

The Word became flesh ⁱ

Joh 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Sometimes we can get so familiar with something, that we cease to be moved by it. We have seen it, or read it so many times that it no longer captivates us. This passage may be one of those. You may have read it hundreds, even thousands of times. And with familiarity comes, maybe not contempt, but a blasé attitude; a feeling that I've heard it all before.

John, of course, is referring back to another passage in the Bible that you've probably heard thousands, maybe even tens of thousands of times:

Gen 1:1-5 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (2) The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (3) And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (4) And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. (5) God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And maybe you've heard that one so many times that it no longer arouses a sense of amazement and awe in you. It is a sad thing, but it is reality also.

But, you know, these passages are talking about things that are beyond understanding, things for which we have no human or earthly comparison. God created out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. He had no raw materials to work with. He had to create those as well. I'm in the Building Industry, and I know that we can't build a house for a client without the appropriate materials. We need concrete, timber, bricks, plaster and paint to build a house. And all of those materials came from suppliers who dug raw materials out of quarries, or cut down trees to make them.

I once read a cartoon where God agreed to a challenge put to Him by scientists to prove that they had enough knowledge and equipment to create a man. They were determined to show God that He had done nothing miraculous, nothing special. So God got down on His knees and shaped a man out of the dirt, and breathed into him to give him life. The scientists began to gather up some dirt also, whereupon God pulled them up, saying, "No, no, no. You have to create your own dirt. You're not allowed to use mine."

How did God create out of nothing? And with only a word? It is impossible for us to grasp.

How do you begin to comprehend that which is beyond comprehension?
How do you begin to understand that which is beyond understanding?

We face this problem every time our thoughts turn to God. Let me give you a few more things that are beyond our understanding.

The Mystery

How do we get our minds around eternity? We are so confined within these earthly bodies. We can track back to our beginning, maybe even to the day or time of conception. We know we will have a physical ending. And we are governed by time in between. Sunrise, work, sunset, sleep. Day in, day out, for maybe 70 years. We are ruled by clocks, both internally and the one hanging on the wall. How then can we imagine eternity? A time without time. No night, just continuous day. No aging, no sleep, no death. Our merely human minds don't stretch that far.

How are we to work out omnipresence and infinity? I am trapped by this body in one place at one time. I can't be here and in the room next door at the same time, let alone everywhere in the universe at once.

Even the sheer vastness of the universe is beyond my comprehension. The nearest star outside our solar system is 10 trillion kilometres away. How do I get my mind around a being who fills every nook and cranny of it personally. Scientists tell us that the universe is expanding all the time, at a phenomenal pace. What is it expanding into? What is on the other side, ahead of the expanding universe? I can't even begin to think about these matters.

Neither can I understand purity and holiness. No substance I come into contact with is absolutely and totally pure. Everything has some impurity in it, no matter how minute. And this is painfully obvious in my Christian life. No matter how hard I try, I can't even go one day without committing at least one sin. Somewhere along the line, I fall short. And don't get too smug. You are no different. Jesus, by contrast, was so pure that He never committed even one sin in 30-something years on earth. God in heaven has never committed one sin in all eternity, however long that is.

So, what am I to make of these things? I consider myself to be a man of reason and fairly logical and rational. But I can't work these things out with my powers of reason. I have to confess that they are all a mystery to me. God is a mystery to me. I can't work Him out. I can't conceive of His vastness, His power, His wisdom. They are all so infinitely superior to my feeble attempts at greatness that I can't even begin to grasp them.

Isa 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Thankfully, God doesn't require that we understand Him, for that is impossible. He has simply asked that we know and love Him. Knowing someone doesn't mean that we will understand them. How many of us can truly say that we understand our wife or husband, the one closest to us? And yet we know and love them. But if I can't understand my wife, how am I ever going to understand God?

You see, I am vastly different to God. I am weak. I am easily conned. I give up too easily. I am self-righteous. I am self-centred. I get too easily distracted from what is important and get side-tracked by the unimportant.

This isn't a one way confession. You're the same. I know you are because you are human like me. We all get caught up in self, and bogged down by pettiness. And it all serves to take our focus off what is important and eternal.

There is a story I once read of a group of mountain climbers. They set out to climb a majestic, snow-capped peak in the Alps in Europe. On clear days the view of the summit was both breath-taking and inspiring. On days like this, the climbers made rapid progress. The peak seemed to beckon them onward and upward. The walk was brisk. The co-operation was unselfish. Though many, they seemed to climb as one, all looking to the same summit.

