

The Word Made Flesh

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[0 : 00] Well, if I could, this evening, with the Lord's help, turn back to John chapter 1. John chapter 1, and we take as our text the words of verse 14.

John chapter 1, verse 14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

They often say that essay writing is an art form, but sadly it was an art form that I don't think I possessed during my years of training in the Free Church College.

Because there's one thing which was always stressed to us prior to writing an essay, where the professors would emphasise the need for a good introduction and a good conclusion to the essay, in which the introduction to the essay was meant to begin with a hook, a hook in order to grab your attention and make the reader want to read on through the essay.

But the purpose of an introduction was also to map out what was going to be in the body of the essay. And so the introduction was a very important part of the essay.

[1 : 32] But so too was the conclusion. Because the conclusion wasn't just meant to be this afterthought to fill up the word count. The conclusion was a vital part of the essay, in which discoveries in the essay were re-emphasised, and the outcome of the debates that have been in the body of the essay, they are affirmed by the addition of your own personal opinion.

However, a conclusion was also the last chance in the essay to make your case, as to why your essay was written in the first place. And I suppose if I had followed these instructions at the time, I would have done a lot better.

But if the Apostle John, if the Apostle John was to be marked for writing his Gospel, if he was to be marked in the Free Church College, I think he would have been graded with an A.

And I say that not just because his Gospel is in the Bible, or that he was enlightened by the Holy Spirit when he wrote it, or any of these things, but simply because of the way in which his Gospel is written.

Because you could see that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to John, was written in the form of an essay. It had an introduction, and we read John's introduction, which are the first 18 verses of chapter 1.

[2 : 59] That's John's introduction, which is often referred to as the prologue. And in the prologue to John's Gospel, John commences his work with a hook, in which his opening sentences, they catch our attention, and draw us into the sum and substance of his essay.

Because he begins by saying, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

And immediately you want to say, well, who is this Word? And then John's intention in his prologue is to present to his readers the main concepts and themes of his entire Gospel.

Because what John wants to draw us into his Gospel with is that the eternal Son of God became the Jesus of history. And he did so with the purpose of revealing the grace and the glory of God for the salvation of sinners.

And as one commentator put it, the rest of John's Gospel, after the introduction, is simply an expansion of the revelation and the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 14] But John's intention in writing his Gospel is delivered to us in his conclusion. Because he presents to us who his Gospel is about.

He says who his Gospel is about in the prologue. It's Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But John emphasizes and re-emphasizes his intention in writing his Gospel in the epilogue, in the conclusion.

Because right at the end of his Gospel, John concludes by looking back over all that he's written. He looks back over everything and he says, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book.

But these things are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. And so John tells us why he wrote his wonderful Gospel.

Right at the conclusion, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That's what his whole Gospel is about.

[5 : 19] That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And for John, this good news is the greatest news in all the world. That God became man in order to save us from our sin.

And by believing in him, he says you will not perish but have everlasting life. But the last thing that John says in his Gospel is that he confesses his work to be inadequate and insufficient because he says there are many other things which Jesus did and if they were to be written, I suppose that not even the world itself could contain all the books that should be written about him.

But what John is saying to us is that this is what has been written. This Gospel has been written for your benefit. And I want to tell you about this person in it because he is able to transform your life. And I suppose you could say that for John and many others, but especially for John, he viewed Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as his hero.

Because in the mind of John, there was no other on the same par as Jesus. Nobody like him. No greater saviour to elevate. No greater salvation to proclaim.

[6 : 44] No greater victory to report. No greater gospel to write other than the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And so as we look this evening at how the Son of God became man, I would like John to introduce us to his hero.

And I want him to do so under three headings. The hero, the humanity, and the heretics. The hero, the humanity, and the heretics.

So we look firstly at the hero. The hero. It says right at the very beginning, verse 1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shined in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

The gospel of John, it's often been likened to a pool of water. In which both a child can paddle, and an elephant can swim.

