

## 1. Christmas - *God in the flesh*: The Love of God

*Dear Listeners,*

This month of December, in which the celebration of *Christmas* takes such a central place in our activities, experiences, and focal points, we want to direct your attention to the *unique* account of the gospel by the apostle *John*. Last week I explained to you how different John's account is, compared to that of Matthew and Luke. John concentrates, I said, on the *crux* of the matter: what happened when the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem? Then the Word became *flesh*! What Word? The *Word* who was *God* and who was with God, the Word by whom God made everything, the Word by whom God said, "Let there be light, and there was light!" *That* is the Word that came into the world, John reveals, and through that Word the light came into the world again too! For by the sin of man, *darkness* had come into the world. Yet, God came with His Word again and again to conquer the darkness and restore the light! He used the proclamation of the gospel to restore the *light*, and in that way to bring *life* back too, life with God, life in the light with God! Now that Word, that light and life-giving word came into this world, yes came into the flesh, John proclaims! Thus John shows us, that Word by which God created the *light*, that Word by which God brought *life* into this world, that Word came into the *flesh* with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Yes, I say that correctly, "He came into our *flesh* and lived among us!" The word John uses is the word for our *weak* and *mortal flesh*. No, as we can read in the epistle to the Hebrews, He did not become sinful; He was without sin. Yet, when He became man He experienced in His *flesh* all the weaknesses, all the effects of sin, which we encounter in our flesh: tiredness, tension, worries, troubles, etc. Those *troubles* started almost right away: just think of the stable, the manger, the flight to Egypt. Later on in life we recognize those effects in the emotions He showed, in the tiredness, the death threats, the fear of death, the pain! Now why would He, through whom all things were created, why would He become such a *weak* and *mortal* son of man? Why would He, who was God so gloriously and remained God, why would He take on such a *humble* position?

When we think about that, dear listeners, when we think about having to come *down* a few notches, we could ... never do so! Indeed, we would have a hard time giving up anything, really, because we're so attached to everything; and to *humble ourselves* is even more difficult! Yet, the *Lord Jesus* did: He left the heavenly glory with the Father in order to become a *weak man* like you and me! Why? Well, that's the gospel of Christmas: God, also the Word of God, He by whom all things were made, this whole world, so loved the world, so loved us! That's why He became *flesh*, to dwell among us, to live in our midst. Indeed, love moved Him to lay down His heavenly glory, His Divine glory, and to take on the same 'tabernacle,' literally, the same *tent* (our temporary dwelling due to sin!) as *we* have.

God gave His Son! God *gave up* His Son; God gave His Son *away* for this world, to this world, John also explains in chapter 3 of his account. Again, John reveals this way the heavenly meaning of for Christ's birth! Perhaps on Christmas day *we* prefer the *earthly* things; the aspects such as the stable, the manger, the

shepherds, etc. may be more appealing. Yet, when we look at Christ's *birth* from God's point of view, then we must observe in deep amazement, that God so *loved* the world that He did not spare His own Son, but gave up His only Son...: God's gift is not just a gift, but a *gift of love*, a gift of sacrifice! The Lord Jesus thus presents this gift. Well, *He* should know, better than anyone who came before or after Him! For He is the *Word*; He was in the bosom of the Father, *He* has made Him known! *He* permits us a look into the very *heart* of God, showing us what was in it: in His *love* for the world He gave up His Son, that He could come into the flesh, to save this world, this sinful world! God manifested His love among us, sending His only Son into the world, "into the likeness of sinful *flesh*!"

Did He lay down His glory completely? Can we be sure, then, that it's true what John is saying here? Well, says John, even though He dwelt among us in our *weak* and *humble* flesh, we did see some of His glory! No, it was not the *full* Divine glory, yet we did see the radiance of His glory in all the things He did and said! How true that is! The Lord Jesus laid down His Divine *glory*, and wanted to hide this *glory* time and again, yet those who were with Him could not help but *see it* in the miracles He did! Just think of the water He changed into wine; remember the multiplication of the bread, His walking on the water, the raising of the dead! Those *miracles* sure showed His glory. As the apostle Paul would put it later on, "In Him all the *fullness of God* was pleased to dwell!" Yet, at all those occasions He wanted to hide it. When He noticed that in response to the multiplication of the bread, the people wanted to make Him *king*, He left them. After many a healing, He told the people *not* to mention His Name! Why, because He did not come to be glorified among men but to show them His *love*, His grace!

You all know what *Christmas* has become, dear listeners. It's a tree with lights, a turkey-dinner, coffee with treats, and also, of course the Christmas stories about the child in the manger, the shepherds, the wise men, etc. However, *this* is behind it: the love of God manifested in the birth of His Son in the likeness of our sinful flesh; that's uplifting! In the manger at Bethlehem was not just a *child*, but He who was the Word, who was God! That's tremendous, terrific. Yes, but God gave Him *up* for a world He loves, which is a *fallen* world, a *sin-laden* world, a world exposed to judgment, a world which will *perish* under God's wrath! That's incomprehensible! Yet, that's the secret behind this world since Paradise. That reality cannot be atmosphered away, parted away, or dimmed by candles. Behind the beauty in this world, behind the brightness of the sun, behind the wealth of nature, behind the perfection of science, the *wrath of God* over the sin of the world remains.

Now into that world God sent His Son. There He had to become Son of *man*, and He could not get out of it unless the Father would draw Him. Well, the Father will draw Him to Himself, only when He had *appeased this wrath*! God so loved the world, that He gave Him up for suffering, for isolation, for death on the cross! That's the gospel of Christmas! That's what John puts in the centre: "we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth!" He was full of grace!

That's what we will focus on more next week, dear listeners. Hence, please tune in again at this same time next week! Thank you for listening!