

Midnight Communion 2015: Sermon – ‘The Word became flesh’

READ MAX LUCADO QUOTE TO //

Indebted to Max Lucado for that – promised on Sunday I’d return to him....

‘The Word became flesh.’ One of the most famous phrases in the bible. The great summary of Christmas – and the climax every year of our Advent readings, as the waiting turns into the real thing. St John, a very old man, looks back and condenses into one tiny phrase the cataclysmic event of the incarnation: God comes to earth, divinity meets humanity – the Word became flesh.

But what does that really mean? Used many metaphors over the years, some of which I used here:

- Slug
- Atomic bomb

All good – but tonight want to focus on something else: the way we like to sanitise the message, the true meaning. We turn the nativity into a fairy story. Perhaps inevitable – very old, ancient history (‘the past is a foreign country’); exotic cast – angels and shepherds and wise men.

Layers of cultural history – Victorian Christmas. We sing carols about snow and Bethlehem sounding remarkably like an English village, and a Jesus who doesn’t cry, but looks adoringly into the eyes of his mother. And it’s all so lovely. And it makes Jesus sound a lot like Father Christmas.

And then we grow up and someone tells us that Father Christmas isn’t real (sorry). And this obvious implication for that other romantic fairytale character is....

But the Word became flesh. A real person. Why does that matter? As Max Lucado says: it’s much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. But look at what we lose when we do. We lose a real Saviour for real people with real lives.

Don’t know about you, but there’s mess and muck in my life as there is in yours. And Christmas gives me 2 choices: I can either escape into the fantasy nativity, which delights me for a week and then the grim reality of life asserts itself once more. Or I can put the manure back into the manger, and the crying and the amniotic fluid and the risk of disease and the skint family who are forced to a distant town to pay taxes they could barely afford, and then forced to flee from it as refugees.

It’s not as pretty – but it’s real. This nativity reminds me that tonight I come to worship a real God who meets me in my real life – and not just tonight and tomorrow but in January’s overdraft, and February’s redundancy, and March’s illness of a loved one, and April’s marital struggles, and May’s child with a drug habit, and June’s celebration of a big birthday, and July’s exam results, and August’s family holiday, and September’s new school, and October’s health scare, and November’s major car bill and December’s annual merry-go-round of the Christmas consumer machine. And everything in-between.

Take your muck and your mess to him. He knows, he understands, he cares. And believe or not, he has the power to change it, to change us – if only we'll let him.

Tonight I wish you a wonderful Christmas – I really do. Enjoy the magic, enjoy the romance. But remember that this isn't a fairytale for children, or worse, for infantile grown-ups who need a crutch in life. This is God breaking into our world. A real God, for real people. I'd much rather worship that kind of God, wouldn't you? And maybe, in 2016, you might. 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.'