

John 1:14

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the profound mystery of the Word becoming Flesh and calls for a diligent response to God's grace through personal engagement with Scripture and care for our souls.

Scripture: John 1:14, Galatians 4:4, Philippians 2:6, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 2:14

Topics: "Incarnation Theology", "Scripture Study"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of preparing and familiarizing oneself with the Scriptures before hearing them read in church, urging the congregation to diligently study and reflect on the Word of God. He delves into the profound mystery of the Incarnation, explaining how the Word becoming Flesh was a divine act of raising humanity to the status of children of God without diminishing His own Nature. Chrysostom refutes heretical beliefs by clarifying that the Word was made Flesh not by changing His Essence but by assuming human flesh, maintaining His divine essence unchanged.

Transcript

And the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us.

1. I desire to ask one favor of you all, before I touch on the words of the Gospel; do not you refuse my request, for I ask nothing heavy or burdensome, nor, if granted, will it be useful only to me who receive, but also to you who grant it, and perhaps far more so to you. What then is it that I require of you? That each of you take in hand that section of the Gospels which is to be read among you on the first day of the week, or even on the Sabbath, and before the day arrive, that he sit down at home and read it through, and often carefully consider its contents, and examine all its parts well, what is clear, what obscure, what seems to make for the adversaries, but does not really so; and when you have tried, in a word every point, so go to hear it read. For from zeal like this will be no small gain both to you and to us. We shall not need much labor to render clear the meaning of what is said, because your minds will be already made familiar with the sense of the words, and you will become keener and more clear-sighted not for hearing only, nor for learning, but also for the teaching of others. Since, in the way that now most of those who come hither hear, compelled to take in the meaning of all at once, both the words, and the remarks we make upon them, they will not, though we should go on doing this for a whole year, reap any great gain. How can they, when they have leisure for what is said as a bywork, and only in this place, and for this short time? If any lay the fault on business, and cares, and constant occupation in public and private matters, in the first place, this is no slight charge in itself, that they are surrounded with such a multitude of business, are so

continually nailed to the things of this life, that they cannot find even a little leisure for what is more needful than all. Besides, that this is a mere pretext and excuse, their meetings with friends would prove against them, their loitering in the theaters, and the parties they make to see horse races, at which they often spend whole days, yet never in that case does one of them complain of the pressure of business. For trifles then you can without making any excuses, always find abundant leisure; but when you ought to attend to the things of God, do these seem to you so utterly superfluous and mean, that you think you need not assign even a little leisure to them? How do men of such disposition deserve to breathe or to look upon this sun?

There is another most foolish excuse of these sluggards; that they have not the books in their possession. Now as to the rich, it is ludicrous that we should take our aim at this excuse; but because I imagine that many of the poorer sort continually use it, I would gladly ask, if every one of them does not have all the instruments of the trade which he works at, full and complete, though infinite poverty stand in his way? Is it not then a strange thing, in that case to throw no blame on poverty, but to use every means that there be no obstacle from any quarter, but, when we might gain such great advantage, to lament our want of leisure and our poverty?

Besides, even if any should be so poor, it is in their power, by means of the continual reading of the holy Scriptures which takes place here, to be ignorant of nothing contained in them. Or if this seems to you impossible, it seems so with reason; for many do not come with fervent zeal to hearken to what is said, but having done this one thing for form's sake on our account, immediately return home. Or if any should stay, they are no better disposed than those who have retired, since they are only present here with us in body. But that we may not overload you with accusations, and spend all the time in finding fault, let us proceed to the words of the Gospel, for it is time to direct the remainder of our discourse to what is set before us. Rouse yourselves therefore, that nothing of what is said escape you.

And the Word was made Flesh, he says, and dwelt among us.

Having declared that they who received Him were born of God, and had become sons of God, he adds the cause and reason of this unspeakable honor. It is that the Word became Flesh, that the Master took on Him the form of a servant. For He became Son of man, who was God's own Son, in order that He might make the sons of men to be children of God. For the high when it associates with the low touches not at all its own honor, while it raises up the other from its excessive lowness; and even thus it was with the Lord. He in nothing diminished His own Nature by this condescension, but raised us, who had always sat in disgrace and darkness, to glory unspeakable. Thus it may be, a king, conversing with interest and kindness with a poor mean man, does not at all shame himself, yet makes the other observed by all and illustrious. Now if in the case of the adventitious dignity of men, intercourse with the humbler person in nothing injures the more honorable, much less can it do so in the case of that simple and blessed Essence which has nothing adventitious, or subject to growth or decay, but has all good things immovable, and fixed forever. So that when you hear that the Word became Flesh, be not disturbed nor cast down. For that Essence did not change to flesh, (it is impiety to imagine this,) but continuing what it is, It so took upon It the form of a servant.

