

**1/4/26****Flesh and Blood Christianity****John 1:10-18****Pastor Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

Most people, today, are familiar with gender reveals and birth announcements. Gender reveals often take place sometime during the second trimester of pregnancy, and can be as simple as cutting into a cake or popping a balloon. Birth announcements usually come after the baby is born – sometimes immediately, sometimes weeks, or even months, later. They're shared in all kinds of ways – printed cards, text messages, social media posts, photos featuring the newborn, along with the important details: name, weight, length, and time of birth. The purpose of a birth announcement is to formally introduce the child to the world, to say, "This is who has arrived. This is who we are welcoming."

Over the past few weeks, in the Christmas season, we've been hearing the birth announcements of Jesus – though we may not have thought about them that way. The four Gospels each begin differently, and each one announces Jesus in its own way.

Mark's Gospel, believed to reflect the teaching and experience of the apostle Peter, and the first to be written, contains no birth story at all. Jesus appears as a grown man, stepping into the waters of baptism, just nine verses in. Mark moves quickly. There's urgency in his telling – perhaps reflecting Peter's impulsive and action-oriented personality. There's no time for infancy narratives. This is who Jesus is, and this is what he does.

Matthew and Luke, written later, slow things down. Matthew, writing primarily to a Jewish audience, begins with a genealogy, carefully connecting Jesus to Abraham and David. Luke, writing for a broader Gentile audience, stretches the family line even further, tracing Jesus all the way back to calling Jesus "son of Adam, son of God." In Matthew and Luke, we hear from angels, and there are songs, shepherds, and wonder. These are the birth announcements for Jesus that we know best.

But John does something entirely different. John gives us no manger, no shepherds, no angels in the sky. Instead, John goes back farther than any genealogy ever could. John reaches back before creation itself, and gives us a cosmic birth announcement. He tells us not just *that* Jesus was born, but *who* this child truly is.

**Listen to *John 1:10-18*.** “He was in the world, and **the world came into being through him**; yet the world **did not know him**. He came to what was his own, and **his own people did not accept him**. But to **all who received him**, who believed in his name, he gave power **to become children of God**, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. **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**. (John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, “He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.”) From his fullness **we have all received, grace upon grace**. The law indeed was given through Moses; **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ. **No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.**”

John’s birth announcement centers on one staggering claim: “**The Word became flesh and lived among us.**” This is the heart of what we might call *flesh and blood Christianity*.

*John 1:10–18* tells this story in two movements. In the first, we hear the voice of an omniscient narrator describing how the world responds when God comes near. In the second, the voice shifts to “we” — those who have received this gift and now bear witness to it. The narrator begins with a tragedy. “*He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.*”

The One through whom all things were made stepped into his own creation — and the creation did not recognize its Creator. This is not just a failure of information. In the Bible, to “know” someone means intimacy, relationship, shared life. Humanity had grown so distant from God that even when God stood among them in flesh and blood, many did not recognize him.

John goes on: “*He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.*” Notice the language carefully. John doesn’t say that they violently rejected him, at least, not yet. He says that they didn’t *receive* him. They didn’t welcome him. They didn’t make room for him. This is quieter, subtler, and more unsettling. God came to those who belonged to him — and they did not open the door.

At this point in history, those of us in the church may find ourselves uncomfortably close to that description. We are the ones who know the stories. We

know the language. We know the traditions. And yet, we're invited to ask ourselves: Are there ways in which we fail to truly receive Christ? In what ways do we keep faith familiar, but unembodied — safe, abstract, and at an arm's length?

John tells us, in chapter 13, that Jesus' disciples will be known by their love for one another. So, *John 1* also invites us to ask: Where do we struggle to accept, welcome, and show hospitality — to God, and to one another?

But the focus of these verses is not on those who don't receive him. The emphasis is on those who do. ***“But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”***

This is not a reward for moral achievement or religious performance. It's a gift. And it's not grounded in biology, heritage, or human effort. These children of God are *“born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”*

Identity comes before behavior. Belonging precedes becoming. And then, John leads us into, perhaps, the single most astonishing sentence in the Bible:

***“And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”***

The eternal Word, the Logos — the One who was with God and was God — became flesh. Not an illusion. Not a temporary costume. Not a divine hologram. Flesh. Skin and bone. Breath and blood. Vulnerability and limitation.

And John says he *“lived among us.”* More literally, the Word *“pitched his tent”* among us. He tabernacled with us. For Israel, the tabernacle was the place where God's presence dwelled amid the people. Before there was a permanent temple, God chose to meet the people in a tent — a portable, fragile structure at the center of the community. It was where worship happened. It was where sacrifice was offered. It was where heaven and earth met. John is saying: Jesus is now that place.

God no longer dwells behind curtains or walls, but in a human life. God no longer speaks only through the law or prophets, but through a face, a voice, a body. God comes close enough to touch — and close enough to suffer.

This is the scandal and the beauty of the incarnation. God does not save us from human life. God enters it.

