

The Word Became Flesh (Advent Series)

II. God Acts

or

For God So Loved the World that He Did Not Send an Email

12/7/2008

1. Pastor Steve opened with an object lesson about email. While the point was that email has some serious weaknesses, what are some strengths of using emails that make it so seductive to use (and abuse)?

Among those that might come up are: it is fast, it is free, it goes anywhere in the world instantly, we don't interrupt the receiver, it leaves a documentation trail, we can take our time to compose our thoughts more carefully than when we are talking face-to-face, we have the option of reconsidering and not sending the message after we have thought it through, we can keep all parties involved informed by making sure that everyone gets a copy of the same thing, and we don't have to get up out of our chair to do it.

2. Now what are some of the downsides to email?

We tend to focus on the message rather than the person, the receiver can not perceive the tone of our voice or our body language to help interpret the mood of the sender, the message comes in cold, there tends to be an emphasis on eloquence rather than on character, and there is no opportunity for easy exchange of information and context to make sure that we are on the same page.

3. How does all this relate to Advent?

God could have just sent a message through a burning bush, a pillar of cloud, a talking animal, or a prophet. However, He decided to come down to earth and live amongst us in the flesh to change the course of history. That's pretty incredible since the Heavens can not contain His glory, yet He confined himself to a feeding trough.

4. Why is God showing up in the flesh such a big deal?

God demonstrated a new level of intimacy by actually coming to visit in person. It is like when we go to visit someone in their home or in the hospital. We are showing them that they are important enough that we would take the time to personally come to them. In this case, Jesus is creating another race – infusing humans with the divine.

5. Read John 1:1-5, and 10-15. Focusing on v. 10-11, how did those to whom Jesus appeared react to this special visit?

They did not recognize him. They rejected His claims.

6. Read Isaiah 40:9-11 to see if you can determine why His own people would doubt that Jesus was the Son of God sent to be their Messiah.

Verse 10 describes a mighty ruler coming to gather his subjects around him and take charge of the situation. Jesus came as a baby, born to a carpenter, and he never ran for mayor, let alone King. Is it any wonder that those most educated in the scriptures had the most difficulty seeing that Jesus was the Son of God? They were not open to God sending a different person with a different message than they had predetermined would occur.

7. Pastor Steve observed that God never talks, He speaks. What is the difference?

A speaker is presenting information in what is usually a one-way setting. If we are “talking” there is usually an assumption that it is a two-way conversation of some kind. While God is willing to listen to us when we pray, when He is ready to communicate a message to us, He’s not interested in a conversation, He wants us to listen with both our head and our heart.

8. Satan understands the power of God’s Word when He speaks, so he tries to undermine that authority. Can you think of a place in the Bible that describes such an attack?

The obvious place is Gen. 3:1-5 when the serpent specifically tells Eve that God doesn’t really mean what He says about not eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. He is attempting to discredit God’s Word, yet God’s Word and God’s essence are the same thing, so there is no room for error – unlike with man.

9. While many of the Jews rejected Jesus as the Son of God, many others with whom He came in contact believed what He said and they became children of God in the new paradigm that He established. Read John 1:12-14 and reflect on what it means to be spiritual in light of Advent.

Real spirituality always involves both God and man. God’s people do real things for real people who have real problems because they are motivated by God to serve others on His behalf. They are in sync with His will and His Word. Jesus coming to live amongst us was the example of what that looks like. It was not an angel coming down briefly to pass on a message, but God taking on human form to illustrate our best potential.

10. Toward the end of the sermon, Pastor Steve said that Christianity is neither a sermon nor even a belief. Christianity is a man, in the flesh, who came to earth. How does that change things?

A sermon or a belief is an inanimate object, a set of words or thoughts open to interpretation. Those who believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, who lived on this earth for around 33 years a couple thousand years ago believe in a person who was God in the flesh. He lived a perfect life to show us it could be done. He then allowed Himself to be the final blood sacrifice for our sins. After rising from the dead to show us that too can be done, He ascended into Heaven to prepare the path for all the rest of us. None of that can be done by torching a bush. Christianity is not a set of rules or doctrine. It is a belief that God so loved the world that He sent His son; not a message.