

At this point I was about to give you some examples from some of the faithful Christians who have enriched my experience, but I have changed my mind. You already have examples in your own experience. Those special people, some of them (perhaps all of them) who may not be significant in terms of national or international affairs, yet whose lives have put flesh on the Word of God for you. Take a moment to call them to mind. Savour their influence; relish their memory. I give you a silent minute to bask again in the light of their love.

(silence)

It is good that you've glimpsed the **beauty** of Christ in them, the **acceptance and mercy** of Christ in them; the **compassion** of Christ, the **courage** of Christ and the **wisdom** of Christ, the **tenacity** of Christ, the **anger** of Christ, the **joy** of Christ, the **self-sacrifice** of Christ in them.

And now back to us. Gently but firmly I ask you on this first Sunday in the new year; are we among those who really **want** to embody Christ? Or are we among those who are content to make and keep him disembodied in pious wordiness? You will notice that I said those who **want** to embody Christ. I did not say those who **always make a major success of it**, but are you among those who **try**, who give it their best shot! Are we amongst the 'fair dinkum' triers?

The truth is that if we truly want to try, with a heart and mind fully open to Christ, then God can take care of the rest. God can make even our sincere failures and our embarrassing blunders a source of fruitfulness. If that were not true, I would not be standing before you at this moment.

I wish you a happy and blessed New Year - as you choose afresh to embody Christ in the daily pattern of your living.

**To the praise of the Name that is timeless and the Love that is boundless.**

**Amen!!**

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## *A Message from Mark!* **God with Skin On!**

**3 January 2010 - Christmas 2**  
**Scripture: John 1:10-18**

**COLLECT** Most loving God, in Christ you speak a Word that can never become obsolete. Please renew the force of your living Word in our lives, that without evasion or qualification, we may accept this living truth and serve it with the joyful abandonment of those who have known that in losing life for his sake, we find it more abundantly. In the name of the Creator, Saviour and Inspirer. **Amen!**

*'The Word became human flesh, and lived among us, full grace and truth. And we have looked upon his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. John 1:14*

God's Word, the ultimate message that God had to give to humanity if we were to be liberated and healed **was embodied in the Child of Mary, the wife of Joseph the carpenter.** Millions of words tumbling from our mind and lips, could never be enough. Billions of words in libraries fell short. Trillions of words stored in our most powerful computers could not contain what God had to say. **God's final Word was too heavy and complex, and yet too simple, for our words to handle.**

The brave questions of Socrates and the philosophies of learned scholars from Plato to Aquinas to Heidegger, would ultimately leave us empty. The choicest words of poets and singers would not satisfy the human soul. The visionary words of seers and prophets were pitifully inadequate. The disciplined, scientific words and mathematical formulae of, physicists and astronomers, would never be the final answer. God had to put human flesh on the one Key Word — **Embodied it in a human life. Jesus, the Jew whom we name the Christ.**

**DE-INCARNATION? A Question.** Am I just crazy (don't answer that!) or am I right in thinking that the church often seems to be in the business of de-incarnating the living Word; of turning the real Jesus, the flesh and blood Jesus, back into words? Am I as a preacher a part of the sorry business of trying to disembodify God's True Word?

Well, I've asked that question of myself all week. Am I able to give an answer? I'm not sure. Maybe the answer is the kind which would make a barrister in a law court very testy. Maybe the true answer is "*yes and no.*"

Let's try the 'yes' bit first. Yes, we do risk reversing the incarnation whenever we make words about Christ more important than the deeds that express his loving reality.

**De-incarnation happens:**

Whenever speaking about Christ is more important than following him.

Whenever the exact phrases used in creeds become more essential than caring for one another.

Whenever denominational emphases override our common love of Christ.

Whenever the actual performance of liturgy means more than the event of spirit-filled-worship.

**It sadly happens:**

Whenever preaching sermons and fluent oratory become a preacher's substitute for doing the Gospel.

Whenever the especially-Protestant custom of sermon tasting (including grammar checks, doctrine savouring and much mental muttering) overrides the desire to hear in a sermon the next thing that God wants us to lovingly do.

**The travesty of de-incarnation happens:**

Whenever in church committees and councils, winning an argument and forcing our will on others displaces a passion for seeing and serving Christ in the living body and blood of those around us.

Whenever we reckon we have framed a smart "mission statement" for our congregation, and have it written on our website and our church bulletins and correspondence, yet fail to show the dogged courage and self sacrifice necessary to put the statement into practice.

Yes indeed, the answer is yes! Far more often than I want to think about, we may have been agents of deincarnation: and so "*the flesh becomes words, and*

*waffles on among us, full of wind and hot air and —*" you know what I mean!

**On the other hand, No!** We don't reincarnate the Living Word. In fact I glory in the knowledge that it is often embodied by ordinary Christians **and** people of good will in every walk of life. Sometimes our Gospel is indeed incarnate in individual efforts. At other times it is expressed beautifully by the church as a community; the body of Christ.

In every parish where I have tried to serve Christ, I have found numerous Christians cropping up here and there in the community among the various service clubs, welfare organisations, political lobby groups, civic structures, sporting clubs, social justice agencies and emergency services. In fact, if all the Christians were withdrawn, the fabric of many communities would collapse.

Today, as we begin a new decade together, I want to salute those ordinary Christians who without the tooting of trumpets make Christ visible. *The Word takes flesh and lives among us, and we see his glory, full of grace and truth.*

I also wish to testify to the quiet influence of people in their work places. Women and men who by their attitude to workmates, the quality of their work, the way they handle themselves in difficult situations, and their integrity in business dealings, witness to the holy Incarnation.

**Praise God for all the Christ's —**

gardeners who see their work as a calling,  
for magistrates who care deeply for those brought before them,  
welders whose joints won't crack,  
physiotherapists who see their hands doing Christ's work,  
teachers who share love as well as knowledge,  
bookkeepers who choose to maintain proper and honest records,  
mothers who baptise their children with cuddles, discipline and prayer,  
bus drivers who pray for skill and patience as they take their place behind the wheel,  
farmers who know they are co-workers with God  
and many, many more.

***The Word becomes flesh and lives among us.***

Without this host of ordinary Christians, the preacher's task might be vain indeed. Every act of Christ-love, small or large, puts body into the Gospel.