

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Christmas Day
December 25, 2016

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Last night we had as our Christmas Gospel the wonderful account of the Birth of Christ as told by Saint Luke. There were only two people present for that birth. The shepherds, alerted by angels, came later. By tradition there were also animals present. (In almost every crèche collection you can spend nearly as much money on the many animals as on the central figures!) The story itself is a wonderful mix: angels, shepherds, the Holy Family, and the animals. We wonder at the Birth of God Incarnate in such circumstances. But alongside our being familiar with the beloved account of St Luke, we can still marvel at the *unspeakable love* which prompted Almighty God to enter His creation to save us from our sins.

The great apostle Saint Paul is seldom at a loss for words! But when Paul tried to put into words how and why God could *dispossess* Himself of His heavenly power, wisdom and glory, and become a baby, all the apostle could say was that God “emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:7) At Christmas, the majesty beyond words or thought, the splendor of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, was completely dependent upon the mercy of His creatures. God “emptied Himself” is all St Paul could tell the Philippians.

By tradition the *Prologue*, or opening of Saint John’s Gospel, is also especially associated with the Christmas liturgy. By the time St John put pen to paper, (or perhaps it was *parchment*!) he and the rest of Holy Church had been celebrating the observance of Christmas for many years. Saint Luke’s material (likely obtained directly or indirectly from the Blessed Mother) was familiar to, and loved by, St John. He clearly did not need to re-tell that information in his own gospel account. The *Prologue* is the result of John’s, and the Church’s, reflecting upon those great events of the Birth of the Saviour, great events which brought St Paul to a loss for words.

“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” That is what John wrote. There are no shepherds or cattle or a manger here. To fathom the mystery of the Incarnation St John took a different approach. Any word is a living thought clothed in language. The Divine Word of God was always God’s thought. In obedience to what had been revealed to them, the Divine Word was named *Jesus* by Mary and

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Joseph. At Christmas the Word was clothed in our language, and He opened to us experience of a spiritual world that had been foreign to us.

Perhaps you have had the experience of being in a great foreign city where you did not understand the language. The street signs and shops were all a mystery to you. But then when someone interpreted the unknown and put it into your own language, suddenly all the possibilities of the city were open to your experience and enjoyment. That is what happened when Christ was born. As St John says “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” *Thanks be to God.*