[8 : 01] Because the beauty and wonder with which John has written this gospel is that, on the one hand, it's simple to understand and to follow. It's the easiest gospel to read. There are no complicated words, and all the words are relatively small.

And so there's room for a child to pick up this gospel and slowly paddle through it, which this gospel, which portrays the hero of sinners. But on the other hand, there is this unfathomable depth to this gospel.

Because in it, John stretches our, he stretches our minds so that we will gaze upon the glory and the majesty and the eternity of this person that entered into human flesh.

And when John introduces us to the hero in the story of redemption, he wants to indicate to us straight away that his existence didn't begin with his birth, the birth through the Virgin Mary.

No, no. John wants to tell us that there was never a time when this hero did not exist. Because in his opening statement, John echoes the first words of our Bible in Genesis 1-1, in the beginning, God.

[9 : 17] In the beginning, God. And here is John and he's telling us in the beginning was the Word. Before the foundation of the earth, before God spoke anything into being, before the world was the Word was.

He is pre-existent. He was in existence before time existed. There was never a time where he was not. But what this eternal, what was this eternal Word doing in the beginning?

What was he doing? John says the Word was with God. That's what he was doing. He was with God. Not only alongside in his existence, but he was towards God.

He was literally face to face with God. He was in fellowship with God. He was in a relationship with God. He was the Son of God in relationship with his Father.

And they were in the beginning with one another. They were not identical, but distinct. And yet, they were together face to face in communion and fellowship with one another.

[10:25] But John goes on to say that the eternal Word was not only in the beginning and he was not only with God, but he also was God. The Word was God.

God. And there's no greater Christological statement which can be made than this statement. The Word was God. Because in this statement, John claims that the Son of God is distinct from the Father, but at the same time he is one with the Father.

He's not in some way a lesser being or an inferior God, but he is God and he has always been God. The Word was God, he says. And what we must be clear on is that Jesus is not a God.

That's the translation of the Jehovah's, Jehovah's Witnesses use. He is, he is God. Not a God, but he is God. He is a divine person which coexisted with God the Father.

The Word was God. But, but, why does John give the Son of God the title the Word? Why does he refer to him as the Word?

[11:38] The Word who was in the beginning with God? Well, the title the Word was used by both Jews and Greeks in the first century.

The Word which they used was the term Logos. Maybe you've heard that before. The Logos which means the Word. But in Hebrew Scripture the Word was both an agent of creation, a source of God's message to his people and a standard of God's holiness.

The Word was an agent of creation, a source of God's message to his people and a standard of God's holiness. But in Greek philosophy the Word was this principle of reason which governed the world.

It was the wisdom and the will of God. So when John refers to Jesus as the Word he's wanting to tell us that his hero was not only the agent of God's creation but he's also the one who communicates the wisdom and will of God to his people.

He is the full revelation of God and his holiness towards mankind. This Jesus as the writer to the Hebrews put it he is the Word who was spoken and revealed as the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his passion.

[12:59] This Word is God in action God in communication God in revelation he is the voice of God the messenger of God he is literally the speech of God that's what John Calvin called the Word in his commentary the speech of God the voice piece the one who communicates truth to mankind but then John moves on to describe how God has revealed himself and he says that God has revealed himself through creation all things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made everything in animate creation everything you can see was brought into being through the Word and without him it was an impossibility without him nothing could be made that was made without him the creation would not be sustained he is the author of life and everything is dependent upon him because all that exists has its ultimate source in God the Father but everything that came into being came in through the

Son he was the medium through which God first spoke this world into being he is the medium through which God first declared his glory the word was the means by which the heavens declare as Psalm 19 began the heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim his handiwork he was the means by which all that took place he was the voice of God he was the speech of God which spoke into the darkness and said let there be light and that's exactly what John confirms to us when he says in him was life and the life was the light of men and the light shined in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it he is the word which dispelled the darkness at creation he is the word which brought life into creation and is that what we were just singing about in

