

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

John 1 verse 1 sounds like an echo of Genesis 1 verse 1. *“In the beginning...”* says Genesis. *“In the beginning...”* echoes John. St. John tells us that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was turned toward God (this is how the Greek puts it), and the Word was God. The Word was not turned away from God. He was turned toward God. From the beginning, this was the posture of the Word, the Son of God.

And when God created our first parents in Genesis, this was their posture. They, too, were turned toward God. Until the day when they turned away from Him. They sinned. And this is the essence of sin. To turn away from God.

But here’s a problem. And it’s a real big problem. Once mankind turned away from God, mankind is unwilling, and even unable to turn back to God. And so, when you and I were born, we were turned toward evil, toward the devil, toward sin, turned toward death, turned away from God toward everything that is the opposite of God.

What a way to begin a Christmas sermon, right? But bear with me because good news is coming. Yet it does not come from within us. It comes from God.

The Word, who was God and turned toward God, writes St. John, *“became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”* This is St. John’s Christmas story. *“The Word became flesh.”* John does not mention the Virgin Mary, and Bethlehem, the shepherds, and the manger. Yet they are all here in these few words. This is Christmas: *“the Word became flesh.”* We had turned away from God. And so, out of pure grace, from His heart of mercy, God turned toward us. How? By becoming flesh, our flesh, in the womb of Mary.

And when Mary’s child grew up to become a man, He turned toward the cross, going there to suffer and die for everyone who had turned away from God.

As the Word who became flesh hung on the cross, His Heavenly Father did something He had never before done. He turned away from the Word. He forsook His Son, Jesus Christ, turning away from Him. And so, for the first time from all eternity, the Word was not turned toward God. Jesus became like us as one turned away from God. Not because He turned away from His Heavenly Father, but because His Heavenly Father turned away from Him.

Why? To suffer the punishment you and I deserved for turning ourselves away from God. Jesus accepted that punishment on your behalf. Jesus endured that place from where God is forever turned away. He endured hell’s agony for you.

And so you, my friend, will never go there. Jesus turned God toward you. You are forgiven. Fully and completely forgiven. Each and every one of you is forgiven, for God is turned toward each and every one of you, His face shining with grace toward you. Jesus did that. Jesus turned God around to embrace you with kindness and mercy, with pardon for your sins.

On this Christmas Day I want to conclude by talking about Christmas trees. One in particular. A tree that has on it only one ornament. Just one. But at the very top of this Christmas tree there is a crown, a crown of thorns. This Christmas tree I speak of is the cross, and on this tree hangs just the one ornament: the Word made flesh. And no tree, no matter how it is decorated, is more beautiful.

We do have a beautiful Christmas tree up here to my left. And yet, there is also one behind me to my right. For upon the wood of the altar there is placed that one ornament: the body with the blood of Him who died for you. The altar is not shaped like a tree. Yet it takes its shape from the tree of the cross. And so, as you approach this tree in a few minutes, you are drawing near to the tree of the cross. And here in His holy meal Jesus, the Word made flesh for you, is turned toward you, full of grace and truth, with forgiveness for you, life, and salvation. Merry Christmas! Amen.