

There are certain things in this world so great, so grand, they take your breath away, leave you speechless. On a Spanish immersion trip to South America, my brother and sister and I took a tour of the salt-flats in Bolivia. We were hundreds of miles from the nearest city, so there was no light pollution, no air pollution. We were at 14,000 feet, so the air was super thin and crystal clear. And on the first night, we looked up.

And then we kept looking up for the next two hours. I've never seen so many stars in my life. Not just stars...clusters of stars...galaxies...meteors so big you could see chunks flying off them as they entered earth's atmosphere. For two hours, we hardly said a word...wonder-struck by what we were seeing.

I'm guessing you've had similar experiences. Whether it's mountain peaks, or a sunset, or something a little closer to home: Holding your newborn child in your arms for the very first time...there are things that leave us so full of awe and wonder that they take your breath away, leave you speechless.

But nothing...nothing quite like the wonder that John describes in the opening verses of his gospel. And it couldn't come at a better time. After trips to the manger all through Advent...on Sunday...on Christmas Eve...we might feel “wondered” out. Our sinful nature just wants to run past the manger today and get on to Christmas dinner. But John won't let us! In the simplest of language, he communicates to us the loftiest of truths that drive home the depths of God's love for us. He calls us to cradle the Christ-child in our arms one more time, and to behold the wonder of the Word made flesh. The wonder of who he is, and the wonder of why he came.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning.

³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

I. The wonder of who he is

More wonderful than a night sky on the salt-flats in Bolivia...than a sunrise, a sunset, or the highest of this world's mountains...is the Christ-child in the manger. Why? Because, as John so simply puts it, he's the one who made it all. He's the Word – that's John's special name for the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. The one who was with God the Father from all the way back into eternity. The one who is himself God, equal in power and majesty with God the Father. The one who simply spoke and brought this vast universe and everything in it into existence.

That Word...John says...became flesh. Just try to wrap your minds around that. The one who fills the whole universe fits into a tiny baby boy. The all powerful One becomes a weak and helpless infant. The one who measured off the heavens with the breadth of his hands can barely wrap his hand around Mary's finger. The one who gives life and breath to every human being is given life and breath as a human being.

We could go on. But I think you get the picture. The Word made flesh - God and man in one person – that's simply something we can't wrap our minds around. The truth is, it's a mystery and a miracle we can only wrap our hearts around because the Spirit has led us to believe it. But because he has, it's a mystery and a miracle that fills our hearts with wonder and awe.

II. *The wonder of why he came*

But there's another mystery here – another wonder that just doesn't fit up here. And really, of the two, it's the more wondrous. It's the wonder of why he came.

John drives that wonder home by describing the world he was born into – the people he chose to dwell among. It's a far cry from the world he created. That one was perfect and full of life and light. This one was corrupt and full of darkness and death. Full of people living in the darkness of sin, rebelling against God. People so rebellious that, when the one who made them sees fit to walk among them, they want nothing to do with him - they actually prefer living in the darkness of sin to the light of life he'd bring them.

People a whole lot like us. Yes, that's us by nature. Preferring darkness to light, rebelling against God, wanting nothing to do with him. We still prove it. Every time we choose to do what we know is wrong is another act of rebellion against God's rule. When we fall into the same sin we've repented of a hundred times, we show we prefer darkness to God's light. God wants us to grow ever closer to him through his word, but when we're slow to use it...when he calls us to change, and we don't want to...we prove we'd rather keep him at a distance in our lives, too.

We're the ones God sees fit to dwell among? We're the ones he sees fit to rub shoulders with? Yes. Even when we were rebelling against him, he loved us. Even when we wanted nothing to do with him, he wanted to have us as his own. Even when we were nothing but darkness and death, he wanted to give us life and light.

And so the Word became flesh. Not just to rub shoulders with us...but to save us. The God who gave the law became one of us to perfectly keep that law in our place. The God in whom there is no darkness at all became one of us to take on himself the darkness of our sins so we could know the light of his forgiveness. The God who is the author of life became one of us to die the death we deserved so that we could have life eternal.

What a wonder this is! It doesn't even fit up here. That the One and Only would come into this world in power, full of wrath, to bring me the punishment I deserve...that I can wrap my head around. That's only fair. But that he'd come in humility, as one of us? That he'd come full of grace, to suffer the punishment I deserve, and bring me the salvation I *don't*? That's something so glorious that it takes my breath away. It did John's, too: **We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

Of all the displays of glory John saw – changing water into wine, raising Lazarus from the dead, etc.– it was the glory of God's grace that was the most wonderful. And that's what Jesus came to reveal to us. That's what that name John gives him, the Word, is all about. Words reveal what's impossible for us to see and otherwise know: What's on someone's heart. And the most important question in life – the one our eternity depends on – is what's in God's heart toward us? The answer is one that we never could have stumbled on by ourselves in a million years.

But the Word knew, because he was with God in eternity, and because he himself is God. And in his love, the Word gave us the definitive answer by being made flesh. Why did he do it? To save you from your sins, when you deserved it the least. What's on God's mind, in God's heart toward you? Grace.

Do you see what this means for you? When you fall into the same sin you've told yourself a thousand times you'll never fall into again, and you're disgusted at yourself...what must *God* feel toward you? In the Word made flesh, God gave you the answer. The same love he showed in leaving heaven's glory for you to be born like you is the love in his heart toward you still. When your life is falling apart around you, and the question burns a hole in your soul: What in the world is God thinking to let all this happen? In the Word made flesh, God gave you the answer. The same loving, saving purpose on his mind when he died for your sins is the loving, saving purpose he has for you still as he rules all things.

God's love for those who deserve the opposite –it's another mystery we just can't wrap our minds around. It's something that defies all human logic and understanding. But we can wrap our hearts around it, only because the Spirit's led us to believe it. And because he has, it's a truth that fills our hearts with awe and wonder.

More marvelous than the night sky on Bolivia's altiplano...more breathtaking than any sunrise or sunset...even more awesome than holding your child in your arms for the very first time...is holding the Christ-child in your arms, the wonder of the Word made flesh. God grant that to you today and always. Amen.