

Artfest Introductory Presentation

“The Word Became Flesh”

John 1:14

Introduction:

I want to thank all of you for coming tonight. And I want to reiterate our purpose in hosting *Artfest 2010*. Our goal is to facilitate greater communication and stronger relationships among the artists in our city.

The summer before my freshman year at Southern Methodist University, I was preregistering for classes and an older student said, “Whatever you do, make sure you take Mary Vernon’s Art History class. It’s the best one at the university.” So I took it, and by the end of our first session, I’d fallen in love with Art History. And during my junior year, I was able to spend a semester in Paris studying Modern Art and Impressionism at the Louvre Museum.

In the years, since then I’ve continued my love for the arts and continue to take art history courses through the Teaching Company.

And one of the things I realized in my studies in Art History is that for the past 2,000 years, artists were inspired by themes from the Bible. It seems all the great names in art, figures like Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Vermeer, and others...drew their inspiration from biblical themes.

So with that in mind, I want to explain the meaning of our theme for this December’s event. The theme is *the Word became flesh*. And our theme this year comes from the prologue of the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

And then we skip down to verse 14:

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

So let me explain some of the key concepts here.

- 1. The term *Word* was common in the first century. It was the word *logos*, and when John uses it he’s challenging his readers to think.**

- A. For instance, the Greeks used this word frequently. Some Greek philosophers believed the *logos* was like the soul of the universe. They taught that the *logos* was like the cosmic force that directed and permeated all things...kind of a *Star Wars* concept of the Force.

When John uses this word in his gospel all his Greek read would have immediately perked up and said, "Wonder what John is talking about?"

- B. This title would also have appealed to John's Hebrew readers.

As we're going to see in a moment, the Hebrew term *word* is used all the time in the Old Testament as a God's way of communicating to his chosen nation.

- C. So I just want you to see that at this very beginning of John's gospel, John uses a term that would have immediately attracted readers of many backgrounds. John is speaking into the language of culture.

→ *But what exactly does John mean?*

2. **This term, *word*, refers to the self-expression of God.**

- A. In the opening chapters of Genesis God uses his *word* to bring the universe into existence.

You may remember that in the Genesis account it says nine times, "Then God said." And when God speaks stuff happens. When God says, "Let there be light," there is light. When God says, "Let life come forth," life comes forth with profusion.

So from the very beginning of the biblical story we see that God's word is incredibly powerful. It brings order out of chaos.

- B. But I want you to see something else God's word in the Old Testament. God uses his word to reveal his mind to his people.

Over and over again in the Old Testament we see phrases like, "The Word of the Lord came to Abraham." Or, "the Word of the Lord came to Jonah." Or, "the Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel."

And when God's word comes men and women learn something authoritative from God that they could not have known apart from direct revelation.

- C. I want you to notice something else about God's word. God used his word when his people were in trouble.

In Psalm 107 the author portrays four different ways that people can get into serious trouble: They can get lost on a path...thrown into prison...physically ill...or experience natural disaster.

But in Psalm 107, in each case, when people cry out to God, his word comes, and when God's word comes it is effective in changing the circumstances.

It's almost like God's word doesn't just consist of consonants and vowels and sentences and paragraphs. It's almost like God's word comes with the power to change impossible situations.

- D. So in the Old Testament God's word is a reference to God's active and loving self-expression. God moves toward his creatures to reveal his mind and make things different.

3. But in John 1:1 John gives us a crystal clear definition of what God's word actually is. God's *word* is a person.

In John 1:1 it says, "*The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*" And then he says this in John 1:14: "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*"

Now, we learn four important things here.

- A. First of all, we learn that God's eternal self-expression is not just an abstract principle like the Greeks thought.

The Word is a concrete person with real flesh and blood. And this person is Jesus of Nazareth. Now this would have been a totally shocking thing for John's Greek readers. They would have thought, "What? Really? I mean, we've heard about the Logos in philosophy for hundreds of years. Could the Logos, actually be a person Jesus Christ?"

