

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
December 16, 2020  
Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer  
***God is with us in the flesh***

—John 1:14-18

The story is told of a young child who was afraid to be alone in his bedroom at night. When the fear got great, the child scampered to his parents' bedroom and asked for one of the parents to come stay with him. But the parents assured the child, "You'll be okay. Don't worry. God is with you." The child went back to bed, but the fear came back. So the child scampered again to his parents' bedroom, looking for one of them to come stay with him. But the parents assured him again, "You'll be okay. Don't worry. God is with you." The child returned to bed, but none of it was working. Anxious and afraid, the child hurried back to Mom and Dad and said, "I need one of you to stay with me." Same reply: "You'll be okay. Don't worry. God—" but before the parents could finish the sentence, the scared child interrupted, "I know that God is with me. But I need somebody with skin on!"

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

God has one of two ways he will reveal himself. One of two ways he will make himself known. And he has done them both. Law. Grace.

Think about how you want God to reveal himself and make himself known this Christmas. You look at the world around you, and whatever frustrates you about it. You look at the people around you, especially in your view the people who frustrate you, the person who has somehow done you wrong. Maybe you have a very good idea how you would like God to show himself to the world this Christmas. How you would like God to show himself to the people who have or are making your life difficult. Oh, that God would come down the same way he came down for Moses! Thunder and lightning, loud trumpet blasts, smoke and fire, and belt out his "thou shalt" and his "thou shalt not" to everybody who is not getting the message. And if anyone doth when he has been told "thou shalt not" and if anyone doth not when she has been told "thou shalt," then may fire and brimstone fall upon them and may they not live! Do not get me wrong. I am not making fun of the way God came down at Mount Sinai. I am not making fun of the commandments which God spoke there. What I am saying is if that's the way you want God to treat the world this Christmas, is that the way you want him to treat you? Because he can. *The law was given through Moses.* But if you think somehow you should get a pass from Moses, that sure seems to smack of self-righteousness. Each of us should be personally asking, "Am I walking in my own home with blameless heart, setting before my eyes no vile thing? Am I carrying a grudge against someone, when I have been told not to carry grudges to love my neighbor as I love myself?"

No, we would not choose for God to reveal himself to us again this Christmas through Moses. When we come to our spiritual senses, we will return to pleading, "Come not in terrors, as the King of kings, but kind and good, with healing in thy wings, tears for all woes, a heart for ev'ry plea; come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me" (CW 588:3).

We were covering the Second Article in catechism class: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary..." A student explained all that for me by saying that Jesus was incarcerated by the Holy Spirit. Now aside from wondering why a middle schooler would be thinking about incarceration, I realized I had been doing a poor job teaching the incarnation. But it also does bring up a fascinating practical question. Incarcerated? Is that how the Son of God felt when he became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary? Did the Son of God feel like he was being sent to prison when he came to this world in the flesh? When it's time to go, a parent tells a child, "Let's go, get your shoes and socks on and get out to the car!" In the days leading up to Christmas, did God the Father have to tell God the Son, "Come on, get your skin on and get down there in the manger?" No. Not at all.

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.* How do you know it wasn't forced? Look at how many times the word grace is used. The Son came from the Father, and it was the Son who was *full of grace and truth.* *From the fullness of his grace*—the Son's grace, the grace of Jesus Christ—we *have all received one blessing after another.* The Son came to show grace, and you don't show grace and truth, you don't show true grace, because you're forced to. You do it because you want to. And that's what Jesus Christ did.

Of all the ways God could have made himself known! He could have made himself known at Sinai again, the way he did the first time. He could have written his name with stars. He could have brought his surging glory up from the

depths of the earth. But none of that would have helped us. We need more than Moses. We need more than wishing upon a star. We need more than seismic splendor.

We need the Son of God with us in flesh. We need a Savior.

A Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

A Good Shepherd who lays down life and takes it up again.

Someone to do the Father's will and to finish the work of saving us and to say "It is finished" when it is.

We need a Resurrection and a Life, so that by believing in him we live, even though we die, and so that by living and believing in him, we never die.

So that's why the Word came in flesh, became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and dwelled among us. How long will that hold? How long will he stay and dwell with us in flesh? Forever. He is never taking his skin off again. He is keeping his skin on forever.

When you are afraid and anxious, maybe with daunting tasks ahead, you may want to say the same thing that child said at bedtime: "I need somebody with skin on!" Whenever you feel like that, remember what the apostles like John and Peter, who did see Jesus with skin on, have to say to you about Jesus Christ. Peter wrote, "Though you have not seen Jesus Christ, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." You and I don't see Jesus in the flesh right now. That's okay. Mary and Joseph, Peter and John did that for us. We do believe in Jesus, and we know he is right beside us in the flesh, even though we cannot see him yet, because he has promised us he is. And more than anything, we believe with all our heart what Jesus Christ, God in flesh, is bringing us again for Christmas. Grace. Saving grace. Amen.