

“Unto You—A Word Was Born”

Christmas Eve Service

John 1:1-14

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” John 1:14

A blessed Christmas to all of you! As the biblical writer John reminded us this evening in the first chapter of his Gospel, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .” (Jn 1:14). That is what we celebrate tonight. We were reminded through a service of lessons and carols that with the words of prophets God spoke a promise to send a savior to the world. Now the Word has been fulfilled. God’s promise has come to pass. The child is born. The Word has become flesh.

In his painting, *Emmanuel*, the painter Edward Riojas captures this fulfillment of God’s Word of promise in the birth of Jesus. I brought a print of this painting framed here.

There is also a copy of the painting for you to look at on the projector screen above. With a paintbrush the artist visually depicts what the Gospel writer St. John has written with a pen, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .” (Jn 1:14).

The artist shows us the importance of the birth of this child in

where he paints him. Riojas locates the infant Jesus in the bottom center of the painting. By painting him in the center of the width of the painting, Riojas reminds us that Jesus is the intended focus of the season of Christmas.

In the painting Mary and Joseph are gathered around Jesus and he has their attention. Mary’s face is directed toward the child even as her eyes are closed and hands folded in prayer, contemplating all that has just taken place. Joseph, on the other hand, holds a lantern over the child, reminding us that Jesus is the light of the world. Joseph’s eyes are not looking at Jesus but rather they are directed toward you and me as if to say, “This child was born for you too!” *So Joseph looks at us and invites us into the painting and in so doing invites the child to come and live in our lives.*

The artist also reminds us of the importance of the birth of Jesus by painting him at the bottom of the painting. Jesus is the one who has traveled from heaven above to earth *below* for us. Through words the heavenly prophets foretold his birth and the heavenly angels proclaimed his birth. *Now, the holy, heavenly Word has become flesh and dwelt among us. Here on earth God’s Word has taken on a life of its own!*

So through the *location* of the child Jesus in the painting, the artist, Edward Riojas, reminds us this Christmas Eve that *the child Jesus is the eternal, heavenly, holy Word of God that has become flesh and wants to come live and dwell in your life too*



“The Word that has become flesh and has dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). It might be difficult for us to wrap our heads around the idea of a word taking on a life of its own. It is true, though, that words can take on lives of their own. Consider these two phrases that have become a part of our lives and conversations this past year: “ice bucket challenge” and “I can’t breathe.” By themselves these words don’t carry a lot of significance but when you put them together and speak them in a conversation with someone or type them into a google search, you will get a lot of different and varied responses. These words have taken on a life of their own.

The word “love” can take on an incredible life of its own. The words “I love you” can evoke all kinds of emotions depending on when we say them, how we say them, who we say them to.

Yes, words can take on a life of their own. And the result can be positive. And the result can be negative. Words of encouragement build people up and live in such a way that they bring positive results in people’s lives. Words of anger, envy, or hatred tear people down and live in such a way that they bring negative, destructive results in people’s lives.

With a pen the Evangelist St. John wrote the truth that the “Word has become flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). With a paintbrush the painter Edward Riojas painted *the child Jesus as the Word of God that has become flesh*. Both of them proclaim to us *our need* for God’s Word of promise to live in us. To live in our lives.

Because our words, thoughts, and actions, and deeds can take on a life of their own that hurt not just our relationship with our God but also our relationship with others, we need the one who is the Word who becomes flesh. We need this baby born in Bethlehem to take on a life of his own in our lives and hearts and minds each day. This child who has lived and breathed in lessons and carols this evening is the one who wants to come into your live to give you true forgiveness that leads to eternal life.



I want to bring us back to that painting that I showed you at the beginning of the sermon. I told you that the painter Edward Riojas shows us the importance of the birth of Jesus in *where* he paints him. Jesus is located in the bottom center of the painting reminding us that he is the Word from heaven who has become flesh and is the focus of the Christmas season and wants to be the focus of our lives. It is also true

that Riojas shows us the importance of the birth of Jesus in *how* he paints him.

Riojas paints the child Jesus in two unique ways that proclaim to us as the viewers that this child’s life has a specific purpose. First, he wraps the baby Jesus not in swaddling clothes but in burial cloths. Second, he places the infant Jesus not in a manger but in a sarcophagus. In painting Jesus this way Riojas reminds us that this child was not born *just* so we could celebrate his birth every year and have an excuse to put up lights, a Christmas tree, give gifts, eat a nice meal, and be nice to relatives for a day. No, this child is the savior. He was born “to save us from our sins” (Mt 1:21). He was born to die for the sin of the world once and for all.

That is to say, this child was born to die for you. To die your death. To pay your price. To purchase your forgiveness. This child is the Word that has become flesh to take on your life as his own. He buries your life with his own. He buries your sin, your guilt, your words, thoughts, actions, and deeds. And he brings you to new life just as sure as he rises to new life from his tomb. And he daily wants to redeem and reshape even your words, thoughts, actions, and deeds through his love and forgiveness.

Yes, this Word become flesh wants to continue to live in your life. I told you that the picture in this frame is a print of the painting *Emmanuel* by Edward Riojas that you saw up on the projector screen. What I didn't tell you is that this framed copy belongs to me and my family. We bought it this year so that we could hang it in our living room this Christmas season and put it back up in Christmas seasons to come. So in our living room we hang a picture of the birth of the one who longs to forgive and live in us. It is a reminder that God longs to live and have his love and forgiveness be the focus of our life together as a family. It is my prayer that as you celebrate the birth of this Word who has become flesh this evening, tomorrow with your families, and in the days and years to follow, that the love of this child and the forgiveness that he was born to purchase be the focus. Amen.