

Advent Reflection: Word made flesh



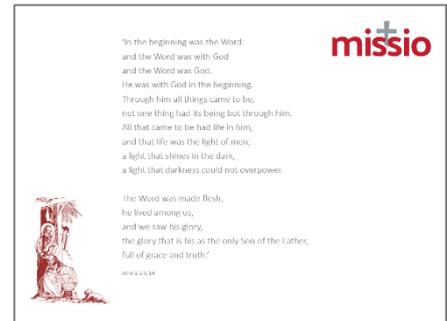
*The aim of this resource is to focus attention on the Christmas day Gospel and explore the concept of 'Word made flesh'. It may be included in an assembly or to form the basis of a longer Advent liturgy and **can be used with or without slides.***

I'd like to begin today with a little test of your imagination. I want you to imagine it's 10.30 on Christmas morning. You're up, presents have been opened, you've had breakfast, showered, dressed and are making your way into church for Christmas day Mass.

Imagine. You've sung the first carol with gusto, you've sat down, and the Gospel reading of the day is about to be read. What reading do you expect to hear? What characters do you expect to hear about?

Most of us would expect the reading to include mention of Mary, Joseph, perhaps shepherds and angels. Not wise men though, we won't hear about them until the New Year. And of course, we'd expect the reading to mention baby Jesus in the manger.

But this isn't what you'd hear. The Gospel reading heard in Catholic churches around the world during the Christmas day Mass is this: [Click to reveal or read out the scripture below](#)



'In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him.
All that came to be had life in him, and that life was the light of men;
a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower.

The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory,
the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.' John 1:1-5,14

On the face of it, this scripture doesn't sound Christmassy at all. There's not even mention of the baby Jesus! Or is there? Can anyone spot the word that makes direct reference to Jesus?

Answer: The Word.

How can we tell that 'the Word' is referring to Jesus? What clues are provided in the scripture?

Turn to your neighbour and spot as many clues as you can.

Possible responses: 'the Word was God', 'with God in the beginning', 'life that was the light of men', 'Word was made flesh', 'only Son of the Father', 'full of grace and truth'.

These clues, written in just a few lines by the Gospel writer St John, sum up why the birth of Jesus changed everything. That's the reason this seemingly unlikely reading is heard in Catholic churches all over the world on Christmas morning. It's the perfect scripture to help us see why Christmas is so important.

Do we really need scripture to tell us why Christmas is important? Surely, it's because of family, friends, gifts, parties, food. At least that's the message we get from the world around us.

No doubt these play a huge part in our celebrations and rightly so, but they are not the **reason** we celebrate.

And that's why we need scripture, so we are not misled into thinking that Christmas is all about us. We turn to scripture because, if we look hard enough, it will lead us towards truth.

So let's take a closer look at the Christmas day scripture to see what truth we can find there, focusing today on the phrase: 'the Word was made flesh'.

It's an odd phrase, we don't usually associate words with flesh! What are the more common associations that come to mind when you think of words?

When we think of words, we imagine the things we write, read and say. We use words to explain ourselves to others. On occasion we might struggle to find the right words, but at these times our emotions and behaviour often communicate for us. For example, tears show that we are upset. Smiles show that we are happy. Friends who know us well don't always need these actions. The close relationship we have means they can just 'read' us.

This helps us understand how Jesus' birth changed everything. Although the Christmas day Gospel reminds us that God has been present since the beginning of time, Jesus' birth was the start of something new. For the first time in human history we were able to know God, face to face, as friends.

And the **way** in which 'the Word was made flesh', communicated further how much God wants to be close to us. Because God didn't enter our world as a powerful warrior, or a rich ruler, or a handsome prince. These would have kept him out of reach. God was placed into our arms as a vulnerable baby, reliant on our care.

Those who have babies in the family know just how much they depend on us for their wellbeing. We feed them, clean them, keep them safe and warm. The next time you are around a baby, consider that God became like this for you. God trusts and loves you enough to care for his greatest treasure; our lives and the lives of others.

It's a message Jesus continued to communicate to as an adult, reminding his followers often that by clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, nursing the sick, they were doing the same to him.

Since his birth Jesus communicated clearly that all people are gifts to be cherished; an important way we can do that is by appreciating our body and those of others.

The Word became flesh and lived among us so we could see that everybody is worthy of respect and care.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, let's reflect on some of the lessons we have learnt from our Christmas day scripture: [Click to reveal the points below](#)

- Cherish God's written word, listen to the readings at Mass and read the scriptures yourself, reflect on them, look for the truth they contain and let the word shape who you are.
- Cherish the relationship Jesus was born to form with you. Spend time with him in prayer, communicating with God through your words, your emotions, yourself.
- Cherish your body and those of others. Don't devalue the one you have or that of another. Treat both with respect and love.
- Finally, find ways to share God's message of love with others. Visit someone who is lonely. Share with someone in need. Pray for someone who is sick. Become a light in the darkness for others.

With these points in mind let's conclude with a moment of silent prayer, remembering our own needs and those of others in our world. **Conclude with the sign of the cross.**

A CALL TO ACTION: CHRISTMAS AT NAZARETH HOUSE

As part of your school's charitable giving, please consider supporting our Christmas appeal. This year Missio hopes to raise enough funds to buy a generator for Nazareth House, South Africa. Nazareth House is located in an impoverished part of Johannesburg and provides residential care for elderly and children affected by HIV. Read more about the light and hope your Christmas gift could bring at www.missio.org.uk/christmas19