

**HE KNOWS
John 1:1-14**

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Jesus knows your pain today. He knows your hurt, your disappointment. If you're tired and weary today, just worn out, Jesus knows what it feels like to be worn out. If today you're wrestling with a temptation to sin, Jesus knows what it means to be tempted – to be told He can just turn the rocks into bread, to take a short cut instead of doing things God's way, the right way. He knows what it feels like to weep beside the tomb of a dear friend. He, too, has had dusty shoes and a dry, thick, thirsty tongue from a long day of work.

Did you hear what I said? Jesus knows your pain.

God, in Christ, is no longer far away. God, in Christ, is near.

God stripped off his finery and appeared – how embarrassing – naked on the day he was born. God rips off medals of rank, puts aside titles, honors, and talents, and appears like one of us, in his birthday suit. *Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate deity. In the Incarnation* [that is, when God puts on flesh by becoming Jesus] **things heavenly and earthly are gathered into one: one in the naked flesh and folds of God. (Mary Ellen Ashcroft, "Giftwrapping God," *Christianity Today*, Dec 8, 1997, Vol. 47, No. 14, p. 32)**

God knows what it's like to start life in this world just like we do: helpless, crying. And He didn't even have a crib but an animal's eating trough for His bed. Today, it doesn't matter whether you're at home dressed in a bathrobe or here in the sanctuary in Brooks Brothers, God knows who you are. He knows what you've experienced, for He, Himself, has experienced exactly the same.

God knows your pain because God put on flesh.

We want God to know our pain. We want God to be here, to be here with us. Humanity has always craved a God who is tangible and visible. Think about Job (23:8-9). He cried out that although he sought God, he could not see Him. "Behold, I go forward, but He is not here. I cannot behold him." Philip said the same thing when he said to the Lord, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us" (John 14:8).

God had an answer to this universal craving – this craving to see God, to touch God, to know God. It was the incarnation.

God puts on flesh when He's born as a babe of Bethlehem.

Jesus said to Philip, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” In other words, “Philip, I am God. I’m God with flesh on.”

Before you understand Jesus as man, however, John wants you to understand Jesus as God. He starts out his magnificent Gospel making sure that we realize that Jesus was absolutely, fully God. The opening words of this Gospel, “In the beginning...” echo to us the words of the Hebrew Bible in the book of Genesis, the very first biblical words, “In the beginning....”

“In the beginning” for John is the same beginning we find in Genesis. Like the narrator of Genesis, John was talking about a new creation. He uses the words that echo the refrain from the first creation, words like “life” and “light” and “darkness”. John’s theme, however, is not the first creation, but, rather, God’s new creation.

It is important for us to know that there was never a time when Jesus, when the Word, was not. And there was never anything which did not depend on Jesus for its very existence. John wants you to realize the antiquity and the eternal nature of Jesus. Unlike anything or anyone else, Jesus was not created. Rather, Jesus was in the beginning. The very beginning.

In verses 3-5, John quickly hurries to make clear that Jesus was an agent of creation for God. All things were made by the Father, but through the Son. Both the Father and the Son are at work in one great creative act of earth, of humanity, and all that dwells therein. The world is due to God Himself, acting through His Word, His Son. This universe is not eternal. It is not due to some foolish or inferior being. Rather, the world is God’s world through Jesus.

On the David Letterman show, Larry King, the interviewer, has an interview with Dave. Dave asked, “If you could interview anyone from history, who would it be?” Without a moment of hesitation King answered, “Jesus Christ.” David looked stunned. When he recovered, “What would you ask Him,” Letterman inquired of King. Larry King looked into the camera and said, “I would ask Him if He was really born of a virgin.” King continued, “The answer to that question would define history.” David Letterman sat for a long, silent moment and quietly – maybe for Letterman, even reverently – looked into the camera and said, “We’ll be right back.”

We need to know. Was Jesus really God? Was Jesus really man?

How can this be?

After John had made us see just how eternal and how much at one the Word is with God; that is, just as we begin to understand how Jesus is God, none other than God the creator, he lets us know in verse 14 the identity of this Word. He has not mentioned Jesus before, but now (verse 14) he plays his determining card. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Verse 14 is the most concise statement in all of scripture of the incarnation. The Word – the one who is nothing less than God, we’ve already been told – became. Past tense, particular action. At a point in time, God became flesh.

This is almost a crude word here in the translation. It doesn't say the Word became man, the Word took on a body. He chooses an expression which puts what he wants to say almost bluntly. It's God with skin. The Word became flesh. God became a naked baby and dwelt among us.