When the great 1st century philosopher Justin (100-165) read the gospel of John and discovered this, he quickly determined that he would become a Christian.

- B. We learn secondly Jesus was with God before Genesis 1:1. Jesus didn't come into being in the first century.

Jesus has an eternal past. There was never a time when Jesus was not. And we also discover here that Jesus is God. That means that Jesus can be a totally accurate messenger of God the Father. You can't get a more accurate communiqué from God than from the one who was with God and who is God.

- C. We learn thirdly, that Jesus came to earth with a particular sort of relational style.

The literal term John uses is that Jesus *tabernacled* among us. That's a wonderful word picture. The tabernacle was the worship tent in the Old Testament where God met with his people for fellowship.

So when we hear that the *Word* took on a human body and *tabernacled* among us, we get the strong sense that God isn't coming to destroy the world or to harm his creation; he's coming with intent to have restore fellowship to a hurting and wayward race.

D. We learn fourthly that Jesus is full of grace and truth.

Grace is God's unconditional favor. It's his unmerited favor. God comes to give us something we don't deserve and could never earn: Himself. Grace comes first, then truth. Jesus showered people with grace. He was kind to enemies. He was patient with people who were slow. He was wise when people needed teaching. He was kind to children. He was loving to those who suffered.

But in the midst of all that kindness he taught truth and he modeled the truth.

E. So let's jump back to the big picture.

In a nutshell, the concept of God's Word becoming flesh is this.

God has a consuming passion to express himself in love and power. And the ultimate way he expressed himself with love and power is through sending his Son in human flesh.

But the way John expresses this concept makes it clear that he's speaking in a culturally relevant way toward the entire world: Jews and Gentiles...scholars and religious people...the simple and the smart.

In other words, this concept of the word appeals to us as human beings. I think it's part of the human condition to seek some sort of word about what life is all about, and how it works, and our place within it. And God sends Jesus as the one to teach us about the biggest story of all...the story of creation and redemption and future glory.

4. Now with that in mind, let's look at the specific stories of Jesus in the Gospels that describe exactly how Jesus came into the world.

→ I'm going to tell you the story in six very quick snapshots. These are the biblical passages from which we think you could gain some inspiration for your work.

A. Snapshot #1: In Luke 1:26-38 the angel Gabriel appears to Mary in her house in Nazareth in Galilee. Nazareth at this time has a population of only about 600 to 1,200 people. It is regarded as being an extremely humble place. It is hugely surprising that God would send his son to such a humble place. When Gabriel meets with Mary, he tells her that she is going to have a miracle son, born apart from sexual intercourse. Mary is amazed and she submits. "*May it be done to me according to your word.*"

- B. Snapshot #2: In Luke 1:39-45 we discover that Mary makes an impromptu visit to the house of her cousin Elizabeth who lives about 80 miles away. She does this to gain some comfort from someone who would understand. But this is an incredible journey. We don't know much about how she made the journey, but this was hugely risky. When she arrives she does receive comfort because, Elizabeth was the only one who would understand. Elizabeth's baby is also a miracle baby.
- C. Snapshot #3: In Matthew 1:18-25 we have the account of Joseph's dream. When Mary returned from Elizabeth's house, Joseph saw the baby bump, and he must've been hugely disappointed. So, he thinks, "I'm breaking off the engagement. Mary has been gone for three months. No one knew where she had been. When she returns she's pregnant."

Joseph is obviously thinking, "She's my fiancée, and she's been unfaithful."

But an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and says to Joseph, "Mary's baby is a miracle baby, more than that...Mary's baby is going to be the great Messiah...the Emmanuel, which means God with us." So Joseph keeps the engagement, but now they undoubtedly struggle with gossip and innuendo in that small town.

- D. Snapshot #4: Luke 2:1-20 takes us to the time that Jesus is actually born. In this account Mary and Joseph leave Nazareth and head to Bethlehem where they plan to register for the census.

