

## Nine Lessons and Carols, 2018

*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

Eight words, at the heart of everything we have heard tonight. The reason why we are here, for all the beauty, for all the light, for all the mystery: eight words. The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.

‘Flesh’ in the Bible is so much more than just another word for skin.

More, indeed, than just another word for physical. It has to do with physical, but its more than physical.

Flesh, for the Bible, means everything in human life which is prone to falling part. Everything, which like our actual, physical bodies is weak and fallible and slides towards disintegration. Flesh is everything you can't quite trust.

Flesh are those who long to be free from addiction, who struggle with all their strength, and yet somehow slide back into defeat again and again.

Flesh are those parents who know that children learn by example, example, example. Who know they should be loving, gentle, and patient, but who find themselves snapping and shouting and bullying, and watching their children learn that.

Flesh are those who are driven by anxieties, by compulsions, by dreads they barely begin to understand, who paint themselves into hopeless corners, who are mysteries of pain to themselves and others.

Flesh are the guilty, the sick, the demoralised, the exhausted, the stuck.

Flesh for the Bible is quite simply *failure*: our failure to be as God made us, to be love and joy and peace.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The Word became failure. The Word became *us*, in our flattest, emptiest, most exhausted disappointment. That's what the Cross means.

And this is good news, because of what the Bible says that Word is. What does God speak into the failure? Why, says the Bible, He speaks mercy. Forgiveness. Peace. Power. He speaks hope, transformation, He speaks glory beginning within you. When God speaks his Word into failure, He

turns it around and makes it sing. He takes dead, crucified, lost human beings and makes them resurrection.

The Word became flesh. My flesh. Your flesh. Whatever our failure is, the Word is in there, and the Word is mercy and peace, forgiveness and hope.

If you hear one thing this Christmas, hear this. Because the Word became flesh, because that baby was born and lived and died and rose again, your flesh is made new. Your failure, however deep and radical and fatal it seems to you, however hopeless – your failure has mercy and peace, forgiveness and and hope spoken over it, breathed into it. And this is *God's* Word, God's breath. There quite simply is no failure which he cannot turn around, which he cannot make sing, which he cannot bring into love, and joy, and peace. Not the worst person you can imagine. Not even you.

The Word became failure so that failures might become like Him: might become what we were made to be.

He came to hold our destiny to us, to offer us glory.

This Christmas, let us each take it gladly from Him.

**Peter Waddell**