2. Wherefore then does he use the expression, was made? To stop the mouths of the heretics. For since there are some who say that all the circumstances of the Dispensation were an appearance, a piece of acting, an allegory, at once to remove beforehand their blasphemy, he has put was made; desiring to show thereby not a change of substance, (away with the thought,) but the assumption of very flesh. For as

when (Paul) says, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, he does not mean that His essence removing from Its proper glory took upon It the being of an accursed thing, (this not even devils could imagine, nor even the very foolish, nor those deprived of their natural understanding, such impiety as well as madness does it contain,) as (St. Paul) does not say this, but that He, taking upon Himself the curse pronounced against us, leaves us no more under the curse; so also here he (St. John) says that He was made Flesh, not by changing His Essence to flesh, but by taking flesh to Himself, His Essence remained untouched.

If they say that being God, He is Omnipotent, so that He could lower Himself to the substance of flesh, we will reply to them, that He is Omnipotent as long as He continues to be God. But if He admit of change, change for the worse, how could He be God? For change is far from that simple Nature. Wherefore the Prophet says, They all shall wax old as does a garment, and as a vesture shall Thou roll them up, and they shall be changed; but You are the same, and Your years shall not fail. Psalm 102:27, Septuagint For that Essence is superior to all change. There is nothing better than He, to which He might advance and reach. Better do I say? No, nor equal to, nor the least approaching Him. It remains, therefore, that if He change, He must admit a change for the worse; and this would not be God. But let the blasphemy return upon the heads of those who utter it. Nay, to show that he uses the expression, 'was made only that you should not suppose a mere appearance, hear from what follows how he clears the argument, and overthrows that wicked suggestion. For what does he add? And dwelt among us. All but saying, Imagine nothing improper from the word 'was made'; I spoke not of any change of that unchangeable Nature, but of Its dwelling and inhabiting. But that which dwells cannot be the same with that in which it dwells, but different; one thing dwells in a different thing, otherwise it would not be dwelling; for nothing can inhabit itself. I mean, different as to essence; for by an Union and Conjoining God the Word and the Flesh are One, not by any confusion or obliteration of substances, but by a certain union ineffable, and past understanding. Ask not how ; for It was made, so as He knows.

What then was the tabernacle in which He dwelt? Hear the Prophet say; I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen. Amos 9:11 It was fallen indeed, our nature had fallen an incurable fall, and needed only that mighty Hand. There was no possibility of raising it again, had not He who fashioned it at first stretched forth to it His Hand, and stamped it anew with His Image, by the regeneration of water and the Spirit. And observe I pray you, the awful and ineffable nature of the mystery. He inhabits this tabernacle for ever, for He clothed Himself with our flesh, not as again to leave it, but always to have it with Him. Had not this been the case, He would not have deemed it worthy of the royal throne, nor would He while wearing it have been worshipped by all the host of heaven, angels, archangels, thrones, principalities, dominions, powers. What word, what thought can represent such great honor done to our race, so truly marvelous and awful? What angel, what archangel? Not one in any place, whether in heaven, or upon earth. For such are the mighty works of God, so great and marvelous are His benefits, that a right description of them exceeds not only the tongue of men, but even the power of angels.

Wherefore we will for a while close our discourse, and be silent; only delivering to you this charge, that you repay this our so great Benefactor by a return which again shall bring round to us all profit. The return is, that we look with all carefulness to the state of our souls. For this too is the work of His lovingkindness, that He who stands in no need of anything of ours says that He is repaid when we take care of our own souls. It is therefore an act of extremist folly, and one deserving ten thousand chastisements, if we, when such honor has been lavished upon us, will not even contribute what we can, and that too when profit comes round to us again by these means, and ten thousand blessings are laid before us on these

conditions. For all these things let us return glory to our merciful God, not by words only, but much more by works that we may obtain the good things hereafter, which may it be that we all attain to, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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