Christmas Eve 1981
A NEW WAY OF COMMUNICATION (Not with Words Only)

In a recent issue of the New Yorker Magazine, a writer noted that “late fall always seems to be the season of words, written and spoken: the mail swells in volume, with fat catalogues thumping into the letter box: newspapers and magazines thicken: the General Assembly of the United Nations deliberates in six languages: and everybody seems suddenly to have a great deal to say. Advertiser’s flashing announcements grow more insistent. Everything seems bent on squeezing itself into language. Word processors have claimed the center of the stage, and ·have given even manual typewriters an antique look.”

In a technical sense, it has become a lot easier to put things into words. But to turn words into flesh, to turn words into action is something else. For example, it’s easy to talk about love in words but to express oneself, to communicate in an action — that’s different.

We’ve all felt the frustration of Eliza in the musical — "My Fair Lady.” After dealing with nothing but words from people, she cries out in exasperation — "Words! Words! Words! I’m so sick of words! I get words all day through; first from him, now from you! Is that all you blighters can do? Then she goes on to sing — "Don’t talk of stars burning above, if you’re in love, show me!”

The message of Christmas is that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Or to translate it another way: “The Love of God became a human being and lived among us.”

In the beginning was the Love of God and the Love of God expressed itself in the creation of the universe — and in the Christmas event, the Love of God expressed itself in a human being, in the baby born at Bethlehem.

What does it mean for us — this new way of communication?

First of all, it means that God’s presence is among us in a new and wonderful way. Not in a new set of rules, not in some ideals, not in some additional instructions — but in a person, a human being like you and me.

That adds another dimension to life. It means we can live with meaning and serenity even under the worst of circumstance because God is present with us in all of our human affairs. Life has touched life in a personal way. The Love of God became a human being and lives among us. God’s love is personal. As St. Paul put it, “If God is with us, who can be against us.”

2. Secondly, the fact that God’s love became a human being, “the word became flesh,” and lives among us, means that we live in one world, not two. We keep trying to divide the world into two parts — the religious and the worldly or secular part. We like to talk about withdrawing now and then from the secular world to enter the world of religion in order to become more inspired and fortified.

But the Love of God entered this world, this material world, not just the world of the spirit. Jesus Christ was composed of the same human flesh as you and me. It was one world to Jesus and God is everywhere people are, including those who live disreputable and shabby lives.

Jesus Christ spent his days in secular and worldly ways among secular worldly people. He got into trouble too. The authorities said he wasn't religious enough and tried to get rid of him.

The Love of God became a human being and lives among us! The Word became flesh. Whenever love or words become flesh — that's a new way of communication. And it is not only God's communication to us — but it is also a way of communication among human beings.

One of the saddest letters I've ever read was one written to Dear Abby by a landlady. She wrote —

"Yesterday was an old man's birthday. He was ninety-one and 'home' was a small, rented room with cooking privileges. He awakened earlier than usual, bathed, shaved, and put on his best clothes. Surely, they would come today, he thought. He wouldn't take his daily walk to the gas station to visit with the old-timers of the neighborhood because he wanted to be right there when they came.

He sat on the porch with a clear view of the road so he could see them coming. Surely, they would come today. He's skip his noon nap that day because he wanted to be up when they came.

He has six children. Two of his daughters and their married children live within a few miles. They hadn't been to see him for a long time, and today was his birthday. Surely, they would come.

At suppertime, his landlady brought him some ice cream and a small cake, but he didn't eat it. He was saving it to have with 'them' when they came.

Nighttime came, and the old gentleman went to his room to retire. But first he knocked on his landlady's door and said, 'Promise to wake me when they come.' It was his birthday, and he was ninety-one."

God's love became a human being and lives among us. The Word became flesh. Tonight, on this Christmas and every day let your words, let your love become flesh — let your presence be personal. There are people waiting. Amen.