

### **Be Amazed: Love Comes Down**

Our theme for our Advent series this year has been ‘Be Amazed’. We’ve been encouraged to be amazed at the ways God shows up in our world and our lives. We’ve looked at God showing up for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Then we looked at God showing up in Ezekiel in the story of the valley of dry bones. Last week we took a break from the series but not from amazement as we witnessed our younger kids (and a few of our older kids: Henry, George, Torben!) show us exactly what happened some 2000 years ago with the shepherds at Jesus’ birth!

Today, as we draw closer to Christmas, our attention turns to amazement at God showing up...in the flesh, in Jesus the Christ. We’ll look at John 1:1-18, this beautiful, mysterious, mystical, amazing description of Jesus as the Word who is made flesh and dwells among us. Our sermon is entitled Love Comes Down and my hope for this morning is that as we look forward to Christmas and reflect on this passage we would experience joy as the reality of God’s love for us, for all creation, settles in again.

We’ve heard the passage already read to us but I’d like to read it again but from the First Nations Version which gives us another angle from which to understand these words and then we’ll reflect a bit on some of the amazing things we see in it.

**“Long ago, in the time before all days, before the creation of all things, the one who is known as the Word was there face to face with the Great Spirit. This Word fully represents Creator and shows us who he is and what he is like. He has always been there from the beginning, for the Word and Creator are one and the same. Through the Word all things came into being, and not one thing exists that he did not create. Creator’s life shined out from the Word, giving light to all human beings. This is the true Light that comes to all the peoples of the world and shines on everyone. The Light shines into the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it or put it out.**

**Into the wilderness of [Judea] came a man named [John]. He was sent by the Great Spirit to tell what he knew about the Light so everyone could believe. He was not the Light but came to speak the truth about the Light. The true Light that shines on all people was coming into the darkness of this world. He came down into this world, and even though he made all things, the world did not recognize him. Even his own tribe did not welcome or honor him. But all who welcome and trust him receive their birthright as children of the Great Spirit. They are born in a new way, not from a human father’s plans or desires, but born from above—by the Great Spirit.**

**Creator’s Word became a flesh-and-blood human being and pitched his sacred tent among us, living as one of us. We looked upon his great beauty and saw how honorable he was, the kind of honor held only by this one Son who fully represents his Father—full of his great kindness and truth.**

[John] told what he knew about him and cried out with a loud voice, “The one I have told you about is here! He comes after me, but is much greater—*my elder! He has more honor, for even though he is thought to be younger, he existed before I was born.*

**From the fullness of his being we have all had many gifts of kindness poured out on us. [Moses] gave us our tribal laws, but the gift of great kindness and truth came from [Jesus], the Chosen One. No one has ever seen the Great Spirit, but the one Son, who is himself the Great Spirit and closest to the Father’s heart has shown us what he is like.”**

It is a beautiful passage and there is much that we could unpack from it but I just want to reflect on a couple things we see that can lead us to amazement about who our God is and what they are like as we remember and celebrate Jesus’ coming this Christmas.

### **1. Jesus as Creator God and as fully representing God.**

Firstly, we see Jesus, the Word, described as God. “the Word and Creator are one and the same.” Or the more familiar: “the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

It isn’t my intention this morning to dive deep into the theology of the incarnation and this reality. But rather, in light of our theme of Being Amazed, I simply want us to acknowledge the beautiful, mysterious, and mystical element of this reality in our faith. “the Word and Creator are one and the same.”

And as such, when Jesus, then, comes to earth, we see that They “fully represents Creator and shows us who he is and what he is like.” Jesus the Christ, the Word, is God made flesh.

Now, I want to draw our attention to another description of God but from **1 John 4:7-8** where we read: “Beloved, let us love one another, because *love comes from God*; and everyone who loves has received the new life from God and knows God. The person who does not love has not learned to know God; for ***God is love.***”

God is love. And if Jesus the Christ is God Made Flesh, I think it is an appropriate title to refer to Jesus as Love Made Flesh.

That’s the first amazing truth I want to draw to our attention: Jesus the Christ, the Word, in coming to earth, is God Made Flesh, Love Made Flesh. Fully representing who God is to humanity.

### **2. Secondly, attention is given to the Generous, Giving heart of Love Made Flesh.**

A second amazing reality we see about Jesus in this passage is the generous, giving heart of this Love Made Flesh. They create, they are Life and Light and give life and light. They invite us into relationship as children of God. They bless us with these and other gifts: “**From the fullness of his being we have all had many gifts of kindness poured out on us.**” (1:16).

From the overflow of God we receive life, light, welcome, grace, kindness. Love, loves to give, loves to bless, loves to have their kindness and goodness overflow to all creation. This is at the heart of who we call God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17).

Gifts and Christmas go hand in hand. Sometimes we neglect to remember that we give gifts to each other as a picture of what God does with us. At Christmas we celebrate that our God is one who gives good gifts, who gives Themselves to us and not only Themselves, but innumerable other gifts in this world as well. In 1 Timothy 6:17 we read that God is one who “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”

I don't know about you but I often have a difficult relationship with enjoyment. There is often a tinge of guilt associated with enjoying gifts and experiencing pleasure. Or at least a sense that moderation is needed. It can be near impossible to simply and fully revel in that which brings enjoyment. Does that resonate with anyone else?

I've been prepping a sermon for the future around a theology of pleasure so you're getting a bit of a preview here but I think that Christianity has often been guilty of downplaying the goodness of pleasure. The value, even spiritual value, of simply enjoying something, enjoying the many good gifts God has filled creation with.

