**Jesus the Son of David** 24/12/23

Read: Isaiah 9:1-7, John 1:1-14,

Text: John 1:1-14

Psalms: 8, 27:1-5, 49:1-10, 72old

We touched down in Kolkata shortly before midnight. We will always remember this because the stamp in my passport has 20November and in Elizabeth’s passport 21November. We reached our guest house and got to bed at 1.30am. We were up at 5.50 am to join a friend, a man we had never met, in a taxi to take us to a village some distance from the city. The traffic was light in the early morning, and we were soon turning off the highway onto a narrow village road; we stopped for a cup of chai and a biscuit. The road got narrower as we drove along the levee bank of the river. Our GPS took us to a bridge that was only half built. We turned back and crossed a rickety bamboo bridge in our Tarago-like car; Elizabeth wanted to get down and walk but we made it across. Sleeping dogs and goats on the road made driving a challenge.

We came to a place where the police had blocked the road because of a religious procession. They would not let us go ahead, so we turned back. By this stage I was praying in the back seat. The GPS started leading down village paths; we were lost! We stopped to ask for help. A young man on a motor bike stopped to listen- the conversation was all in Bengali. Soon we were following the motor bike back the way we had come. This helmeted young man spoke to the police and they let us through the road block. We followed him for some distance until he waved us on and disappeared. I did wonder for a moment if he was an angel sent by the Lord! Angels are associated with the birth of Jesus, and an angel led Peter out of prison (Acts 12).

Near to Kolkata is a place called Serampore, the centre where William Carey settled. Apart from translating the Bible into some six Indian languages, Carey spoke out against the practices of satee and child sacrifice. I have seen Hindus sacrifice chickens but not a child. A child is sacrificed in a most desperate attempt to appease or influence a god, and that not only in Hinduism. In the OT we read of animal sacrifices being made to atone for sin, but never child sacrifices. However, no one was made perfect by these animal sacrifices. They pointed forward to the supreme sacrifice of a ‘Lamb without blemish’ provided by God himself, his only begotten Son; God did this for you and me (Gen 22:14, Heb 9:9).

John speaks of God giving his only begotten Son as the propitiation for the sins of the world (John 3:16, 1John 2:22), but in John 1:14 he takes us back to the incarnation, to the ‘Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us’. The ‘Word’ or ‘Logos’ was John’s way of referring to Jesus, as this verse tells us. Just why he uses this word we can discuss another time. In verse 1 of this chapter John assures us that this ‘Word’ was God. So Jesus was fully God; again, more of this next time. Today our focus is on the Word becoming flesh and blood, on God’s Son, the second person of the Trinity, becoming a man.

All around the world people are celebrating this historical event, namely the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem just over two thousand years ago. Do they know what they are celebrating and why? Are you able to tell them? John’s gospel gives us the answer, in particular this verse. Our subheadings are: ‘God in the flesh’, ‘He dwelt among us and we saw his glory’, and ‘Grace and truth revealed’.

**1. God in the flesh**

Our text does not say literally, ‘God in the flesh’; it says, ‘The Word became flesh’ and the context clearly shows the word, ‘Word’ refers to Jesus. But Jesus will later declare equality with the Father or with God (John 10:30). This was the reason the Jewish leaders hated Jesus of Nazareth and accused him of blasphemy. Jesus not only declared he was one with the Father, but demonstrated this by miraculous signs and marvellous words. In fact he revealed God to the world.

Jesus was fully God- ‘The Word was God’- so we can say, ‘God in the flesh’ or God became man. God is a spirit of course. We cannot see God or see his face lest we die, as God told Moses (Exod 33:20). Man on the other hand has a physical body. God made us with flesh and blood to live in this physical world. He also breathed into us the breath of life so we are more than just flesh and blood, but our life is bound up with our body. The Bible often speaks of the flesh being evil; it became evil when sin entered the world and corrupted us, and brought death upon us.

‘God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons’ (Gal 4:4,5). Jesus was not an angel; angels are created not born. An angel helped Peter out of prison but not out of sin and death. Jesus was made a little lower than the angels, even while remaining God the Son, because he had to made like us in order to take our sin (Heb 2:9, 19). Jesus took on flesh and blood when he was a born of the virgin Mary in a stable in Bethlehem just over two thousand years ago. The sentiment, ‘No crying he makes’ is not from the Bible.

Jesus grew up in a family, eating and sleeping and working like any other child. The Bible tells us that he got tired and slept on the boat. Jesus could slip away in a crowd; he did not have a halo or wear special robes. Jesus was tempted by Satan; he was tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). While Jesus, the Son of God, became flesh and dwelt among us, Paul makes it clear that it was ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ that he came (Phil 2:7). Jesus was not born in sin as we are; he took on the flesh and blood that we have but not the sin that we inherit from Adam, and of course not the sin that we commit; he grew up without sinning. ‘The incarnation made it possible for Jesus to die’. That death could not hold Jesus (Acts 2:24) points to ‘him who knew no sin’ apart from ours, and to his eternal place in the Godhead.

