

The Fourth Part in the Series
The Word Became Flesh: John 1:1–18
“The Word Dwelt Among Us”
(John 1:14a)

September 13, 2006. That’s when it all happened. That’s when things went south. That’s when the bottom fell out and that’s when everything came completely undone. September 13, 2006.

On March 13, 1930 things had begun with so much excitement. There was fanfare. There were fireworks. And there was a great flourish of excitement! And it was global. It really was. But that was on March 13, 1930 when it was discovered.

On September 13, 2006 it all came crashing down. On that day the International Astronomical Union, meeting in Prague in the Czech Republic, voted to downgrade the planet Pluto. To what? To a dwarf planet! The audacity of it all! Pluto was no longer Pluto! The International Astronomical Union now officially calls Pluto “asteroid #134340.” That’s right. Pluto got bumped. Pluto got cut from the team. Voted off the island. Hosed. Rejected. Demoted. Devalued. Demeaned. Dismissed. One day Pluto’s in. The next day Pluto’s out. This was such a stunning turn of events that in 2006 the word of the year was what?

Plutoed! Pluto, the proper noun, became Pluto the verb—plutoed. Plutoed? We all know what that feels like. We were the wrong size, the wrong height, the wrong shape, the wrong color, the wrong age. We had the wrong friends and went to the wrong school. And we had the wrong parents. People get plutoed by bosses, businesses, boyfriends and all kinds of busybodies.

Thanks be to God that He is with us in Christ! That He is incarnated for us!

“Incarnation” is shorthand for John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

And he did it for plutoed people. John describes them throughout his Gospel. The Samaritan woman, who had been divorced five times. The paralytic, who had been crippled for thirty-eight years. Mary and Martha, whose brother Lazarus had died. The man born blind. Discouraged disciples. Sheep without a shepherd. Rejected. All of them. The whole lot. But John announces the incarnation—God is with us in Christ. And he did it for plutoed people. Let’s dig deeper.

The Word. By now we all know John 1:1. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Our God is not silent. Our God speaks! Throughout the Old Testament God’s Word creates, directs, controls and shapes events. In fact, the expression, “The Word of the LORD” appears 261 times in the Old Testament—261 times! But hold on to your hat, because the Word is more than an element of speech; or an expression; or a sound; or an idea.

The Word **became flesh.** The creative, powerful, true and enduring Word of the LORD became flesh! When connected to God, sophisticated Greeks and Romans of John’s day recoiled from the word “flesh.” Flesh, to them, was doomed to be destroyed. What matters most is our spirit. Flesh is worth nothing. No god in his right mind would ever deal with anything as degrading as flesh. Yet that’s exactly what our God did.

Jesus is not only one substance with the Father. (Jesus is true God.) Jesus is also one substance with you. (Jesus is true man.) The Word, God the Son and the Son of God. He became flesh. God became hungry, thirsty and tired. God felt disappointment, sorrow, hurt, loneliness and rejection. He knows my name and he feels my pain!

But don't be confused. The Word didn't *change* into flesh. The Word didn't *morph* into flesh. And the Word didn't *transition* into flesh. That's not what John writes. If the Word changed, morphed or transitioned into flesh he would no longer be God. But remaining what he was, he became what we are. That's it! *Remaining what he was—God; Christ became what we are—flesh.*

His golden throne room was left in favor of a dirty sheep pen. Worshiping angles crying out from eternity past, "Holy! Holy! Holy!" were replaced by bewildered shepherds. Lying there in a manger, Jesus looks like anything but God. His face is wrinkled and red. His cry, though strong and healthy, is still the helpless and piercing cry of an infant. Majesty in the midst of the mundane. God entering the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager, in the presence of a carpenter. God has eyebrows, elbows, thumbs, toes, two kidneys and a spleen. No silk. No ivory. No hype. No hoopla. Not for this Babe in Bethlehem. The Word became flesh.

John drives this point home when he writes about Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate. Pilate has Jesus' flesh, ripped, torn, dressed in purple and crowned with thorns. Then he brings Jesus out before the crowd and says in John 19:5, "Behold the man!" The Latin is famously, *Ecce Homo. Ecce Homo.* "Behold the man!" Here is the man. Flesh. Flesh and blood. Flesh and blood and a beaten body. That's God we're talking about. *The God who gets plutoed!* Demoted, devalued, dismissed, distained, demeaned and left for dead.

The Word became flesh **and dwelt**. The word literally means "pitch a tent." It's an Old Testament idea. Moses built the tabernacle—a tent—so God could dwell with Israel. Solomon followed Moses. He built a temple so God could dwell with Israel.

The Message Bible doesn't use the word "dwell" but rather "moved into the neighborhood." By living in Moses' tabernacle and in Solomon's temple God moved into Israel's neighborhood. And now God moves into our neighborhood, the human neighborhood! But what kind of neighborhood is that?

It's a neighborhood where we hurt each other deeply, with words, cold shoulders and with our callous hearts. It's a neighborhood where we ignore each other's needs repeatedly because we're so busy and have such important meetings. It's a neighborhood where *we* carelessly pluto people with accusations and condemnations—positioning ourselves as judge and jury. Our neighborhood is filled with mixed up and messed up people. How do I know? Because sometimes I'm as mixed up and messed up as anybody! But God still decided to move into this neighborhood!

We dare to confess, "Who for us men and our salvation he came down." Jesus came down into our messed up neighborhood to teach, heal and love. Jesus came down to forgive, bleed, suffer and die. *Jesus came down to get plutoed!*

The Word became flesh and dwelt **among us**. Us! You and me! Not just the high and mighty. Not just the kings and queens. Not just the polished, the preppy, the preferred, the pretty and the powerful. The Word dwelt "among us!" Him. Her. Them. You. Me. *Us!*

Too often, though, when we get plutoed and our world breaks into a million pieces, this promise falls on deaf ears and hard hearts. We shrug our shoulders and say, "So what? Who cares? I have no hope!"

We have hope! Because God was plutoed for us to claim us as His own in the waters of Holy Baptism. True. Some may demote you. Others may dismiss you. And the devil wants to

destroy you. But God claims you. God restores you. God loves you. How can I be so sure? “The Word became flesh and dwelt among *us!*” Amen.