Psalm 36 that the fountain and source of life is found in him and that it's only in his pure light that we shall see light and what John is pointing out to us is that the word was not only the means by which the general revelation of God came into being through creation but the word was also the means by which the special revelation of God came into being through scripture scripture he was the medium through which all the prophets spoke every prophet they always spoke on the authority of the word because they all began with the phrase thus saith the Lord he was the voice piece he was the spokesman he was the communicator to mankind in their spiritual darkness he was the word which was the light of man he was the word which was to be the light of the world he was the true light which was coming into the world on a mission to give light to everyone who sits in darkness and so my friend what makes Jesus the hero in the story of redemption is that he is God he is the eternal son of

God and as we saw last week our Jesus he needed to be God in order to redeem us he needed to be God in order to be our mediator he needed to be God in order to be our saviour but it was not only because he was God that Jesus was John's hero it's because God became man it was as man he secured our redemption through his blood it was as man he brought reconciliation between God and man and it was as man that our Jesus died and rose again in order to provide a way of salvation in order to be the hero of the story of our redemption this Jesus needed to be fully God and fully man two distinct natures one person forever God so what happened what happened to the word the word which was in the beginning with God

John tells us that the eternal word of God became flesh and dwelt among us the hero took to himself the humanity the hero took to himself the humanity so we look secondly at the humanity the humanity says in verse 14 the word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory is of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth John's entire gospel hinges and rests upon this one verse because without it without the incarnation of Jesus without the enfleshment of the son of God as a historic reality then the gospel is meaningless it was only if a man died at

[18:47] Calvary then in the words of the apostle Paul if Jesus did not become man and die at Calvary that's the point if it didn't happen if he didn't become flesh then in the words of the apostle Paul our preaching is in vain our faith is in vain we are yet in our sins and we are all of men most miserable if this didn't happen then this is pointless but it's because he became flesh and died upon that wondrous cross and rose again from the dead this is the marvel of our gospel that I suppose in the words of Hugh Martin it was precisely because he was the son of God in our human nature without sin that Jesus was able to die death dead Jesus was able to die death dead but when you read this key verse in

John's gospel there is a simplicity to his language when he claims the word became flesh there is a simplicity in this statement but at the same time there is a profundity in the statement because what John says is that this eternal word which spoke through the general revelation of God and creation and spoke through the special revelation of the prophets this word now is the revelation of God by becoming man and that's what the writer to the Hebrews sought to emphasize about Jesus that when he introduced his letter to those who wanted to turn away from following Jesus the writer to the Hebrews opened with the words God who at various times and in various ways he spoke in time past to the fathers through the prophets but now in these last days he has spoken to us by his son the son of

God who became flesh and that's what John is telling us here the word who was in the beginning with God the word who was God he became flesh and what John is emphasizing to us is that the word wasn't always flesh he became flesh he was always the word he was always the eternal word and he was always God and he was always with God but the word wasn't always flesh he became flesh which which means that the word took to himself a human nature at a definitive and decisive moment in time he added to his divinity the human nature that he would be two distinct natures one person forever he didn't lay aside his divinity he didn't lay aside his glory no he added to his person a human nature and you know I'm always thankful that there are those who can put it much better than

I can because there was an early church father who put it this way a great way to remember how Jesus became man remaining what he was he became what he was not remaining what he was he became what he was not and at that perfect time that definitive decisive moment he became flesh says John and he dwelt among us he dwelt among us he tabernacled amongst us not in a tent but in his humanity he pitched the tent of his humanity amongst us sinful creatures he tabernacled like the tabernacle in the old testament which veiled the glory of God in the holy of holies and here is Jesus he is the veiled glory of God in a human tabernacle and that veiled glory it only belongs to the only begotten of the father who is full full of grace and truth he is the only begotten son which means he is the one and only son from the father he is the unique son of

