

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday December 16th 2007  
John 1:14 The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.**

Twenty years ago, if you had written a paperback about the historical Jesus and tried to sell it through W H Smiths it would have been a flop. Now there is a veritable cottage-industry devoted to the Jesus debate. The battleground today is whether Jesus is God, the second Person of the Trinity, or is he, as A N Wilson describes him: 'merely a moderately pale Galilean'?

In the early centuries of the Church the battleground was a different one – it was the humanity of Christ that theologians debated. In Greek thought God and humanity mixing was impossible. The Spirit is eternal, the flesh finite. If God were to become a human being he would have to sully himself. And so the essence of spirituality is to get out of this messy flesh into mysticism, into the world of the Spirit. Just like today, being spiritual is seen as detaching from the real world of messy things like work and bringing up children, and entering pure bliss. This is not a Jesus that hardened fishermen would be inspired by, with an ethereal look on his face: not really with us, not really human. No, we get the Docetism heresy which says that Jesus seemed to be human, seemed to have a real body to suffer hunger and thirst, but that he was not really human at all. In verse 14 John destroys the docetism heresy by saying that the Logos, the pre-existent Word became not a text or a series of abstract propositions, but flesh - *sarx*. By which John does not believe that God became a human being and was no longer God. No, God the Son took our humanity upon himself, the real, red-blooded humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. Not subtracting from his deity but adding to it the incarnation of his Son, and taking it into the very being of God which is why today there is a man in heaven.

In the beginning God made men and women in his own image. There is a mark of God-likeness, and God wants to be fleshed out, wants to dwell on earth among men and women, first in the tabernacle in the wilderness, then in the temple in Jerusalem where God presenced himself in the Shekinah glory. Then something even more scandalous, this desire culminates in his dwelling in the Person, the One and Only, of Jesus.

So the litmus test as to whether you really are a Christian is whether you believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. To counter those who want to make Christianity truly ethereal and irrelevant to the real world of changing nappies and catching trains, we say 'The Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood' *Eugene Peterson*

The glory that is revealed is veiled – it is only revealed to the disciples who put their faith in him. 'His own did not receive him'. Jesus was arrested, tried, crucified. This lifting up of Jesus, in His flesh, dying for our sins, the bloodied broken Son of God means that at the heart of the revelation is not some dispassionate aloof God, indifferent to suffering. We have a God in Jesus with his hands out wide, handing back love, grace and mercy. This is what drives our worship, makes sense of the Church. This is a real humanity, otherwise we are not saved, and He cannot represent us in our life and death – he cannot bring us back to God if he is not God.

Just like the space engineers had to dock with the malfunctioning Hubble Space Telescope and get inside it in order to fix it, so God has docked with his malfunctioning creation. Becoming one of us He enables us to be all that we were created for.

In the ordinary elements of communion we have a very real presence of Jesus himself, who takes his own resurrected and glorious body into the very throne room of God to intercede for us at the right hand of the Father.