

CHRISTMAS EVE

John 1:14

At some point in our life, all of us have likely had the phrase, “*I’d like a word with you*”, said to us. We immediately wonder what the person wants to speak to us about. We make an appointment to meet somewhere a little later, and while we wait, we sweat it out, thinking about what on earth we are going to be told. Will it be good news or bad news? Have we done something wrong? Maybe we’ll be asked to do something that is going to cost us money and effort? Maybe we will receive a gift, or an invitation to dinner. If this happens at work, maybe we are about to get a promotion, or worst, maybe we are being laid off or fired. It is agonizing as we wait until the appointed time to find out.

Today, on the day when we are all excited about Christmas presents, visiting relatives and friends, the Christmas dinner and everything else that goes with making Christmas Day an enjoyable and festive occasion, God says to us: “*I want to have a Word with you*”.

What on earth does God want to speak to us about? Well, the Word that God wants to have with us is quite different than what the boss might mean when he or she says, “*I want to have a word with you*”. The Word that God has for us, is not the kind of word that we find in the dictionary; not the word that can be translated from one language to another; it is a unique Word, and God is offering it to us now. Of course, John’s Gospel is

referring to the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, Son of God from eternity. John, in his Gospel, calls Jesus "*The Word*". Our Gospel reading from John, summarizes what Christmas is all about. It tells us that the Word, Jesus, has chosen to become human. Just think about the importance of that statement for a moment.

The all-powerful and eternal God, has chosen to plunge Himself into the arena of human life as we live it, and take on the flesh and bones of our humanity. Or to put it another way, the Creator of the universe is born in a stable in Bethlehem.

This is the special time of the year when we celebrate the birth of our Saviour in Bethlehem. We enjoy the story in Luke and Matthew about Mary and Joseph, their trip to Bethlehem, the birth in a stable, the visit of the shepherds and the Magi; we enjoy seeing the faces of children glow with excitement, and we delight in their very simple understanding of the events of Christmas. However, too often we don't go any further than the simple story. We miss out on the real significance of these events. Christmas is the celebration of God becoming one of us and living on this earth with all the pain, the suffering, the human tragedies, the sin and dying. Jesus came into the thick of everything.

The point John is making when he says, *The Word became flesh*, is that, in the midst of our agonies in this life, we are not alone.

In Jesus, God is with us when we are depressed, hurting or sick. In Jesus, God is with us when we receive bad news. In Jesus, God is with us when we feel guilty and ashamed. In Jesus, God is with us when we are worried about someone we love. In Jesus, God is with us when we are caught up in a chain of events that we are powerless to prevent. The good news of Christmas

is that God hasn't kept Himself separate from all of our troubles and pain, but he has come right here into the middle of all of it.

He truly is Immanuel, *God is with us*.

The story is told of a psychiatrist whose treatment methods were radically different from that of his colleagues who separated themselves from their patients. He placed his bed among their beds. He lived the life they must live. Day by day he shared it.

He loved them. He put his arms around them and hugged them. This doctor, who was like God to the patient, held those unattractive, unlovable persons, and loved them back into life.

Often, when patients who had been unable to speak said their first words, they were "thank you".

In plain and simple language, isn't that what God did through Jesus at Christmas? Jesus has come and lived in our world; He has become part of our life of confused priorities, of aching bodies, torn and bleeding spirits, of heartbreak and loneliness.

Christmas tells us God is not out there somewhere, separate from our world, He is in the world with us, He has come to hug us and hold us tight, even though sin makes us unattractive and unlovable. Jesus was born to show us the heart of God, a heart that throbs with love for every one of us. Jesus doesn't come with vague descriptions of love. Jesus is love. He came to bring "*peace on earth to those with whom he is well pleased*". He is truly God. In this baby of Bethlehem, born to Mary and Joseph, we shall see as much of God as we shall ever hope to see in our earthly life. This baby is God in the flesh.

The special Word God has for you is Jesus, who came to give up His life for us in the shame of the cross, His suffering and dying for the sins of all people. That first Christmas was for this reason, and we continue to celebrate it to this day.

Many of us may wonder on this holy of nights, what difference

will this Christmas celebration make in our life? Is it just another Christmas, here today and gone tomorrow, that is, gone except for the pain of the bills to pay? He may not be able to do much about the bills right now, but Jesus can make a huge difference to our life. Christmas invites us to trust Jesus.

Christmas challenges us to take Jesus seriously, not just today, but every day. Christmas reminds us that we have a heavenly Father who loves us so much that He became one of us, so that He can help us, whenever and wherever we need help, all the year through. Christmas reminds us that just as the baby Jesus was given life in that grubby stable, Jesus wants to make our life new, and refresh our daily existence in the dirtiness of life in this world.

God does indeed have a word for us tonight. God, in Jesus, has become a human being, because of us, and for us.

AMEN.