God the dearest son of God the beloved son of God who became flesh and what John is reminding us is that it was not three persons of the Godhead who became incarnate it was only the only begotten son from the father who became incarnate it was only the second person the eternal word God the son he was the only one who took to himself a human nature the father didn't take to himself a human nature the spirit didn't take to himself a human nature it was only the only begotten son that underwent this experience and this is important simply because mormons teach that the

father and the son have glorified bodies but the authoritative voice of scripture says that it was only the only begotten son that became flesh but what we must also highlight is that when John uses the word flesh he's not only implying that

[24 : 24] Jesus had a human body he's affirming that as one who took to himself the fullness of our humanity he encompasses the whole of our human nature the word became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh which is why the gospels emphasize that Jesus was born into the world by a virgin birth it's to show that beyond all doubt Jesus was the incarnate son of God and because he became flesh he became like us in every way he became human he was a human being like us he had a mind emotions and affections he had a mind emotions and affections and as one who had a human mind his human mind was limited was finite his knowledge was not infinite knowledge his wisdom was not infinite wisdom it was limited by his humanity which means that

Jesus was not at the level of omniscience he didn't know everything and that's clearly set before us when Jesus speaks about the second coming and the day of judgment because he said of that day and hour no one knows not even the angels in heaven nor the son but the father only but in this limited knowledge and wisdom we're told that it was always increasing in which Jesus as man was continually learning more and more and he underwent normal intellectual development and learning like everyone else he learned about who he was and the mission that he was sent on by observing the world around him and listening to his mother and searching the scriptures for himself but we must always remember the close relationship which he had with his father he was always praying and the spirit was also revealing things to him but you know what always blows my mind when talking about the wisdom and knowledge of

Jesus and I know this is complicated it's not easy to look at all this but this is what the bible teaches and this is the wonder of our savior but what always blows my mind when talking about the wisdom and knowledge of Jesus is what professor Donald Macleod once said he said even now at the right hand of the majesty on high christ's glorified human mind does not fully comprehend the glory of his own divine nature there are complexities in his own being which are still inaccessible to his finite human intellect he has a depth to himself he has a depth to himself now that's a thought Jesus in his humanity is still learning about his divinity but the other ways in which Jesus is like us is in his body because his body it wasn't a super human body or in some way different to us rather he was made up of the same composition as our body he had the same anatomy same physiology same nervous system same sensitivity to pain he had a real physical body which underwent everything which we experience for we know that

Jesus experienced hunger in the wilderness he experienced thirst on the cross he ate food with his disciples he experienced tiredness he slept he felt cold and heat he felt pain when he suffered his body underwent the torments of the crucifixion his body was lacerated and flesh was torn out of it by whips he experienced the agony of being nailed to a cross and crown with a crown of thorns he was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities his blood oozed out of him as he gave his life as a ransom for many but to top it all he died he died as a human being God in the flesh he tasted death and he tasted it in the bitterness of the cross forsaken by God and yet every nerve heightened by his own perfection he died our death but now he has a resurrected body he is the first born from the dead he died and rose again he's now ascended into the glory of heaven and as

Rabbi Duncan put it when he said the dust of the earth is now at the right hand of the majesty on high the dust of the earth is at the right hand of the majesty on high he is bone of our bone flesh of our flesh but this Jesus is not only like us in his mind and in his body but also in all his emotions he experienced all the emotions that we go through except without sin he experienced love he loved his disciples John is called the beloved disciple the one whom Jesus loved Jesus marveled at the unbelief of those who heard the gospel he experienced anger to the money changers in the temple he experienced joy in his people he moved with compassion towards those in need he underwent temptation in the wilderness he experienced sorrow at the death of Lazarus he wept over Jerusalem he was disappointed when Peter denied him three times he was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief he experienced loneliness and abandonment and his soul was troubled even as he he faced towards the cross this Jesus was like us in every way every way and because he dwelt among us he came right alongside us and he shared in our existence in every way my friend this is not a God who is afar off this is one who has drawn near he dwelt among us dwelt among us and let's never be tempted to think that God does not understand let's never think that he is so far

removed from us that he could never relate to to us or to what we are going through in our lives but it's exactly because he is like us that we can go to him and find grace to help in time of need it's because he is

