 1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, **and we have seen** his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

1. This is the first year that I have been with Bethel Church for a Christmas service that actually falls on Christmas Day. I have read stories by other pastors about how *few* people attend Christmas service on Christmas morning – most have come on Christmas Eve and now they are too busy with family and presents. Some churches change the time of worship to afternoon, allowing time for all the festivities to run their course. I don’t know how many Christmas morning worship services I actually attended as a child, but I can say that if I had a choice, I would have hung out in the living room and played with some of my new toys.
2. There is a certain irony about our preference to stay at home and enjoy our gifts: We prefer the substantial to the insubstantial, the tangible to the intangible. I can play with a Major Matt Mason action figure complete with moon crawler and space pod. God seems too ethereal, too spiritual to be of much interest to a child *or* an adult. And yet Christmas is precisely a celebration of God’s becoming substantial to us, taking on flesh and blood, walking and talking and camping out with us.
3. We read in today’s gospel lesson that “in the beginning was the Word” Word with a capital W. In Greek this is LOGOS – and it meant something much broader than a series of letters arranged to be a linguistic representation of an object or act. Greeks would have understood logos to mean more. In the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament there are 60 pages devoted to the meaning of the word Logos. The best way to understand Word as John uses it, is the complete mind and power and action of God: his wisdom, his energy, his love and compassion and grace.
4. Now imagine all of that appearing in the magic and mystery of a vulnerable human life. Get that, and you get the greatest gift of the Christ Mass. “The Life Energy of the Universe, became flesh just like us and camped out amongst us.” The word *became* flesh. The Logos was with God, yet the Logos lived **among us**. That seems like a pretty good gift, for God to pack all that he is into Jesus and come spend time with us.
5. But for me, God’s gift of his son seemed more like that sweater that I got from some aunt and uncle that I can’t even remember because, as a little boy I found nothing of interest in that gift. It would take me years to learn that all the Major Matt Mason toys, all the cars and gadgets, all the trips and vacations, all the good foods and wines, could not fill a need that I had within me. Even the love of family couldn’t fill it. I found that the only thing that could fill it was Christ. Pure love; pure grace. And in learning that Christ was my greatest need, I learned something about the nature of giving. I learned what the perfect gift truly is.
6. Most gifts come with cards or tags that give a message: Sometimes it’s simple: *to Matt, from Aunt Audrey and Uncle Dale.* Sometimes it says more: *Dear Matt, It was nice to see you this past summer. We hope you enjoy this sweater. Love Aunt whatever and Uncle whatever – I can’t remember their names because I had no interest in a sweater.*
7. As a typically narcissistic child, everything is about me: it what all about what I got and not what I gave. Little children don’t go around asking, “What did you give your parents for Christmas?” It’s always, “what did you *get?* And the more we like the gift, the more we like the giver.
8. Well, as we grow up and become a little less narcissistic, more thoughtful, we think more about what we give and not what we receive. *Boy, Mom would really like this.* Instead of relishing the thought of opening our own presents, we relish the thought of others opening their presents, of seeing their joy, of hearing them say “thank you!”
9. But we still want the person receiving our presents to know that they are OUR presents. This one is FROM ME! If there’s a girl that you like, and you know she likes a particular kind of jewelry or clothing, you go out and buy it for her, you wrap it, and you give it to her, BUT YOU WANT HER TO KNOW THAT THE GIFT IS FROM **YOU. *To Hyesun, from MATT.*** *Here Hyesun.* ***I*** *bought this for you.* You are a more generous person, but too often gifts still come with that qualifier – it’s from ME. And often, deep down, you do hope to receive something in return – a kiss, a thank you, forgiveness for something you’ve done or haven’t done.
10. Which brings me to God’s style of giving. Why is it that our lives don’t come with tags that read: “From God?” The air we breathe, the food we eat, our health, our homes and families. Nothing comes with a card or tag saying, “Dear Matt, I hope enjoy the life I’m giving you. Love, God.” Why doesn’t God make it known that all these gifts come from him? Because that’s not his nature. A God who manifests pure love doesn’t seek to draw attention to himself. His gifts come with no strings attached, because he seeks nothing but our joy, our happiness.
11. What makes Santa Claus so endearing to us is just this kind of giving – legend has it that he used to disguise himself in his philanthropy…or leave bags of gold at people’s doorways, or throw the bag into the chimney.
12. Jesus, God incarnate, came in part to teach us this lesson. “The greatest among you is the who serves the most. I have come that YOUR joy may be complete.” On the night before his execution, he comforts his friends – Don’t be afraid. I’ll be gone, but I’m coming back to get you and bring you to where I’m going.”
13. This kind of love, this kind of grace demands nothing from those who receive it. But it prompts our response, which is why we come here this morning. John writes, “**we have seen** his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” And what we have seen gives us a heart of thanksgiving and prompts an unsolicited “Thank you” which we express through worship and obedience.” Jesus said, “if you love me, keep my commandments.” Love one another. Let your light so shine. In other words, enflesh me.
14. the real struggle for the soul of Christmas is allowing Jesus, the "Word made flesh," "God made flesh," to be genuinely enfleshed in us, enfleshed in our hearts and minds and hands, enfleshed in our relationships and in our care for the stranger, for the jobless, for the homeless, for those in any need or trouble, enfleshed in our struggle for justice and peace among all people, not to draw attention to ourselves, but to draw attention to God – “Hey look at how much he loves us!” There are so many people who don’t know this, who don’t feel this love, who lack the true Christmas spirit.
15. I pray that this special Christmas day we would cherish God’s gift of Jesus Christ for all that it is, and that we could celebrate in a way that would draw attention to the giver of the gift. He doesn’t do it Himself, but we can show our love for Him by sharing that love with those around us. May the word become flesh in us today.