

Sermon preached at OCC, Christmas Day 2024

*Mighty God, the shepherds of old were full of your praises, saying that all they had heard and seen was mirrored by what they had been told. Move among us now with your Holy Spirit so that we, too, might listen to and experience the wonder and joy of the living Word as we seek to welcome the Word into our lives. Amen.*

John 1:1-14

### ***The Word Became Flesh***

“Merry Christmas! Today, we celebrate the miraculous truth of the Word becoming flesh—the very heart of our faith. John’s statement in verse 14, ‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,’ is as transformative today as it was when written. It tells us that God didn’t remain distant but entered into our world, embracing the physical and spiritual alike. Together, we’ll explore what this means for us today.” “John’s affirmation directly challenges the worldview of his time, particularly the idea that the physical world is flawed or inferior. Instead, the Incarnation declares that creation is inherently good—a message we desperately need in our world today.”

Written around AD 70, it radically differs from Plato’s philosophical worldview, represented by dualism, which has a sharp contrast between the physical and the spiritual realms. According to Plato, the material world, including the body, was seen as a shadowy, imperfect reflection of the perfect and eternal realm of Ideas or Forms. The body was considered a prison for the soul, a hindrance to actual knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. So, the soul’s ultimate goal was to escape the body and ascend to the immaterial realm of pure ideas. Plato emphasized the soul’s purification through philosophical contemplation and separation from bodily desires.

On the contrary, John’s statement – ‘the Word became flesh,’ emphasizes the unity of spiritual and physical, as the eternal Logos (Word) that is Godself took on human flesh. It affirms a few things: first, the goodness of creation and the material world, as in Genesis 1. God created it for six days and saw that it was good. Second, far from evil, the body is honoured as the vessel through which God dwells among humanity. Since God made a covenant with Israel, God was in the midst of them. Third, human nature, including the physical body, is not a hindrance to divine work but a means for redemption. In the present world, we see that people can destroy the world, but at the same time, people can build it up for the common good. Last, it affirms God’s intimate involvement with creation in which salvation is not an escape from the physical but the transformation and renewal of the whole person, body and soul. When we read the

Book of Revelation, John sees that a new heaven and an earth, and the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. John was still on earth, and he saw the power of God was renewing everything.

We also understand God's character more through the incarnation: by becoming flesh, God reveals the desire to dwell with humanity, to know our struggles, and to redeem fully. Also, God's purpose is revealed in the material world. It allows us to have an intimate relationship with God through Christ. As such, John 1:14 was a radical affirmation that God values the physical world and seeks to redeem it, not abandon it. If so, how do we experience God's embodiment daily?

The first point of Incarnation is that we trust God's creation is good for all. There was a movie titled *The Book of Eli*, an American sci-fi film depicting the aftermath of the nuclear war in America. The bomb caused the *ecocide*, and the overall environment is bleak and deserted throughout the movie. A lone warrior named Eli marches across the ruined landscape, carrying hope for humanity's redemption. The hope he is holding is the last copy of the Bible to the sanctuary on the West Coast. Eli's physical condition and the book's presence aren't revealed until the end. Eli has to overcome many obstacles, and in the end, a warlord takes the Book from Eli by force, who wishes to use the power of the Book to control his people. Ultimately, the warlord cannot possess even a single word in the Bible as they were written in Braille. Eventually we learn that Eli is blind, and he can dictate it from his memory when he gets the sanctuary, thanks to his daily devotion to reading the Bible. His journey demonstrates the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring value of God's Word. If we lose the fundamental elements – such as language, history, culture, and religious traditions such as the Bible that have enabled us to reflect on our existence, we risk losing sight of the goodness of creation that was so good to God.

The second point of the incarnation is to be with God's people. Last week, a friend sent me a tribute to Ann Hartley, a former Labour MP and the North Shore mayor, written by Councillor Richard Hills. I didn't know either Ann Hartley or Richard Hills, but I could see what this person Ann is like and how much she has been working to improve people's lives through Councillor Richard. This serves as a reminder that being deaf to the cries of anguish and suffering is contrary to God's incarnational work. As a church, we actively engage in efforts to embody this call. By participating in the Kaipatiki Emergency Response Group, we open

our doors to those affected by natural disasters, offering shelter and safety. Through workshops and seminars focused on justice and compassion, we strive to meet the needs of those around us and reflect God's presence in their lives.

The third and last is that God redeems the creation through our faith and actions. We admit our past mistakes or indifference and endeavour more to love our neighbours as ourselves through small or big actions; through confession and prayers. This Christmas, may we marvel at the mystery of the Word becoming flesh. Let it inspire us to embody God's love in our daily lives. Like Eli, may we be guided by God's Word and commit ourselves to God's mission. As we offer our lives for God's Kingdom, we become active participants in God's redeeming work. Merry Christmas, and may the light of Christ shine through you this season and always. Amen.