While they're there, Mary gives birth in a stable.

Then Luke takes us to the fields outside Bethlehem. Someone has to know about this incredible event, the birth of the Messiah. So God tells the most humble shepherds ever. These are the shepherds that manage the temple sheep destined for slaughter during Passover. They are treated to the appearance of an angel and then to a massive concert by the angelic choir.

- E. Snapshot #5: And then, Matthew 2:1-12 shows us the arrival of the Wise Men from the east, also known as the Magi.

These Magi are a band of astronomers and wise men who can read and discern the signs of the times, and they travel for many months to visit the Christ. When they arrive, Jesus is probably about one year old. They're not in a stable any more; they're in a house.

And Jesus isn't a baby, but more like a toddler. Nevertheless, they bow in worship, and they give him exotic gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These would have been every expensive gifts.

But these gifts came at just the right time, because Herod hears about the wise men's trek and he now seeks to kill all the babies in Bethlehem. And Joseph and Mary probably financed their escape trip to Egypt with the income off these gifts.

- F. So that's the basic story line. There is the...
- Mary receives the announcement.
 - Mary travels to see Elizabeth.
 - Mary returns and Joseph has a dream.
 - Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem.
 - Mary has her baby.
 - The shepherds are told about Jesus' birth. Six or seven weeks later Jesus is dedicated at the temple.
 - About a year later the Wise Men come to Bethlehem.
 - Then Joseph and Mary head to Egypt to escape the anger of Herod.
- G. So that puts John 1:1-14 in context. Incredibly, God expresses himself through a humble child, who comes in human flesh, to show people the love of God and the will of God, and communicate the way of restoration to God.
- H. Now how does the theme relate to Artfest 2010?

Ideally, we want you to derive inspiration through these six passages.

Remember that art has always been a symbolic expression of truth that reaches into the hearts of people in contemporary culture. This has always been the case. When the renaissance artists painted Mary in black robes with a white lined hood, were they suggesting that Mary wore a 15th century renaissance dress? No. They were taking the truth of the story and casting it into a form that contemporary renaissance people could understand.

That's what we want you to do. We don't want you to change the story in any way. What we'd like you to do is to take a fresh look at the story, and then portray the story in a way that will inspire contemporary people living in Oklahoma in the year 2010.

Some of you might use realism. Some might use primitive early American style. Some of you might use a southwest style similar to what G. Harvey uses. Some of you might use abstract expressionism. Some of you might do an update on Van Gogh's style of using a paint knife.

And what we're looking for is a rich diversity of artistic expression that maintains the truth of the original biblical stories. We don't want to change the story. We want fresh ways of looking it.

Part of the way we're going to judge this art is going to be, "Did the artist follow the theme? Was she faithful to the truth of the theme? And is this a contemporary rendition of the theme?"

5. *AT THIS POINT, I WANT TO INVITE OTHER MEMBERS FORWARD AND THEY'LL EXPLAIN ADDITIONAL DETAILS.*

- A. Schedule of events.
 - 1. Bring artwork to GCC on November 4th. The Artfest judges will make sure it is appropriate for display in the show.
 - 2. Pickup artwork from GCC on November 6th.
 - 3. Drop off artwork for the show on November 30th.
 - 4. The final judging will take place in Thursday December 2nd. Our artists' and patrons' reception will be on that night also.
 - 5. Artfest happens Friday through Sunday December 3-5.
 - 6. Pickup artwork on December 6th.

- B. Sales and Awards.
 - 1. Artists must price their work.
 - 2. Artfest handles sales.
 - 3. Issues of commission and taxes, etc. will be addressed later.
 - 4. We will have security to protect the artwork.
 - 5. How payment happens.
 - 6. Patrons' role.
 - 7. Awards
 - 8. The art categories.

- C. Opportunities after Artfest
 - 1. Claremore Gallery.
 - 2. Other opportunities.