1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, [1] and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, [2] and his own people [3] did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 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.

When anthropologists talk about the gift, they talk about three aspects of gift exchange: the act of giving, the act of receiving, and the reciprocation of or return on the gift. And they don’t talk about this just as some ritual we happen to participate in to forge bonds and so forth; some also consider why we are compelled to give, compelled to receive, and compelled to make a return. This return can be expected or unexpected, and it can be experienced in many forms: gratitude, joy, proliferation, or a return gift somewhere down the road. Despite that last example I don’t want to talk about this return with cynicism. Not as, for instance, in the case of a birthday gift that I receive from you that results in my getting you one of about the same value and type down the road when it’s your birthday. I mean the type of return you feel compelled to make when someone has done you a tremendously generous favor and you can’t help but want to make some return on that. A return that is suitably generous. If a stranger had just saved your child, is there much you would deny him? If he refused your return or gratitude, you might insist. You would feel compelled to an even greater generosity, wouldn’t you?
Those of you who are around me a lot know I like talking about the gift. When Ann invited me to speak here on the incarnation, I tried to avoid the topic of gift, but I couldn’t help but repeatedly come back to this idea of incarnation as gift, perhaps because, in the Christian faith there has been no more extravagant or more important gift. Even the death at the cross is an extension and culmination of the incarnation, the ultimate fruition of this gift of flesh. And gifts of flesh are no small matter. Any recipient of a donated organ could tell you that. Lewis Hyde, a scholar on the gift, writes about people who make the decision to donate an organ to a family member, and discovers that the word “decision” isn’t even relevant in most of these cases. This is because people who donate organs to family members say there is no decision to be made, there is nothing to think over. Most of you, if you were a match for your son or daughter, your sister or brother, your father or mother, would give to them without hesitation. In face of a need like that, you would care for their flesh as if it were your own. The impetus to give, despite the risk, would be immediate. The giving, because of the risk, would be extraordinary. And it would be one of the flesh. And flesh matters. The matter from which we are made matters. We can exalt the mind and the soul and the heart and curse these flesh-and-blood shells that house them, but the fact is that gifts of the flesh resonate strongly with us. Our flesh has a lot to teach us.

Most of us wouldn’t dream of selling our hair to a child with leukemia or trading a kidney for a Lexus. To barter with these gifts of the flesh -- organs, blood, hair, breast milk, one’s virginity – cause our sensibilities to revolt, because they aren’t meant to be bartered with; gifts of the flesh are meant to be given. Certainly there are exceptions to this, and elements and aspects of the body can and have been sold, but they often give us pause or produce controversy, and for good reason.

And so God sent the Word in the flesh, to meet us where we were and where we are. So that we should know him. So that we should understand. So that we should receive Him. So that we should get Him (I like the word “get” here, because it means both to receive and comprehend). So that we should feel compelled to make a return. So, what should the return on this look like?

A couple days ago my four-year-old daughter wrenched her neck in such a way that she couldn’t move, and she was in so much pain that she just cried all day. When I got home and saw her my gut reaction was, “Oh, God, please let me switch places with her.” And I could practically feel her pain in my own neck, my own flesh. We’ve all had that moment with someone we’ve loved, haven’t we? And is it, do you think, in these experiences that we have a glimmer of understanding regarding God’s gift to us -- the Word made flesh. These visceral responses tell us something of God’s love. It is literally the Word, the love of God, revealed through our flesh. No words or intelligence are needed to understand why you would trade places with someone you love or give a kidney to your child without thinking about it. And no comprehension is required on the part of the child to properly receive it, because whether he knows it or not, he has benefited from it, and his life makes this gift a productive one. His life is the return. God spoke to us in flesh, because we get the flesh. Without words. Without explanation. And we benefit even when we don’t comprehend (that’s where faith comes in). We should listen – albeit
judiciously -- to what your body tells you about giving. About love. This is, I believe, one of the myriad ways God meant for us to hear Him.

