

## **JOHN 1.14: THE WORD BECAME FLESH - AND WE SAW HIS GLORY!**

### **BIRTH IS A MESSY, PAINFUL AFFAIR**

Birth for the most part is a messy, painful, traumatic experience – hence the reason for midwives in the past shooing husbands out of the room.

I know, for I have had four children – but I only ever saw one born.

- Jonathan, our first-born, managed to get the cord round his neck, so he was an emergency section – and in those days husbands were not allowed in the operating theatre;
- When Timothy, our second child, was born, we were in Africa and I was at the time giving tea to Jonathan, with the result that I missed Timothy's entry into the world;
- When Susannah, our third child, was born, the midwife asked me to step outside the room for a moment, and like a mug I obeyed her and missed her entrance into the world;
- But fourth time lucky. I did manage to be there when Benjamin was born. If I'm honest, I can't remember too much about it – but my memory is that it wasn't exactly a laugh a minute. Indeed, the term for the birth-process is 'labour' – and I'm told that some mothers might think that is a bit of a euphemism.

### **THE BIRTH OF JESUS WAS A MESSY, PAINFUL AFFAIR**

The birth of Jesus was undoubtedly also a messy, painful, traumatic experience.

In the words of the poem we have just had read to us: 'What a way to have a baby'

*Nowhere to go in labour  
Nothing to help the pain,  
Not even a bed to lie on  
Just straw where beasts had lain*

Matthew and Luke do not give us any of the gory details. However, the mess, the pain and the trauma are surely present in John's great statement that "**The word became flesh**"; or as the GNB translates it: "**The word became a human being**".

Jesus didn't simply appear to be a man – he truly became one of us.

His birth therefore must have been like any other birth. Mary may have been a virgin when she conceived – but there was nothing virginal about the birth.

- Some people call her the Blessed Virgin Mary – but there was nothing blessed about the labour – there was no pethedine, no spinals, not even some Anadin – just pain, and more pain.

- Jesus didn't just drop out the birth canal, all clean and tidy, with a smile on his face - like any other baby, he emerged bloody and screaming.

Was Joseph around for the birth? I doubt it - in those days giving birth was very much a woman's experience. I can't imagine him holding her hand and helping her breathe.

Was Mary on her own then? We don't know. Maybe the innkeeper's wife lent a hand.

But there were no family members - no mother, no sister, just Joseph.

**"The word became flesh"**, declared John. What an amazing statement! God entered our world - and he did so using the normal channels of arrival. As one ancient Eastern prayer put it, even *"the most eloquent orators"* become like *"voiceless fishes"* when we seek to declare the mystery that God became one of us.

Much has been made of the fact that Jesus wasn't born into a palace - but rather he was born into a working class home. But frankly that's no big deal compared with the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, entered our world.

My mind boggles.

- How could Jesus, God's Son, limit himself to time and space?
- How could Jesus, who was involved in the very creation of the world, become one of us and take human form?
- Listen to C.S. Lewis, the Oxbridge don of half a century ago, elaborate on the mystery: *"The Eternal Being, who knows everything and who created the whole universe, became not only a man but (before that) a baby, and before that a foetus inside a woman's body. If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or a crab"*.
- As Charles Wesley put it in one of his hymns: *'Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man'*.

## **THE LIFE OF JESUS WAS ALSO MESSY & PAINFUL**

**"The word became flesh"**. Let's reflect a little more on this amazing statement.

Jesus, in becoming man, experienced the pain, the mess, the trauma - not just of child-birth, but of life.

Let's be clear - Jesus did not live in some kind of sterile, trouble-free plastic bubble.

He experienced life as it is - that is to say, life in the raw. Yes, life can be pretty raw.

I don't know about you, but there are times when I see young children playing, that I am tempted to weep for them. There they are, happy as can be, without a care in the world - but as you and I know, for most of us life is down-hill from there on.

**“The word became flesh” - “The word became a human being”.**

Yes, of course there were good times too - as we know from the Gospels, Jesus was something of a party-goer. He enjoyed good food, good wine. But there were tough times too. The pain, the mess, and the trauma of his birth were a foretaste of pain, mess and trauma to come. Indeed, he ended his life on a Cross - rejected and misunderstood, in great pain and so alone.

**IN THE MESS AND THE PAIN GOD WAS THERE**

But John goes on to say: **“We saw his glory”.**

Listen to this remarkable paradox: **“The word became flesh - and we saw his glory”.**

In the mess, the pain, and the trauma of his coming into our world, **“we saw his glory”.**

It's a mind-numbing paradox - for glory and mess do not normally go together.

And mess is the word - for John doesn't have in mind a little baby, smiling and cooing - he doesn't have in mind shepherds and angels, wise men and a guiding star. John is speaking of the glory of God becoming one with us, in all our ordinariness, in all our sinfulness.

But I have missed out a phrase: For John does not only say, “The word became flesh”, but also that **“he lived among us”** - literally, he 'camped out' with us, he 'pitched his tent' with us.

It was as he lived among us, as he camped out with his, that **“we saw his glory”.**

Any Jew reading of a tent and of glory would have been reminded of the tent in the wilderness, where for 40 years God had made his glory known.

It is against this background that John declares that God has made his glory known again, this time within a human frame, and for 33 years at that.

Yes, as the story of Jesus develops, we see a man on the move.

God pitched his tent first in Bethlehem, later in Nazareth and then all over Galilee, and finally he pitched up in Jerusalem - and at every stage we saw his glory.

And when John says this, he does not have in mind the crowds flocking to Jesus, he is not speaking of the Feeding of the 5000 or of the entering in triumph into Jerusalem - he is speaking first and foremost of the glory of God made known in the ordinariness of life, in the mess, the pain, and the trauma of life, culminating in the mess, the pain & the trauma of crucifixion.

**GOD CAN DEAL WITH OUR MESS AND PAIN**

Here then is the Good News of Christmas – not just that a baby has been born, but that God came into our world – “**he moved into our neighbourhood**” (Peterson).

God in the form of his Son Jesus has come into our world – he has first-hand experience of the mess, the pain, and indeed the trauma which characterise so much of our living.

He knows, he understands – what a difference that can make.

More importantly, he longs to change our lives – to give purpose, meaning, direction and hope.

But he can only change our lives, if we allow him into our lives.

Jesus can deal with the mess, the pain and the trauma of our lives – but only if we allow him to come into our lives.

In the words of John: “**To all who received him and believed in him... he gave them the right to become God’s children**”.

We need to receive him – we need to believe in him – to discover the difference that he alone can make.

He shared our life, that in due course we might share his life. He was born into our world – that we might be born into his world. Here is Good News indeed.

Alas, time tonight does not allow me to develop my theme – there are mince pies to eat, and coffee and mulled wine to drink.

If you want to know more, let me encourage you to join our next Alpha course after Christmas.

Alpha is a 10-week introduction to the Christian faith. Each session begins with a great meal, a talk on some aspect of the Christian faith, and then a time for discussion, when guests are encouraged to speak their mind.

Details are on the reception desk – and in the goodie bags for visitors.

Come and explore the difference the coming of Jesus can – and does – make to life.

“**The Word became flesh**” – Jesus came into our world – and he can come into your world too.