That the ‘Word became flesh’ speaks of the pre-existence and indeed eternal being of Jesus. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus was with God in the beginning. He took on flesh and blood according to the will of God and the love of God for us- that we might be saved. One commentator writes, “The incarnation is the foundation of our salvation. Jesus’ eternal divinity and pre-existence (‘has come’) and true incarnational humanity (‘in the flesh’) constitute the heart of apostolic gospel”.

In his letters John condemns as heretics any who deny that Jesus ‘came in the flesh’ (1John 4:3). This is not a common heresy in our day; a more common heresy today is to deny that Jesus is any more than a man, or that Jesus is God the Son. Many regard Jesus as a great teacher and example of a man willing to die for a cause- as self-deluded as he might have been! But in the second century some Christians called Gnostics taught that Jesus only seemed to have a body (Docetists), or that he became a man only on the cross because, ‘How could God the Son die?’ This heresy saw the body as evil; some became ascetics, afflicting their the bodies, while others indulged the flesh because it played no part in salvation.

**2. He dwelt among us, and we saw his glory**

Coming into this world ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ was a great condescension and humiliation for Jesus, the Son of God. Yet God, or his presence, came into the tent of meeting built by Moses; this was where God meet with Moses. God’s presence came in the form of the Shekinah glory that appeared between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. A cloud came and covered this tent whenever God’s presence appeared.

After the golden-calf incident Moses would not move on unless God’s presence went with him. Indeed, Moses wanted to see God’s glory but this was not possible (Exod 33:15-23). In Jesus we have one who is greater than Moses, one who in fact reveals the glory of God. ‘In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son… who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of his person’ (Heb 1:2, 3). When Phillip asked Jesus to ‘show us the Father’, Jesus said to him, ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). So if you want to see God, see Jesus! We do not see Jesus as John and Phillip and the disciples did, but we have their record of what they saw.

In Jesus ‘dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily’ (Col 2:9), at the same time as Jesus dwells among us. In the form of a man Jesus was tempted and suffered, while the divine glory was also revealed. That divine glory was revealed most wonderfully to Peter, James and John, on the mountain. Was John referring to this incident when he wrote ‘We beheld his glory’? Not necessarily. The glory of God was revealed in Jesus at all times, though generally veiled to the human eye (1Cor 3:18). The apostle Paul saw this glory on the road to Damascus such that he fell to the ground blinded. The risen Jesus ascended in the clouds of heaven and is now seated in glory at the right hand of the Father. He will come again on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mat 24:30). We who are waiting for him will be changed in an instant to behold him in unveiled glory.

While Jesus took on flesh and blood, he remains ‘the only begotten of the Father’ (1:14). He was made like us in every way, and had to be in order to become our great High Priest, the one to represent us before God the Father; our sin, remember, cuts us off from God. Jesus calls us his brethren because we are; we are of the same family because of the incarnation, but as adopted children not begotten. We were adopted only after Jesus was begotten, and died on the cross bearing our sin, thereby reconciling us to the Father.

Do you find it hard to understand or grasp the incarnation? Do not be discouraged or dismayed because the disciples and everyone does- remember Phillip and his plea, ‘Show us the Father’. Jesus simply asked them to believe him and they did, and so can you. It is all logical from God’s perspective because he had to be just and the justifier, and this was the only way (Rom 3:26). In order to save you from the penalty of sin, someone else had to take your punishment? The only one who could do this was another person, but a person without their own sin. Only Jesus, the Word become flesh, the Son of David and Son of God, fitted this requirement.

Those sacrificing a child in order to please God were not entirely wrong, even though it was a futile and abhorrent practice. God did ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. But only the sinless Son of God could carry our sins and satisfy the wrath of God upon those sins; yes, the sins of the whole world!

**3. Grace and truth**

‘For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God’ (Eph 2:8). What is grace? What does it mean to be saved by grace through faith? We define grace as the unmerited or undeserved favour of God. John 1:14 defines grace as Jesus Christ. Jesus is the wisdom of God (1Cor 1:30). Jesus is the love of God (1John 3:16). Jesus is also the grace of God. We would not know what love or grace is apart from Jesus. And the revelation of grace in Jesus Christ began in the incarnation, before being fully revealed in the cross.

The law was given by God through Moses but no one was saved by keeping the law (1:17). By the law is the knowledge of sin, and the animal sacrifices pointed to the supreme sacrifice of the cross. Remember, no blood, no forgiveness of sin (Heb 9:22). This is the truth, the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. To think you can be saved without the cross of Jesus is an insult to Jesus who died for you, and to God who sent him into this world to die for you. John writes, ‘Of his fullness we have all received, and grace for grace’ (1:16). Have you received this grace? It is free!