But on some days, grey, drab clouds hid the peak. The climb became arduous. Eyes were downward and thoughts inward. The goal was forgotten. Tempers were frayed. Weariness set in. Complaints flowed freely.

We are all like the climbers. When our summit is in sight, the going is easy; we climb in unity. But when our view is blocked, then the effort quickly becomes too much. We groan, we quarrel, we get restless, we withdraw, we work against each other instead of with each other.

Too easily we lose our focus on the important One, Jesus Christ. Today, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I hope we will all be able to re-focus our vision, to see the peak in front of us, to see Jesus nearer and clearer than ever before.

Some of what we see may be surprising, some may be refreshing, some may be thought provoking. I hope it will help you to see Him through fresh eyes, and maybe in a way you never expected.

There is so much about God that is mysterious. How can He be 3 and yet only 1? It's easy to see why many people have difficulty accepting the idea of the Trinity. It just doesn't make earthly sense. And every attempt I have ever heard to describe it is inadequate. Yet the concept is clearly in Scripture, so I must accept it. How can I be

sure I am praying to the right member of the Trinity? And does it really matter that much?

We know that God created all things. But what was there before He created? Even an empty space must be something. How is it possible for there to be nothing? And how did He create everything out of nothing?

How do you speak a stone into being, let alone a whole universe?

“Tis mystery all,” one of the old hymn writers wrote.

Why did God ever create the devil? He knew what the results would be. He knew that everything would be spoilt, polluted, contaminated. He knew that evil would abound; the hatred, the killing, the loneliness, the fear that would affect every living thing on this earth. Why did He create him? Surely for some one so knowledgeable and wise, there must have been a better, less painful way?

“Tis mystery all.”

Why did He choose people like the Hebrews to be His chosen nation? Apart from a few faithful exceptions, they seemed to excel at stubbornness and idolatry. They seemed to put the heathen nations to shame with their spiritual prostitution. They constantly tried, tested and rejected God. They killed His prophets, they rejected His word. Surely He could have found a better bunch somewhere than this lot. For centuries God’s name would be dragged through the mud because of these people. Whatever was He thinking when He picked them?

“Tis mystery all.”

But there is something even more mysterious. You will find it if we go back to the start of John’s gospel. John tells us in no uncertain terms who Jesus was. He was the Word; He was God; He was always there. He made everything. That alone is amazing. In Old Testament times, people would make a statue of wood or stone with their own hands and worship what they have made. (Some still do today). But for us, it is the other way around. We are the ones made, and we are to worship the one who made us.

The Immanence

But here comes the punch line:

Joh 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

This is truly amazing. There are over 30,000 verses in the Bible. But this one may be the most astounding. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

I know, you’ve read it a thousand times before. So what? What’s so amazing about that? I’ll tell you what. This is the same God who made the universe! He reigns in

unapproachable light. He is awesome in majesty; spotlessly pure, terrifyingly powerful. He is entitled to every accolade we can give Him. He is entitled to our worship and our praise. We should fall at His feet at the mere mention of His name. He is so wonderful.

But He became flesh, and lived with us. Every crown and every royal robe that was His by right He put aside. He became flesh. Do you know what this means?

We can't hope to understand the majesty and the glory that was His in heaven, with all the angels singing Holy, Holy, Holy and worshipping Him. That's beyond our comprehension.

How He did it "*Tis mystery all*" as well. But we can understand one thing. He was flesh. He was man. The One who was larger than the universe became a microscopic embryo. The Creator of all things was formed in a virgin's womb. The Author of life received life from a teenage girl. The Provider for every need lay helpless in a bed of straw, requiring His every need to be provided by one of those who polluted His creation. Are you in awe? The omnipotent became breakable. The eternal became mortal.

Have you ever pictured God crying because He is hungry? Have you ever thought about the One who has no needs, needing to be picked up and held in a young mother's arms? How about our Comforter needing to be comforted Himself? Doesn't this tax your imagination?

Wouldn't you like to ask Mary some questions? Like:

Did Jesus ever scream Himself to sleep because He had colic?

How often did God need His nappy changed?

At what age did you wean Him?

Didn't it ever occur to you how absurd it was that you should be the creator of your own Creator?

Was it scary knowing that you and your husband were responsible for the life of the only One who could save humanity?

What if you accidentally dropped Him on His head?

