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God in the Flesh
John 1:1-5, 10-18

It's been a **wild year**, hasn't it?
Lots of unexpected headlines, scandals, and disasters!
And then we come to **Christmas**, which has it's own
Unexpected happenings!

Christmas for most of us is a **wild and chaotic** season with family,
friends, parties, shopping, decorating,
and **worrying** about all of the above.
It can be full of friends and family, and still we feel alone.
It's a time of **great expectations**, expectations that none of our
Christmases can live up to!

So it's not surprising that we might ask ourselves, ok, **where is God?**
Where is God in the world **this year?**
Where is God this **Christmas?**

The Gospel of John reminds us that God is **right here** with us.
God became **one of us**.
The prophet Isaiah called Jesus **Emmanuel**, which means, God with us.

John says, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
The Greek word for **dwelt** means '**tabernacled**'.
Do you know what a **tabernacle** is?
In the Old Testament it was the tent where people would worship God.
The tabernacle was built to house the very presence of God.
It was a sign that God was always with them before they had the
permanent structure of the Temple.

Presbyterian Pastor Eugene Peterson,
 in the Message Translation of the Bible puts it this way in John 1:14:
***The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the
 neighborhood.***

I love that.

In other words, God is ***never far away,***
 Jesus is in our neighborhood.
 I guess the question is, ***have we seen Him lately?***
Where do we find Him?

Christianity is the ***only world religion*** that believes
 God became ***human***—flesh and blood—like one of us.

This is the ***great truth*** that sets our faith apart from other faiths.
 Our God is not remote and unapproachable,
 but has come to us in ***person.***
 He did not just write us a letter.
 He did not just send us a representative.
 He did not just speak laws from a mountain.
 He came to us as ***one of us.***
 The Infinite became an infant.
 The Eternal One became a little one.

It's known as the ***Incarnation***—the flesh and blood of God.
 Jesus himself says in John 14:9, *because you have seen me, you have seen
 the Father.*
 In Jesus, we get a ***permanent glimpse of God.***
 In Jesus, we see the very ***face of God.***

Rev. Thomas Butts says that *No act of God in time and history gives us
 more reason to **hope** ...than the Incarnation. ...*
At the right time and in the most undeniable and unforgettable way,

*God **stepped into our world** of sin and sorrow to break the grip of evil and to save us--from ourselves and all the demonic forces that **deface the image** of God in us.*

*On one night of all nights **God entered our world** ...*

This child was more than he appeared to be. ...

he was more than just a man. He looked like us.

*He grew up like any other child of his time, but he had **a reason for being** here that not only required him to be human, but more.*

*In him we got a **permanent glimpse of God**,*

*and in him we came to **know more about God** than has ever been*

known, before or since. From the sermon, A Permanent Glimpse of God, by the Rev. Dr.

Thomas Lane Butts, *Day 1*, 2009

ONLY in Jesus do we get to see the **face of God**.

No one else, not even those closest to God's own heart, got to see the face of God.

Moses only saw the back of God as He passed by (Exodus 33).

Elijah heard a still, small voice.

Samuel heard God calling his name.

Jacob wrestled with an angel, and knew it was the Lord.

But none of them saw the face of God.

Then Jesus came, **so everyone could see the face** of God—
in this man, this perfect human being, who looked just like one of us!

So is the God we find in Jesus a **different God** than the God of the Old Testament?

Over the years many people have argued that the Old Testament God is a God of wrath and vengeance.

And the God of the New Testament is a God of grace and love.

No, John reminds us that **Jesus IS God**.

And Jesus was God **from the very beginning**,

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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being*
⁴ *in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people.*

Jesus is the **very same God** we find all throughout the Bible, it's just that we **didn't fully understand** the character of God until we had God in the flesh.

Jesus is, as Isaiah and Matthew say,
Emmanuel—God with us.

Hebrews 1:1-3 puts it this way:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

Last week Cara sang one of my favorite Christmas songs, called **Welcome to Our World** by Chris Rice.

Listen to some of the words, again.