John continues: *“We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.”*

In the Old Testament, God's glory was dangerous. People trembled at it. They hid from it. Moses could only glimpse it from behind. But now, John says, we have seen it — and lived. Because God's glory has taken on a human face. From this fullness, John says, *“we have all received, grace upon grace.”*

This is not the grace of a cosmic Santa Claus dispensing gifts on demand. Grace, here, names the gift of Christ, himself — the gift of God making himself known. Grace is redeeming love. Truth is faithfulness to God's promises. Together, they describe not an abstract doctrine, but a living presence.

John adds, *“The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*

This verse must be read carefully. Our passage, today, is the only place the word “grace” appears in the Gospel of John — but John is not setting the law against grace, as though Moses gave something harsh and Jesus gave something kind. Grace and truth were always present in God's instruction. The difference is not between bad law and good grace, but between reading a book and meeting the author.

In Jesus, the author steps onto the page. And John presses this all the way to its conclusion: *“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.”*

This is John's incarnational claim in full. God has chosen to be known — not through abstraction, but through embodiment. Through a life lived in real time, in real places, among real people. And here's where the text begins to turn toward us. Because the incarnation doesn't end with Jesus.

Throughout the Bible, God's dwelling place keeps moving closer. God dwelt with Israel in a tent. Then, in a temple. Then, God took on a tent of flesh in Jesus. And now, through the Holy Spirit, God dwells in the church — and even in our bodies.

*“Do you not know,”* Paul asks, *“that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”*

God with us. God in us. God through us.

This is why Christianity cannot remain disembodied. We don't merely believe ideas about Jesus; we participate in the life of Christ. The Word became flesh — and now, by the Spirit, the life of Christ continues to take shape in flesh and blood lives, like ours.

This is the vision that will guide us over the next six weeks as we begin a new series called *The Whole Life of Christ in Us*. Each week, we'll explore a different expression of an incarnate faith — sacramental, Spirit-empowered, Word-centered, prayer-filled, virtuous, and compassionate. But the unifying claim will remain the same: **Because the Word became flesh, the life of Christ continues to take shape in us.**

This is what it looks like when the Word keeps becoming flesh. So, what does *flesh and blood Christianity* look like? It looks like faith made visible.

It looks like love expressed through action.

It looks like God's presence encountered through ordinary means — people, meals, service, forgiveness, justice, prayer.

It looks like bodies that matter. Lives that matter. Places that matter.

And it begins with a question — not about what you do, but about who you are.

John tells us that those who receive Christ are given power to become children of God. Not servants, trying to earn approval. Not strangers, hoping to be tolerated. Children — beloved, claimed, named. So, let me ask you: **Whose child are you?**

Have you received this gift — not just as an idea or a belief, but as a relationship? Have you trusted the God who came close enough to be known, and vulnerable enough to be rejected, so that you might be welcomed home? If you haven't, I hope you will receive and trust in Jesus.

And if you have — where is God inviting you to make your faith more visible, more embodied, more present, this week? Where might the Word want to take flesh again — in your words, your actions, your compassion, your presence?

Because the world still longs to see God. And now, by the Spirit, God chooses to be seen through us. Let's pray.

### **Prayer by John Baillie, This Your Greatest Gift**

O God, who has proven Your love for all humanity by sending us Jesus Christ our Lord, and has illuminated our human life by the radiance of His presence, I give You thanks for this Your greatest gift.

For my Lord's days upon the earth:

For the record of His deeds of love:

For the words he spoke for my guidance and help:

For His obedience unto death:

For His triumph over death:

For the presence of His Spirit within me now:

I thank you, O God.

Grant that the remembrance of the blessed Life that once was lived out on this common earth under these ordinary skies may remain with me in all the tasks and duties of this day.

Let me remember —

His eagerness, not to be ministered unto, but to minister:

His sympathy with suffering of every kind:

His bravery in the face of His own suffering:

His meekness of bearing, so that, when reviled, He reviled not again:

His steadiness of purpose in keeping to His appointed task:

His simplicity: His self-discipline: His serenity of spirit:

His complete reliance upon You, His Father in Heaven.

And in each of these ways give me grace to follow in His footsteps. Amen.

### **Blessing**

Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes with which He looks with Compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good.

Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are His body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Attributed to St. Teresa of Avila

### Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. John says, “The Word became flesh and lived among us.” What does *John 1:10-18* suggest about God’s willingness to be known through physical, ordinary human life?
2. Where do you see faith becoming real and visible in everyday life — through actions, relationships, or practices, rather than words alone?
3. If someone were to ask, “What is God like?”, how does the life of Jesus — his compassion, presence, suffering, and love — shape your answer?
4. John emphasizes that Jesus was rejected, even though he came into the world he made (*John 1:10-11*). Why do you think embodied faith can feel uncomfortable or threatening — both then and now? Where might we be tempted to keep faith private or disembodied?
5. How have you experienced God’s grace through tangible means — people, meals, service, worship, or moments of care? Why do those physical experiences matter?
6. What might “flesh and blood Christianity” look like in your life, and in our church?
7. Where is God inviting you to make your faith more visible, embodied, or present in the lives of others, this week?