

## **CHRISTMAS 1 – 25 December 2011**

About the birth of Christ the great St. Augustine in the 4th century wrote: “Incredible, incredible, but our whole faith is based upon incredible things”. And that’s just what a lonely woman in Sweden thought one Christmas as she sat beside her fireplace contemplating the Christmas story. The more she thought about it, the more incredible she thought it was. “Why would the creator of the universe decide to become human and live among us?”

Just then her thoughts were interrupted by a strange sound outside. She went to the window and looked out and there in the moonlight on the snow covered lawn she saw about a dozen geese crying out frantically, staggering about, dazed, and confused. Apparently, through exhaustion, they had dropped out of a larger flight flying south to escape the Arctic winter.

The woman was moved to pity by the sight of the exhausted geese stumbling about in the cold snow, so putting on her coat she went outside and opened the door to her warm garage and tried to shepherd the geese into its warmth - but the more she tried to help them the more frightened they became - instead of helping them she was only making matters worse for them as they fled about the lawn - .she realised they had no idea that she was trying to help them.

Then a strange thought occurred to her. What if just for one minute she could become one of them, an ordinary goose, and talk to them in their own language? Then she could explain to them what she was trying to do. Then it hit her, that’s what Christmas was all about, God looking down from heaven upon a dazed and confused human race, pitying them, and deciding to help them in the only way possible - by becoming human - just as she had wanted to become one of the geese. And God would talk to them in their own language telling them how much he loved those whom he had created and how much he wanted to help them, a concept which every parent can understand, and suddenly the Christmas story made sense to the woman.

And two thousand years ago in a smelly, dirty, stable in a country smaller than Tasmania that is exactly what God did, the Word became flesh, the Divine became human, God became a man.

But for many this is a difficult concept to accept in a day and age when religious belief seems irrelevant to ordinary everyday life as we know it - and the idea that God became a human male with our own flesh is offensive to many.

But the truth is that God affirmed the dignity of our human flesh by assuming it in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And in that person, and the life which he led, and in his deeds, we see most fully what God is like - confirmed by his own words: “He who has seen me has seen the Father”.

And what do we see in Jesus that tells us about God? Well if we were asked to define love that would be a difficult thing to do. But when we look at Jesus touching the festering sores of a leper and making him clean we immediately have the perfect definition.

Try to define obedience, another difficult thing to do, but we see the perfect example in Jesus setting his face towards Jerusalem to do his Father’s will, despite his knowing that there were men waiting there to betray him and put him to death. And try to define forgiveness and we straight away we know what forgiveness is when we see Jesus say to the woman taken in adultery “Go and sin no more”.

Try to define goodness and we know what goodness is when we see Jesus eat with the outcasts, the dregs of society of his day. When we think of these deeds we begin to understand the significance of the word made flesh when he says: "He who has seen me has seen the Father".

But not only did the Word become flesh, He dwelt among us. There is no argument that Jesus lived in Palestine and that he died there - he dwelt there with his own people, but as John's Gospel tells us "but his own people received him not" - just as today there are countless millions of people who are either hostile or indifferent to the essential Christmas message: that God took on human flesh.

His own people received him not - in spite of the fact that he ate with them, that he fed the hungry, that he restored sight to the blind, that he helped the cripple to walk, that he touched and healed the leper.

And he worshipped in their synagogue, and he went to Jerusalem for their Passover, and there he was arrested and beaten - and there he was crucified on a Cross outside the city on a garbage heap, and buried in a borrowed grave.

And there is no question that on the third day God raised him up. No! There is no question that God took on our human form and dwelt among us, notwithstanding the rejection by so many of His own people, not only then but to the present day.

We are not given certainty in this life, but we are given faith that the incredible is really true - and we are assured by Paul that those who have this faith are led to it by the spirit of God. And we cannot ask for more than faith for as yet we see only through a glass darkly, because as St Augustine also said "If you were not incomprehensible, O Lord, you would not be God, for how can the finite comprehend the infinite?"

But with the Swedish lady and her lost snow geese, we do come to the understanding that the Christmas story though seemingly incredible, is not something beyond belief, even though it is in fact **something** almost too beautiful to imagine - **something** too beautiful for any words - **something** so beautiful that only an incomprehensible infinite God could have thought of it.