*Tears are falling, hearts are breaking, How we need to hear from God
 You've been promised, we've been waiting, Welcome Holy Child*

*Hope that you don't mind our manger, How I wish we would have known,
 But long awaited Holy Stranger, Make yourself at home*

*Bring your peace into our violence, Bid our hungry souls be filled
 World now breaking Heaven's silence, Welcome to our world*

*Fragile finger sent to heal us, Tender brow prepared for thorn
 Tiny heart whose blood will save us, Unto us is born*

*So wrap our injured flesh around You, Breathe our air and walk our sod
Rob our sin and make us holy, Perfect Son of God...*

St. Augustine described Jesus this way:

Our **Lord** came down from life to suffer death;
the **Bread** came down, to hunger;
the **Way** came down, on the way to weariness;
the **Fount** came down, to thirst.

—Augustine, Sermon 78

He so loved us that, for our sake,
He was made man in **time**,
although through him all **times** were made.
He was made **man**, who made man.
He was **created** of a mother, whom he created.
He was **carried** by hands that he formed.
He cried in the manger in wordless infancy, **he the Word**,
without whom all human eloquence is mute.

—Augustine, Sermon 188, 2

So if we are *looking for God*,
for signs of God in our world, and in our Christmas,
we have to look *for Jesus*.
And *where do we find* Jesus?

Well, we find him in the **Word** of God, the Bible—
For He IS the Word.
We find Jesus in the **church**, the body of Christ.
Although the church is **not perfect** this side of heaven,
it is a place where **Jesus dwells**, it is His body here on earth.

Which means we find Jesus in **worship**,
we find Him in our **praises**, and in our **prayers**.

In fact, Jesus told us in Matthew 18:20 that ***wherever two or three*** are *gathered in my name*, *there I am in the midst of them.*

And in ***Matthew 25***, we learn that we find Jesus whenever we ***give, and serve, and reach out to the least of these***— anyone who is hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned, or a stranger, anyone in need!

It's interesting that in John's Gospel, there is ***no nativity scene***. Instead, John talks about Jesus as the ***Word***, the ***light***, and the ***life***.

Which means that finding Jesus takes us ***well beyond Christmas Eve***, because we ***can find him even without*** the nativity scene, or the Christmas tree, or the celebrations.

Jesus is found ***in our midst all the time***, in ordinary life, and faith, worship, and service.

Sometimes people ***doubt*** that God appears to us today, That God talks to us today.....
But I think that just the opposite is true.

I believe God speaks to us all the time.
In our thoughts, our prayers, and in other people.
Because, God is ***always*** with us!

So, how do we notice God in the flesh ***in our lives***?
Do you remember as a kid, learning, ***stop, drop, and roll*** for fire drills?
What if we learn to '***stop, look, and listen***' for God,
in our everyday lives?

We just ***never know*** when and where Jesus will show up, do we?

This is what it means, that our Savior became one of us:
It means we can ***meet God***—if we have the heart to notice.

And we can **BE** Christ,
a light shining in the darkness, for someone else this Christmas—
if we are willing.

In an old Broadway play called **Green Pastures**, playwright Marc
Connelly has a moving and memorable scene,
where the **Lord is looking out**,

trying to decide what to do with the sinful situation on earth.

Gabriel enters with his horn tucked under his arm.

Sensing the Lord's dilemma, he asks, "Lord, has the time come for me to
blow the trumpet?" "No, no," said the Lord, "don't touch the trumpet,
not yet."

God continues to worry.

Gabriel asks the Lord again what he plans to do.

Will he send someone to help the situation? Who will it be?

Gabriel makes some suggestions. "How about another David or Moses?

You could send one of the prophets: Isaiah or Jeremiah.

There are lots of great prophets up here.

What do you think, Lord?"

Without looking back at Gabriel, God said,

"I am not going to send anyone. This time I am going myself!!" From
the sermon, A Permanent Glimpse of God, by the Rev. Dr. Thomas Lane Butts, *Day 1*, 2009