[31 : 44] God manifest in our flesh in our nature it's because he entered into our experience that he knows what pain is he knows what emotional pain is he knows what loss is he knows what it is to lose someone you love he knows what spiritual loss is to go through the dark spiritual times of being walking with God he knows what it's like these things aren't far from him he even knows what hell is like he even knows what hell is like that's why the words of Hebrews 4 are a great reminder to us of who this Jesus actually is because the writer to the Hebrews says seeing then seeing we have a great high priest that has passed into the heavens

Jesus the son of God let us hold fast to our profession for we have not in high priesthood which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities he was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin he says then therefore let us boldly go to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need we can go boldly because the one there knows exactly what we're going through and my friend that's why Jesus bids us to come to him because he remembers that we are dust he our feeble frame he knows it and he's known our nature from the inside he has been where we are he's walked through the valley of the shadow of death he's been in the darkness where there is no light and yet and yet it's because of who he is that he says to us come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest for your soul for my yoke is easy and my burden well it's light my friend have you come to him yet have you come to see this Jesus for who he really is and what he is really like because there is no greater person to come to there is no greater saviour to seek than this Jesus and it's no wonder Robert Murray McShane said man of sorrows what a name for the son of God who came ruined sinners to reclaim hallelujah what a saviour what a hero the word of God became flesh and dwelt among us the hero took to himself the humanity but lastly I want us to see that when John wrote his masterpiece about the hero taking upon himself the humanity he also addressed all the heretics those who question the incarnation and so

I just want to briefly highlight to you these heretics if we look again at verse 14 just to read it again the word was made flesh and dwelt among us we beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth and when John wrote this significant verse his desire wasn't just to emphasize that his hero became so like him in order that he could relate to him but his desire was to refute any person who denied that the word became flesh and this is also why the catechism is worded in the way in which we find it how did Christ being the son of God become man Christ the son of God became man by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born of her yet without sin and what the catechism is emphasizing is that

Jesus Christ the son of God had first of all a true body he had a true body and it's remarkable that one of the first heresies which the early church encountered when John was writing his gospel this heresy was around and it wasn't a denial of the deity of Christ but a denial of the physical humanity of Christ and the first heresy to plague the church was the heresy of docetism docetism a philosophy which viewed flesh as something which was evil and with the flesh such an evil matter it was therefore unthinkable for God to become incarnate and take to himself a body and so according to docetism the physicalness of the body of Christ only seemed to be human it only seemed to be human which is why it's called docetism because the word means to seem docetism claimed that

[37 : 26] Jesus Christ only appeared to be human he was a phantom he wasn't real a real three dimensional historical touchable visible woundable person with real flesh and blood but this is why John says that the word became flesh and why John later pointed out that when Jesus died just moments after Jesus died that a soldier pierced his side and water and blood came out which is something that would have never happened if Jesus had only been a phantom and John refutes this heresy not only in his gospel but also in his letters because he says that Antichrist is one who denies that Christ came in the flesh he says in 1st John 4 this is how you can recognize the spirit of God every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God but every spirit that does not acknowledge

Jesus is not from God this is the spirit of Antichrist which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the early church docetism the denial of the humanity of Christ but John also refutes a heresy called Apollinarianism which is why the catechism says that Jesus Christ took to himself a reasonable soul because Apollinarianism was a product of being oversensitive with the deity of Christ in which they were so concerned to safeguard that Christ was God that they minimized and disparaged his humanity it was a denial of Christ's humanity Apollinarianism claimed that Jesus Christ was 50% God and 50% man in which