There is an author, Christine Gudorf, who wrote a book entitled *Body, Sex, and Pleasure*. In it she argues that pleasure is a pre-moral good. This is to say that pleasure is fundamentally good and we as humans are made by God for it. Now, this is *not* to say that any way we seek pleasure is good. How we go about seeking and experiencing pleasure is where we need to have conversations about ethics, morality, sustainability and the like. But pleasure in itself is a good and God-ordained part of creation.

And not only is it good for us individually, but it is good for us societally and can be part of the pursuit of justice for all creation. Another author, Adrienne Maree Brown, writes about what she calls *Pleasure Activism*, and states:

“I have seen how denying our full, complex selves—denying our aliveness and our needs as living, sensual beings—increases the chance that we will be at odds with ourselves, our loved ones, our coworkers, and our neighbors on this planet.” (p. 6).

Later they say “Pleasure activism is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy. Pleasure activism asserts that we all need and deserve pleasure and that our social structures must reflect this....Pleasure activists believe that by tapping into the potential goodness in each of us we can generate justice and liberation.” (p. 13).

I could go on but I'll force myself to stop preaching my future sermon here now but all this is to say that our God is a God who loves to give good gifts, who loves to have their kindness, goodness, grace, love and joy overflow into us and also through us to the world. And I think that just as I love watching my kids enjoy gifts, *Love Made Flesh* enjoys seeing our enjoyment of their gifts. I believe the experience of enjoyment and pleasure is part of God's vision of *Shalom* for all creation.

Christmas is the perfect time to reflect on and be amazed at the many good gifts God has poured out on us, including the gift of Themselves, and to feel the love of God that is inherent in their gift-giving, that is at the core of who They are.

Ok, so we see in this passage that Jesus the Christ fully represents and reveals God to us because They are God. So when we want to know the nature of God, we look to Jesus, to Love Made Flesh. And part of what we come to see and know about God is Their giving nature. Love gives, Love blesses, Love overflows goodness to us and others.

While there are other beautiful aspects of this passage we could reflect on, the last part I want to highlight this morning is what we see in verse 14: “Creator’s Word became a flesh-and-blood human being and pitched his sacred tent among us, living as one of us.” Or “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (NIV).

### **3. Love Made Flesh comes down to be *with*.**

This is the heart of what we remember and celebrate at Christmas. God becomes flesh. Love becomes flesh. To be made flesh means it no longer remains only in the conceptual realm. God, the Divine, Love, was not content to occupy only the conceptual realm. Rather, They put flesh on and provide a tangible, living, breathing, picture of who God is, what Love is, who it is that we are living in relationship with.

Becoming flesh means God enters into our messiness, the muck and mire of life here on earth. And they show us love and show us the way of love in the mess of life. God does not remain a concept just to think about. And by doing so, invites us not just to follow a concept, an idea, a philosophy, a set of doctrines...but to follow a tangible, real, living Love.

And I think this is part of what we see in the history of Anabaptism. A conviction that if God was not content to remain in the conceptual realm but put on flesh in Jesus the Christ, then following after God is not something that remains in the conceptual realm either. Discipleship is not simply about adherence to a set of doctrines or beliefs but an invitation to follow in the footsteps of Love Made Flesh.

Palmer Becker, in their book, *Anabaptist Essentials*, says “Understanding that ‘Christianity is discipleship!’ is essential to understanding Christianity from an Anabaptist perspective. It means continuing to do in our day what Jesus began doing in 30 CE!” (p. 37).

I’ve been reading this new book called “Faith in Full Color: A Tapestry of Anabaptist Stories” by Jeanne Jantzi. It’s a collection of short stories about the many varied ways Anabaptists have and are putting flesh to their faith, to their love. One story she tells is the story of The House of Friendship for All Nations in Ontario. The beginnings of this organization trace back to a group of Swiss Mennonite women in 1939 who joined an ecumenical prayer group that then expanded into helping with practical needs like hunger. Jantzi writes that “Today, the House of Friendship serves over forty thousand people a year.” (p. 161). And I love this quote “The person experiencing homelessness or hunger is more important than the doctrine or the orthodoxy that the person believes. Ideology takes a back seat in the presence of suffering.” (p. 161). This is Love Made Flesh.

God, Love, is not content to stay in the conceptual realm, so our faith is not something that remains there either. What we remember and celebrate at Christmas is Love Made Flesh, Love coming down into the muck and mire of earthly life.

In Jesus' life we receive a picture of what love is, who Love is. We see Love

- offering of themselves for others, ultimately to the point of death.
- We see Love seeking out the neglected and overlooked and discriminated-against and embracing them.
- We see Love confronting injustice and power that doesn't care for the person.
- We see Love pursuing healing and wholeness and salvation in its many forms for us.
- We see Love seeking out and building relationships and connections.
- We see Love entering into suffering with others, coming alongside.
- We see Love coming to be *with*. Jesus as Immanuel, "God With Us." (Matt. 1:23).

This sermon was entitled Love Comes Down because our conviction is that God is love and that Christmas is a celebration of the reality that this Love came down to us in Jesus the Christ, Love Made Flesh, from whose fullness we receive grace upon grace and gift upon gift.

So as you continue your Christmas celebrations this year may you be blessed with an experiential knowledge of Love Made Flesh who came to be *with* us in the human experience. And may this reality fill you with joy, peace and love. And may we each continue following after Love Made Flesh, putting flesh to our faith and love in the world.