God knows your pain because He experienced your pain in Jesus.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The word "dwelt" here is the word "tabernacled." It means Jesus pitched His tent with us, like the tabernacle of ancient Israel. Jesus came and pitched His tent, cast His lot with us.

Jesus came down from heaven. He came to our location. He came with our limitations. He got tired and had to sleep. He worked and sweated. His feet became sore from walking the streets of Palestine. He was frustrated. He experienced pain. He shed blood. And in fact, ultimately He died.

Jesus becoming man.

When we think about verse 14, we think of Him as a man. It forces us to change all of our ideas about what a man is. When we think about Him as God, it forces us to change of all our ideas about what God is. God with skin on. God in Christ is something that this world never fully expected and something we will never fully understand.

That's what the coming of Christ is all about – what we don't expect. Zacharias and Elizabeth didn't expect to have a baby in their old age. Mary didn't expect to be the mother of the Son of God – she was a virgin. Joseph didn't expect his young bride to be pregnant. Herod didn't expect to be disturbed by word of a baby. The shepherds didn't expect to see angels in the fields. The magi didn't expect to find the Savior of the world born in a manger in the poor little village of Bethlehem. It's just inconceivable that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords would enter into the world this way – that God would put skin on. And under these circumstances, there is something about the incarnation so disturbing.

There is a story that circulates – whether it is true or not, I cannot possibly verify. But the story circulates that Trinity College in Cambridge has a long tradition of sending their students to the slums of south London to do community service. They serve in the Parish of Camberwell. At night they sleep in the parish hall, and by day they do necessary repairs and cleaning in the houses of the poor people in the area.

Decades ago, as the story goes, one such student was helping do some repairs for a bedridden, elderly woman. As the student worked, she asked, "Has anyone ever told you that you look like Prince Charles?" Since no one had, indeed, ever said such a thing to him, he replied, "No." "Well," she said, "I am surprised. You are the spitting image of him. You are, even to my poor eyes, an exact duplicate of the prince."

Well, he answered truthfully. No one had ever said he looked like Prince Charles. That's because he was Prince Charles. The lady never knew that her drains were cleaned by the then-heir to the

throne of England. It would be inconceivable that the prince would be in such a down-to-earth situation in an old woman's kitchen. It was inconceivable that she could be visited by a king.

There is a mysterious, down-to-earthness about Jesus' birth that we can't quite come to terms with. We transform it into architecture, music and art because we can't come to terms with the crudeness of the incarnation. We attempt to gloss over the crudeness of the stable – to hear the story that God was born of a woman, there was no room for Him in the inn, and He was placed in a common feeding trough. There is a stark, animal smell, everyday reality about the scene – the scene where God puts flesh on.

I'm telling you this morning, God knows your pain. Your hurt. Your suffering. Your weariness. Your humiliation. He knows because He came to be one with us. He pitched His tent with His people.

As Michael Card says,

The implications of the name Immanuel [that is, God with us] are both comforting and unsettling. Comforting because He has come to share the danger as well as the drudgery of our everyday lives. He desires to weep with us, to wipe away our tears. The implications are totally unsettling. It is one thing to claim that God looks down upon us, that He is a safe distance away, that He speaks to us (well, by long distance, we hope). But it's quite another thing for us to say that He has come right here, to put ourselves and Him in a totally new situation. He is no longer the calm and benevolent observer in the sky, the kindly old caricature with the beard. His image becomes that of Jesus, who wept and laughed, who fasted and feasted, and who, above all, was fully present to those He loved. He was there with them. He is here with us. (quoted in *The Book of Jesus*, edited by Calvin Miller)

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God with skin. Jesus didn't remain at the headquarters in heaven, receiving reports of the world's suffering from below and shouting a few encouraging words to us from a safe distance. No, He left heaven itself and came down to us in the front line trenches – right down to where we live, to where you live and to where I live. He came down to where we worry about all of life, where we contend with our anxieties and feelings of emptiness and futility, to where we sin and suffer, and to where we must finally die, as He died. **As Helmut Thielicke has said, "There is nothing He did not endure with us. He understands everything."** (quoted in *The Book of Jesus*, edited by Calvin Miller)

God pitched His tent with us.

Jesus knows your pain.