Jesus had a human nature and a divine nature where his mind was divine but his body was human but John tells us plainly the word was made flesh full of grace and truth full full not 50% God and 50% man 100% God 100% man fully God fully man two distinct natures one person forever but these heresies of docetism and Apollinarianism they were only the start of a host of other heresies which the church encountered throughout its 2000 year history Arianism claimed that Jesus was created a heresy still held by Jehovah Witnesses Eutychianism brought the two natures of Christ so close together that it mixed it into one nature Nestorianism divided the natures of Christ so much that when Jesus did a miracle that was his divine nature not his human nature when Jesus died that was his human nature not his divine nature and all these heresies docetism

Apollinarianism Arianism Eutychianism Nestorianism I tell you them not expecting you to remember their names or everything about them but because all these heresies were discussed and debated throughout all the prevailing centuries of our church and because of them because of all these heresies and they're important for us to know you need to know the enemy in order to attack it all these heresies produced creeds and confessions which stated the teaching of the Bible and that's why as a church we seek to uphold the Westminster Confession of Faith that's our subordinate standard subordinate to the word of God but it's a document which reveals to us the teaching of the Bible in a systematic manner and if you've never read it read the

Westminster Confession of Faith read it and re-read it confession because what we're often tempted to think is that the confession is either an old fashioned and outdated document or it's only for ministers and elders but the confession was written for everyone and at one time in our land many moons ago you could say every home in our land had the Bible every home in our land had a confession every home in our land had Boston's fourfold state that's how people learnt their theology that's how they came to know more and more about the Saviour who loved them and gave himself for them they had a desire to learn a desire to grow a desire to know more about Jesus Christ and that's what we have to ask ourselves do we have a desire to learn do we have a desire to grow is this boring to us or is this reminding us of the

[42 : 57] Saviour who did so much for us to bring us to himself so John introduces us to his hero and he sets the scene for the rest of his gospel and what we have come to discover is that the hero which John wrote about was the hero who took to himself humanity and his presentation was in the face of all the heretics everyone who wanted to stand in his way he presented Jesus that's what we ought to do too present Jesus but why why did all this take place why did God become man that's the great question why did he become man so he would be our representative as the last

Adam our substitute to die our death our mediator to reconcile us to God our redeemer to set us free our saviour to save us from our sin but why why did all this have to take place why the God man why it's simply this God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him would not perish but have everlasting life and John went on to say God did not send his world his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved and how does John conclude his gospel all this is written it's all written that you might believe that Jesus is the

Christ the son of God and that by believing you will have a life through his name so the question is is your hero John's hero do you believe in this Jesus may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh Lord our gracious God we give thanks for a wonderful saviour and how the apostle said after considering the greatness and the glory of who thou art he said oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are thy judgments and thy ways past finding out our minds are so finite but we thank and praise thee that we come to a saviour who is infinite eternal and unchangeable one who is the same yesterday today and forever and yet one who is like us and who can relate to us in every way oh protect us we plead help us to lean upon him to see him in all his glory and be reminded of him day after day that he is the shepherd who leads his flock that he says to us my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me

bless us then we plead keep us in the week that lies ahead a week that is unknown to us but known to thee do us good and we ask for Jesus sake amen we shall conclude by singing in Psalm 146 Psalm 146 in the sing psalms version on page 191 Psalm 146 singing from verse 5 down to the end of the psalm blessed is the one who truly looks for help to Jacob's God blessed is the one who places all his hope upon the Lord he who made the earth and heaven and the seas with all their store he who keeps his every promise who is faithful evermore down to the end of the psalm to God's praise place Blessed is the one who truly looks for help to Jacob's God. Blessed is the one who places all his hope upon the Lord.

[48 : 04] He who made the earth and heaven and the seas with all their store.

He who keeps his every promise to his faithful evermore.

He delivers from oppression and re-reaches the hungry's might.

He releases those in prison to the blind the Lord his side.

Those who are but done he raises. God he lies in righteousness.

[49 : 03] He protects and cares for strangers, widows and the fatherless.

He frustrates the wicked's purpose. So the Lord through endless days.

Praise to every generation. Praise your God, O Zion. Praise.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.