

God was revealed as a human being...just like you and me.

God in skin.

God with bones.

God in a diaper.

God nursing at his mother's breast.

God crying himself to sleep.

This happened. Why? Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria sums it up simply "Jesus became what we are that he might make us what he is".

Who do you look like? You look like God because of Jesus Christ.

Claimed, loved and forgiven.

Thanks be to God!