You see, this God was human. He burped, and blew His nose. Maybe He snored. He probably even hit His thumb with a hammer. If He was the kid down the street when you were growing up, would you have played with Him? Did He ever come home from school with a black eye or blood nose? Did any of the girls have a crush on Him? Maybe He had pimples as a teenager. Maybe He had B.O. or dandruff.

He was human. Maybe His knees were bony and His nose too big. His feet hurt. He felt weak and tired. He struggled with temptation. Maybe He was afraid of failure and His feelings got hurt.

Is it blasphemous or irreverent to think of Him in this way? I don't think so. "*The mystery of godliness is great,*" Paul wrote to Timothy, "*God was manifested in the flesh.*" He wasn't like Clark Kent, you see. He wasn't Superman pretending to be a human. He was real flesh and blood. He was like you and I. It is fitting and right to

worship Jesus as God, but sometimes He can seem a bit too distant and remote; a bit too detached from the day to day living we experience.

It is certainly uncomfortable to think about Him this way. He is easier to stomach when we keep His humanity out of it and concentrate on His divinity. It keeps Him distant, packaged and predictable. Let Him be as human as He intended to be. His favourite name for Himself was 'Son of Man' not 'Son of God'.

For most of His life He was just another face in the crowd- no one outstanding.

*Isa 53:2 ...he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.*

For 3 years He was famous, but it led to His execution. After they stripped Him and whipped Him and nailed Him to a cross, they stood back to taunt Him as He died. It is hard for us to comprehend the cruelty of their attack on Him. Who of us would laugh at a condemned man strapped into an electric chair? But that is what they did to the Lord of Glory.

But the cross was no accident. Jesus didn't end up there by mistake. He wasn't up there because the devil tricked Him. It wasn't a last minute, panic stations attempt to patch up a bungled rescue.

The cross was no accident. It was part of an eternal plan. *Act 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Jesus knew what humiliation, degradation and pain He would face before He left heaven.* The choice was entirely His; it was not forced on Him. And when He came back from the dead, He didn't come back to taunt the Pharisees with "I told you so". He only appeared to a few people, not to every one.

Maybe this is the reason it is so hard to understand the wisdom of the cross. It is so foreign to our human nature, the one that likes to beat the opponent and then rub their noses in it publicly. But that isn't the way of Jesus.

Why endure such weakness, helplessness and pain? What motivated it? Purely and simply love, simple and pure. His love for His creation. Mankind, the most precious and valuable thing in the entire universe to the Creator.

The Revelation

If you wanted to tell some one how much you loved them, how would you do it? Rent a billboard and put up a sign? Make a TV commercial? Hire a plane and trail a sign behind it? Or put a front-page ad in the newspaper?

No, there is a much better way. Go in person. Which is exactly what God did. "... *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*" Love is best shown in person. And Love came seeking us. Love searched the hotels, the clubs, the strip joints, the coffee shops,

the building sites, the office blocks, the dole queues, the gutter. Love searched high and low, until He found that which He was looking for. And He put His life on the line for us, the supreme price.

It's incomprehensible, but it's amazing.

Conclusion

This has been a year of increasing uncertainty and turmoil.

We face global financial crisis, where the perpetrators get multi-million dollar rewards for crippling the economy.

Rising interest rates force people out of their homes and on to the streets, worldwide.

Superannuation funds are decreasing in value, forcing many people to put off retirement, and others to struggle to cope.

The cost of living has dramatically increased.

Unemployment is increasing.

Homelessness is up.

Alcohol-fuelled violence is common.

Racial violence is increasing.

Terrorist attacks are still a threat.

The ongoing drought and our dwindling water supplies loom large over us.

Response

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. 1Ti 3:16

Only the Christian faith has a God who is both sovereign and powerful enough to control world events, but also a God who is personal and intimate enough to understand.

He understands our frailty, therefore we can go to Him with our fears, our doubts, our anxieties, our problems.

He knows the struggles of temptation and the battle against sin and is ever ready to help.

He knows the pain of loss and betrayal and will comfort.

As we have seen, God is big and powerful. He is powerful enough to be in charge of the universe. But He is not so distant that He can't understand our troubles.

And God is also small and intimate. He is close enough to be able to help us in times of trouble, but He is not so small that He is unable to control world events.

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Hab 3:17-18

Regardless of the circumstances we face in the world, in our work, or in our relationships, God is always worthy of worship.

¹ By Ian Gould, preached at City Edge Church, Melbourne, 19/10/08