

*Word of God: speak to us. Speak through us. Amen.*

It is a season for stories. Great stories, that we love to tell again and again.  
An angel appearing to a young girl. Two impossible pregnancies.  
A treacherous journey. A dark and dank stable. A host of angels lighting up the sky.  
A baby in a feedbox, attended by rough shepherds and refined wise men.  
Political repression, danger, narrow escape.... So many stories.  
We live for these stories, stretch them out, act them out, savor them.

And then, on the Sunday after Christmas, our lectionary puts aside the stories  
and throws a little theology our way. A lot of theology.  
Pretty much the Whole Christian Story of God and humankind  
packed into the prologue of John's Gospel.  
In the beginning was the Word, who spoke all things into being, all things.  
But that's not all.... This Word became flesh, and pitched tent among us.  
And that's not all... we have seen His glory!  
And that's not all... seeing Him, we have seen God, whom no one has seen.  
I can read this passage over and over and barely grasp what it's saying.

God's Word, *logos*, really more like "The mind/thought/word" of God.  
You know how we think something and it's just in our mind until we  
express it in words – which makes it real, puts it into the world.  
So the Word of God, the Logos, is the expressed thought of God's Mind.  
It is an active thing – words have power; thoughts put out there into being.  
Genesis tells us: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;  
John goes further back: In the beginning was the Word.  
God spoke the universe into being. And the Word spoken was Jesus.

Huh? Here's a way I look at it:  
Sin caused a major communication gap between us and God,  
and God found a way to speak in our language, so he could teach us his again.

When I was one and a half, my family moved to Berlin, where my father worked  
as a foreign service officer. Not only were we in a German-speaking country,  
we also spoke German at home as my father's Viennese mother lived with us.

My nursemaid was German, and so as I learned to talk, it was in both German and English. And when we moved back to the States when I was six, we decided that on Saturdays, we would all speak German at home. But it didn't last long, and as I went to school in the States, and then we moved to Africa, the German faded. The further we got from it, the less we could remember.

That's what sin did in humankind – took us further and further from the language of God that once we'd known innately. The only way we could learn again is from someone who spoke like us. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.*

God didn't only find a way for us to relearn our mother tongue – He gave us a way back into belonging to him, to be his children. *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*

The Word of God, by coming and dwelling among us, has worded us, those who believe in His name, God's very own children. God said so. God has spoken us into being as new creations. Eternal creations. Not just that person we see each morning in the mirror, but much more. Someone with new life, new status, a new identity.

The New Testament uses the metaphor of citizenship to help us understand this. Think of undocumented migrants in this country. They have no rights, no status, their existence is very precarious. One slip, and they might lose it all. Say a woman fled unimaginable violence in her home country and came into the US, lived here for decades, cleaning hotel rooms, paying taxes – yes, the undocumented pay taxes – but she has no real status. She's not secure. Imagine that woman meets a citizen who falls in love with her, whom she loves, who wants to marry her. This union will do more than make her happy – this union will make her a citizen. By this person's choosing to give himself to her, to invite her into his life, she will have all the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. She need not fear the pound on the door in the night, arrest, exile. She will have security. She can stop hiding, and start fully inhabiting her life. She will have identity.

That, my friends, is our story, according to Christian teaching.  
Our birth in the flesh gives us life in this world;

It does not make us children of God.

That comes by God's choosing us – choosing to give himself to us, to invite us  
into her life, through this Son who came in flesh and camped out among us.  
Jesus came to give us power to become children of God.

Through our union with Christ in baptism we are made heirs of God's promises,  
with all the rights and responsibilities that go along with that identity.

We can start to live as who we truly are, not only our natural life,  
but our super-natural life, the one that's going to last forever.

Now, in my little analogy this woman becomes a citizen, with status and identity.  
But she also becomes a wife, the member of a new family.

When we are united with Christ – often referred to as the Bridegroom,  
who gives himself to us – we are made new. We are declared righteous.

Listen to the Prophet Isaiah: *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being  
shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks  
himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

This is not our own righteousness, but God's, conferred upon us as his beloved.  
This status as beloveds, as chosen, comes with a new identity:

*...you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.*

We have been clothed, adorned; we have been called by a new name, adopted.

We don't need to walk around in our tired old clothes – our complaints about  
our lives, our worries, our stuckness in old patterns of relating to people,  
our despair over things we think will never change, when we are so loved!

When we have been made such a promise!

When we have been given such a gift of new life, new identity, new hope.

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth!*

*From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*

That's a statement of enormous abundance, my friends.

Grace is the unmerited, overwhelming love of God, freely bestowed upon us.

Grace upon grace. Acceptance upon acceptance.

Mercy upon mercy. Love upon Love.

We don't have to live as aliens in hiding, or as slaves under the law,  
trying to earn our own way to heaven, which we can't anyway.

We live as children of the household under grace, chosen and redeemed, loved,  
our status assured, our identity secure.

Christ redeemed us for full participation in the life of his household,  
as children who speak God's language, who can understand when God speaks.

God is still speaking, and wants us to hear his word of love deep in our hearts.  
God wants us speak his word of love deep into the hurting heart of this world.  
Through Christ we can become beautifully, intimately fluent  
with God's Word again.

*Amen.*

**John 1:1-18**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name,

he gave power to become children of God, who were born,

not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

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.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

**Isaiah 61:10-11, 62:1-3**

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.