

## Word Made Flesh

JourneyMates Advent Time Apart

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Mary Vandel Young

JM Trustee and Executive Director

Advent is the season of celebrating Immanuel – God with us – fulfilling our heart's desire – “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!” Isaiah 64:1.

Advent brings a sense of hope, expectancy and longing. During Advent, we embrace our longing for our King who was and is and is to come. The posture of Advent waiting is a hopeful, expectant waiting, a certain waiting. Like watchmen who stand ready, waiting for the morning, we know it will come and it will be a beautiful sunrise. Psalm 130. The King is coming!

Advent calls us toward a deeper sense of longing, awareness, curiosity and noticing.

The first three synoptic Gospels hold the birth narratives of Jesus coming to live among us. Then there is John's Gospel...he has something a bit different in mind when he writes in John 1:14:

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...”*

I absolutely love this passage of scripture. My intellect enjoys devouring all the meaning. From John's intent as he spoke to his Gnostic audience to the meaning behind all the fabulous Greek words, I enjoy thinking with God about how He became a man, in His Son, Jesus Christ, putting skin on as a human being, and humbling himself to become “in very nature man” as Paul writes about so eloquently in Philippians 2. I like studying the Greek meanings of words like Logos – God's complete revelation of his thoughts and being through the Holy Spirit in the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The Word that John uses to describe that reality is one of my favorite Greek words, “skenoō” which literally means to pitch a tent. The NIV and ESV translate that as “dwelt among us”, but I also like Eugene Peterson's version when he paraphrases that passage writing

that God “moved into the neighborhood”. The original Greek meaning relates us to the idea of the tabernacle of God’s people – the tent of meeting where God’s people went to be in his presence, veiled to most except priests. In Jesus, born a babe in the flesh, just like us, God brings the tabernacle of His presence to us – the middle of all our mess and darkness. “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.” – Nicene Creed.

*This is the truth that as Christians from all traditions, we believe.*

There is so much to be learned here about God, studied here, and understood here. God uses Bible, theological and doctrinal study to help form us and change us. There is such goodness in all this knowledge and so much importance to us 21<sup>st</sup> century believers in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

*God with us.*

*Indeed, this truth of Scripture is the firm foundation on which the church stands. And as a Christian ministry, God’s holy, authoritative Word of Scripture and belief in the triune nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit provide the foundation of all we are and do in JourneyMates.* If Jesus is not the incarnate son of God who is revealed in the divine, holy Word of God in scripture, “all this” is nothing more than a nicely tinselled spa-for-the-spirit-experience, a one-off means to getting away from it all in the midst of an otherwise crowded, hurried season.

*Yet, there is even more...*

There was a time in my life not so long ago when most of what sought from a passage like John 1 was knowledge. I loved God’s Word and enjoyed studying it. I was in seminary at the time and was thoroughly engaged in the Scripture study and theological training. I was all about good exegesis, homiletics, Greek, Hebrew, preaching and teaching. I believed in the primacy of scripture, the authority of the Bible and the importance of studying God’s Word, knowing about God, having good theology and doctrine...*and I still do by the way...* and after years of ministering to young people, I was pretty good at applying scripture to real life situations in others lives and in mine.

*At that same time of life, though, I was also a young wife and mother who was wearing herself out trying to know it all and do it all.*

Recognizing my plight, my pastor at the time, Judy, called me into her office one day after church and told me: “Mary, I will call Jason (my husband), hire a sitter for Luke (our baby boy), make arrangements with Nate (my boss/her friend - did I mention that I was also working full-time for the seminary?)...I will even pay for you to go, but you are going to the silent retreat next week.

*She wasn't kidding.*

After quite a bit of “I really can'ts” and “way too much to do's”, I agreed to go—with my husband, my boss and our baby boy cheering me on all the way.

I had been on silent retreats before while in seminary and in ministry...I thought I knew what to expect...I didn't.

After lots of silence, the facilitators introduced me to the prayer practice of Lectio Divina...its rhythms and movements. I listened to the oh-so-familiar story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 with rapped attention...I really thought I knew that story after using it multiple times in my ministry talks.

*I did know the story, but I hadn't let the story know me.*

As I listened, I felt myself move into the scene and I recognized myself in Zachaeuss, up there in the high tree, just trying to get a glimpse of Jesus. I sensed His Spirit calling me down from my high place and reminding me that I too am a child of God, the God who loves me and wants to be with me. As I listened, I relaxed into the embrace of my loving Father.

*Rocked. My. World.*

Through that true listening and experiencing of God's Word through the practice of Lectio Divina, I encountered God himself in his living Word and He encountered me.

*“The Word... became flesh... and made his dwelling among us...”*

What do you notice in yourself as you really listen again to those words? Where do you sense the Spirit of God drawing you?

“This” is so much more – this is Advent, set apart, sacred time and space, Word made flesh, Kingdom of heaven coming down, transformation at work!

*It is this same sense of Advent and the Incarnation, with which we approach God's Word in JourneyMates each time we enter into prayerful conversation with God through Lectio Divina. Just as we approach Christmas morning with a sense of expectant hope of our coming King, we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit as we read God's Holy Word to us. As we do so we wait with longing, staying in a believing posture that God wants to speak to us through His living Word, made alive in the incarnate Jesus Christ.*

God's Word, says Hebrews is “living, active, sharper than a double-edged sword”. In Jesus Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Holy Scripture has the power to mold us and shape us as Isaiah tells us. “Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.” Isaiah 64:8. Truly, God's Word is a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path. Psalm 119.

As we approach God's Word in praying the scriptures through Lectio Divina, and in the movement of His Word being lived out in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ, we stand with a posture of openness and expectation to God's desire for us, readiness to the Holy Spirit's leading, and expectancy that the Incarnate Word made flesh is being made in us as well.

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.*

*Israel's Strength and Consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear Desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child and yet a King,*

*Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

- Charles Wesley