

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
2 The Word was with God in the beginning.
3 Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.
What came into being
4 through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.
5 The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.
6 A man named John was sent from God. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning
the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. 8 He himself
wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.
9 The true light that shines on all people
was coming into the world.
10 The light was in the world,
and the world came into being through the light,
but the world didn't recognize the light.
11 The light came to his own people,
and his own people didn't welcome him.
12 But those who did welcome him,
those who believed in his name,
he authorized to become God's children,
13 born not from blood
nor from human desire or passion,
but born from God.
14 The Word became flesh
and made his home among us.
We have seen his glory,
glory like that of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth.
15 John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who
comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'"
16 From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace;
17 as the Law was given through Moses,
so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.
18 No one has ever seen God.
God the only Son,
who is at the Father's side,
has made God known. (Common English Bible)

A pastor was in her office one Sunday morning after church when her six year old daughter came bursting in, trembling with some terribly important bit of news she had to share. The pastor asked "What is it?" silently praying that she would not hear that one of her sons was climbing the steeple.

"Oh Mom!" she gasped, "Mom, we found baby Jesus in the closet and guess what?" She paused to catch her breath and her mother held her breath uncertain what was coming.

The little girl sighed and went on, her blue eyes wide and round, "We unwrapped the blanket he was in and there, there on baby Jesus we found a belly button!"

The mother discreetly covered her mouth to mask her amusement at what was obviously a very important discovery for her daughter.

"Just like me, mom, just like me! I never knew the baby Jesus had a belly button just like me." She lifted up her t-shirt to emphasize her point.

The Word became flesh; that pre-existent being, that which always has been and always will be, that which was with God, in fact that which was God became flesh, bone of our bones, flesh of our flesh. God took on flesh. Its shocking really. Perhaps at the age of six and under we think our flesh is pretty great, hiking our t-shirts up to proudly display our belly buttons, running around the house naked after baths, strutting our stuff in pretty new dresses and patent leather shoes, laughing uproariously after naming body parts or functions, or wrestling big dogs or big brothers to the ground laughing all the while. Yes, the young seem to be able to delight in flesh in a way that those who are slightly older cannot. Think about your flesh, your body for just a moment. What are the first three things that come to mind? I'm willing to bet that for most of us the first three thoughts are critical- we bemoan the extra pounds and padding, or the missing pounds and padding. We bemoan our skin condition, the state of our hair. We bemoan our aches and pains, the physical abilities we have lost or are losing. We don't think highly of our flesh.

When most of us think of salvation we think of being rid of these cumbersome bodies once and for all, but the Christmas story calls us to think twice about that. If God's intention was to free us from embodied existence, why would God bother to take on flesh? By being born a human baby who needed to be nursed and needed his

diapers changed, by growing into a human teenager who undoubtedly had zits and mood swings, by growing into an adult who delighted in meals and took long walks and who experienced bodily pain and suffering, God said to us “I value the WHOLE you, not just your spirit, not even just your spirit and mind. I value you body, mind, and spirit, and I intend to save the whole you!”

Our Gospel reading reminds us that this is very hard to accept. Even those who had the privilege to walk side by side with Jesus, to hear Jesus speak, to encounter Jesus directly, even they struggled to accept that God would choose to be in the world in this way. Clearly much of the world was not ready for what Jesus had to offer, or Jesus would not have died a brutal death on the cross. Our gospel reading puts it this way “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 God raised Jesus, body included, from the dead to give the world another chance, to say to the world, “I love you so much; I open the way to life beyond death for you, for the whole you.” Or as the gospel reading puts it “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.”

This good news of Christmas, the good news that God loved us so much that God took on our flesh to save us body, mind, and soul, is hard to accept, but when we accept it we gain the power to become children of God. How blessed are we today to be able to witness Aubrey and Everett accepting this good news and presenting themselves to receive the waters of grace through the sacrament of baptism. The act of Baptism is an embodied act, the water might send chills down the spines of Everett and Aubrey when they are sprinkled with it, it will mat their hair, their foreheads will glisten with the oil with which they are anointed. Through this sacrament, they are accepting the good news that God made Godself known in Jesus Christ, that it is through Christ that we are saved in body, mind, and spirit, and that from this day forward they are committed to living as God's children in this world. They are committing their whole selves to following God. And those who are presented for

ordination and installation are honoring and renewing their baptismal commitments, dedicating their whole selves to service in Christ's church.

These baptisms, these ordinations and these installations, are shining a flashlight on our collective identity as children of God. Every time we practice Baptism we are reminded of our own Baptisms. Baptism is one of the most powerful ways we are prepared for faithfulness in our world. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not, will not, cannot extinguish this light. The light lives in us. We, our whole selves, body, mind, and spirit, are prepared. Thanks be to God.

Source in addition to scripture that was cited in this sermon:

I believe the source for the opening story was Mary Hinkle, and it was shared on a website that no longer exists.