

There were nine of us that got dropped off out of the back of a straight truck  
in the middle of nowhere, in the northern Wisconsin wilderness,  
on a warm August morning in 1979.

We were a subgroup out of 50 or so soon-to-be first-year students at Wheaton College who  
had voluntarily signed up for a three-week challenge/adventure camping program called  
Vanguards.

*(If you remember that I've told you about this experience before, bonus points for you!)*

We carried everything we needed in our 40-pound backpacks. including food,  
sleeping bags and a tent. I used the term tent loosely. It was actually a big piece of plastic,  
two big pieces of plastic to be exact.

One piece was laid on the ground,  
one was tied between 2 trees in the middle to form the shape of a tent,  
with the sides that draped down tied or staked to make the shape of an "A"  
that would help channel any rain away from the campers sleeping  
underneath.

The plastic was the perfect size to fit two people under it. However, since there were  
an odd number of us, there was one plastic tent group of three, which, for reasons I  
don't remember, included Mike, John, and me.

At night, our faces were so close together at times that I clearly remember the smell  
of bouillon from the evening supper on the breath of a tentmate.

It wasn't too bad, except when it rained. Then the two people on the outside would  
either have to snuggle uncomfortably close to the middle person or just get wet on the side  
of their body that hung out beyond the 2-person-sized sheet of plastic.

We never camped in the same place twice, so every morning, we would fold up the  
plastic and put it in our backpacks for the hike to the next campsite. Once there, we would  
unpack, find a suitable place for our sheet of plastic "tent," and set it up again.

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The ancient Israelites knew something about packing up a portable tent too. After their  
deliverance from slavery in Egypt, God, through Moses, led them out of Egypt, out of  
slavery, into freedom. While to us, being released from enslavement, being released from

oppression of any kind, seems to be its own reward. But God gives a reason and purpose for liberating the enslaved Israelites. When God called Moses at the burning bush, God said,

. . . “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you:  
when you have brought the people out of Egypt,  
*you shall worship God . . .*” (Exodus 3:12)

And so, having crossed through the parted Red Sea,  
and having come to Mt. Siani,  
God gave to Moses the 10 commandments,  
And gave specific instructions about how and where to worship:  
God gave Moses specific, detailed instructions for *building a tent*.

Of course, it was not any tent, it was the specific instructions for the **tabernacle**, a portable, traveling, tent made of animal skins that were set up on poles when they made camp in the wilderness.

They would set it when they camped,  
and took it down when it was time to move on. . .

This tabernacle consisted of an outer courtyard of draped animal skins, with a smaller inner courtyard, with a smaller space marked off by more animal skins known as the “holy of holies.” The holy of holies contained the Ark of the Covenant, the special box with the sacred items of the

10 commandments,  
Aaron’s Rod that budded,  
and a golden pot that contained some manna.

On top of the box were two winged cherubim, angels whose wings stretched over the box,  
And surrounded by the angels’ wings on the top of the box  
was the luminous, glowing, bright light of the presence of God.

This luminous glowing light was known as the “shekinah glory.”  
The glowing light of God’s very presence.

***The visible manifestation of God on earth.***

Thus it was that God accompanied the Israelites  
wherever their wilderness travels led them.

Keeping in mind this history of the tenting presence of God with the ancient Israelites, we come to John 1. John begins with the most cosmic perspective possible. Echoing the words of Genesis, in the beginning, John says that Jesus, the “word,” was there.

A word about the word, “word.” (!). It’s the translation of the Greek word “logos.”  
Its most basic and common meaning is simply  
“word,” “speech,” “utterance,” or “message.”

“*Logos*” carried a lot of philosophical baggage in the ancient Greek world. Ancient Greek philosophy was concerned with answering the ultimate questions of reality. They were seeking ultimate truth, the ultimate reality that lies behind all other things.

Over time, as the ancient philosophers pondered these questions, they came up with a term to describe this ultimate reality, and the term they came up with was *logos*. The *logos* came to be understood as **that which gave life and meaning to the universe**. Within the realm of Greek philosophy, however, this *logos* was largely understood to be an impersonal force, not a personal being.

John 1, then, shows that the apostle has done two things with the term that would have been unthinkable to Greek philosophers. Rather than an impersonal force, the *logos* of John’s gospel is a personal being.

The *logos* is the personal God revealed to us in the Old Testament. John tells us this indirectly by starting 1:1 with “in the beginning,” just as Genesis 1:1 begins. He also tells us this more directly when in 1:1 he writes, “the Word was God.” This *logos*, which gives meaning and purpose to all things, is far from being an impersonal principle. Rather, this *logos* is Jesus Christ, the very God of the universe.<sup>1</sup>

It comes then as a brilliant connection between the faith of the Israelites and Greek speculative philosophy when John says in verse 1:14 that **the word became flesh**. Not only did it become flesh, but *it lived/ dwelt among us*. The word for lived/dwelt is the Greek word *skene*, which literally means—get this—to *tent*.

The word became flesh and tented with us.

My late friend Glenn Jordan was a gifted writer, theologian, and activist in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Having raised considerable funds to redevelop impoverished East Belfast, he and his compatriots took a day retreat to determine an appropriate name for the comprehensive work to care for the poor and impoverished community of East Belfast.

Pondering John 1:14, they eventually decided to call their efforts the **Skainos Project**. Skainos, from *skene*, from word becoming flesh and *living* among us.

To this day, The Skainos Centre serves the low-income and marginalized of East Belfast.

It’s a testimony to my friend Glenn’s passion and vision to care for “the least of these.” And it’s a testimony to my friend’s passion and vision for the continued enfleshment of the very presence of God in the world.

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Friends, there are many Christmas miracles, but THE Christmas miracle is the incarnation.

The word becoming flesh, and dwelling among us, tenting with us, sharing our burdens, healing our hurt, walking with us through the world.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/logos>

So we celebrate the birth of a baby in Bethlehem today,

And know that God's very glowing mobile presence among us  
is become a human being,  
to heal,  
redeem,  
and restore our broken world that God so loves.

The very Word of God,  
is tenting with us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.