Joseph Bayley wrote a song,

A Psalm to the God Man

**Lord Jesus Christ
I thank you
that you were real
a real man**

and before that
a real boy.
It hurt
when you were planing wood
and you got a splinter
under your nail.
You felt it
when a stone got stuck
in your sandal.
You had to shake it out.
You removed the sand
from between your toes
and slept on hard ground
on cold nights
dreaming of foxes
with their warm holes.
You got thirsty
hungry
tired
bone tired
tired of crowds
tired because you walked too far.
You died.
Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you
that you were real
real God.
You healed people's hurts
even raised their dead.
You said
Come to me
if you're tired
and I will give you rest.
You fed hungry crowds
and said
I am living bread
that came down from Heaven.
You rose from deadness
into life bringing life.
Lord Jesus Christ
I thank you
that you are real
real God man.
I worship you
I adore you
because you who bore
my sins

**know what it's like
to have a splinter
under your nail
and to die.**

(quoted in *The Book of Jesus*, edited by Calvin Miller)

Because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, we can say with certainty we have a Savior who knows our sorrows. He knows it all. He knows what it means to be disappointed. He knows what it means to be misunderstood. He knows what it means to be mistreated. He knows what it means to be weary and thirsty and fatigued. He knows what it means to catch a summer cold. He knows what it means to be abandoned by those you think will be forever loyal to you. He knows what it means to be the brunt of brutal gossip. He knows what it feels like to be weary from a sleepless night. He knows the scorch of the sun, the burn of the wind. He knows it all. He's even been there at the weeping and the wailing at the wake of a child.

Jesus has been there. Jesus has done that.

He has come to suffer with us. He has come to sorrow with us. He has come, Himself, to bear our burdens.

One writer powerfully described that Jesus became a human being because God, the compassionate One, could not suffer and lacked a back to be beaten. God needed a back like ours on which to receive blows and, thereby, to perform compassion as well as to preach it. (Meister Eckhart, quoted in *The Book of Jesus*, edited by Calvin Miller)

He had to become a man to die for a man, to die for you. He had to become human to bear human sin – your sin and my sin. That's the power of a God with skin on.

There is something already happening in John, and it's true in our day. Notice verse 10. "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

You see, His being born a man gives us (verse 13) the opportunity to be born again, to be born of the will of God.

But notice. Even as the Christ-child comes, the world must reject Him. Verse 11 can be read like this: Jesus came home. He came to His own. He came home. It is the same expression, exactly, that is used in this same gospel when it says that the beloved disciple, that is, John, in response to Jesus' word from the cross, took Mary "unto his own home." When the Word came to this world, He did not come as an alien. He came home. Moreover, He came to Israel. Had He come to some other nation, it would have been bad enough, but Israel was peculiarly God's own people. The Word – Jesus – did not go where He could not have expected to be known. He came home, where the people ought to have known Him. But they did not know Him, and they did not receive Him.

What about us? Are we ready to receive Jesus? Are we ready for His presence? Are we ready for the Word to become flesh? For God to put skin on? For Him to interrupt history? For Him to interrupt our own lives and our own wishes?

You see, it is in Christ that God comes home. It is in Christ that God invites us to come home, as well.

There is a story of a housewife who came to the point where she couldn't wash another dish or change another diaper – you've heard these stories. So she just got in the car and took off for parts unknown. That night she called her husband, and he was frantic. "Where are you? Why have you left?" She asked about the children, and then she hung up. She called a few nights later, and this time he knew he had to be a bit calmer to communicate with her. After she asked about the children, he said to her, "Honey, we miss you and we love you. Won't you please come home?" She was silent and hung up. This began a pattern of occasional calls. Each time the call ended the same as he would tell her that he loved her and she would then softly and quietly and quickly hang up.

Finally, when he could take it no longer and was at his wit's end, he took the family savings and hired a private detective to locate his missing wife. She was quickly located in Des Moines, Iowa.

He left the children with the in-laws and rented a car and drove to the city where she was staying. The address was a room in a seedy hotel. He paused outside her door with a speech prepared on his lips. He knocked at the door, and when she opened it the speech was forgotten in a tender embrace. "Let's go home."

**It was a few nights later after the children had been put to bed that the young husband finally broached the subject that had been haunting him. "Honey, each time you called, I told you that I loved you and wanted you to come home. Why didn't you return?" She replied, "All those times it was only words. But then you came."
(<http://www.angelfire.com/nt/theology/in01-01a.html>)**

That is what the Lord did in the person of Jesus. In the past, He had spoken to the fathers through the prophets. But then He came. And when God puts flesh on, it makes all the difference in the world.

Will you come home with Him? Don't you feel at home with a God who knows your pain? With a God who wears flesh?