Last week Dr. O’Hara offered you a paradox from Book 1 of Augustine’s *Confessions*. In the vein of Augustinian paradoxes, let me offer you another. Some scholars speak of God giving out of complete and pure generosity, yet he also demands repayment – pure generosity yet a demand of repayment – how do we reconcile the two? The 14th century Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, writes that he will praise God, for being of such a nature and of such an essence that he must give. We are made in God’s image, so we too are compelled to give. And why? Because God knows that there will be a return for us when we give, whether it’s joy or a new relationship or a life. He made us creatures, who are compelled to give, so that we might receive in turn. And by giving to one another, we become the body he intended.

So, to answer the question -- how should we receive this gift of incarnation, this gift of flesh, and what should our return look like? We should respond, as our flesh tells us, without hesitation. With a generosity that needs no words or explanation or deliberation. Not recklessly nor heedlessly, but, nonetheless, with an immense and immediate gratitude that befits such an extravagant gift of flesh.
PRELUDE

“Prelude in Thaxted” 
arr. By David Pettit
Horn, Collin Block

OPENING LITANY

L: My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch in the morning,
more than those who watch in the morning.
L: Out of the depths I cry to You.
C: O Lord, hear my voice.
L: With my whole heart I want to praise You.
C: O Lord, hear my voice.
L: If you, Lord, should mark iniquities:
C: Who could stand? Who could stand?
All: I will wait for the Lord. My soul waits and in His word do I hope.

HYMN

“Be Thou My Vision” 
ELW 793

SCRIPTURE

John 1:1-14

SERMON

Rocki Wentzel, Classics

COMMUNION

Special Music “For Elizabeth”, & "For Sarah” 
Craig Spencer

PRAYER

BENEDICTION and DISMISSAL

All: “Christ, in our coming and in our leaving, the Door and the Keeper; for us and our dear ones, this day and every day, blessing for Always.”
L: Go and be a blessing for others.
C: Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

"Seek Ye First” 
Craig Spencer

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLEAN WATER PROJECT - *For All Who Are Thirsty:* Let's work together to eliminate dirty water! USF, Sioux Falls Seminary, and Augustana are partnering to bring clean water to people who need it - here and abroad. If you're interested in helping, sign up in the narthex or email Hannah Miller at hmmiller08@ole.augie.edu or Kayla Rockwell at kerockwell07@ole.augie.edu Project will culminate in a silent auction and concert on Monday, Nov. 23rd.

MARTIN AND KATARINA LUTHER LOOK-ALIKE CONTEST - In an effort to raise funds for the “For All Who Are Thirsty” project, various campus figures have agreed to ‘compete’ in a contest to see who looks the most like Martin Luther and his wife, Katarina. You may vote with your $$’s by placing your contribution in the box of your choice on the Narthex table. The ‘winners’ will be announced in chapel on Reformation Day worship, and will receive several ‘indulgences’ for their selection. Vote early and often!!

PRISON WORSHIP - Every semester a campus ministry group attends a worship service at the South Dakota State Penitentiary. The date of our visit this semester is, Thursday, November 12th. There are various clearance forms that need to be filled out and returned to the chapel office by Tuesday, October 23rd. Carol has the forms in the chapel office. Please consider this powerful opportunity to minister to the imprisoned.

This week in chapel:

Friday (16th) Worship, 10 am - Abby Thompson, Sr. Spkr.
Sunday (18th) Homecoming worship, 10:30 am - ELMEN CENTER
Monday (19th) Worship, 10 am - Morning Prayer
Tuesday (20th) Roman Catholic Mass, 10 am - Fr. Shane Stevens
Wednesday (21st) Holy Communion, 10 am - Chris Crophan, Reli: Senior Academy
Friday (23rd) Worship, 10 am - Hannah deFreese, Sr. Spkr.
HOLY COMMUNION
Wednesday, October 14, 2009

PRELUDE  “Prelude in Thaxted”  arr. By David Pettit
           Horn, Collin Block

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