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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“AMONG US!”**

John 1:1-5, 14

■ John 1:14: **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** *Among us!*  
{Mt 9:11; 23:28} **“Among us”** greedy **“tax collectors and”** depraved **“sinners”** *and* **“among us”** **“Pharisees”** who project the image of righteousness **“but on the inside ... are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”**

{Jn 5:4; Mt 4:24; Jer 17:5} **“Among us,”** **“blind... lame [and] paralyzed,”** those who are **“afflicted with diverse torments”** and **“suffering severe pain”** *and* **“among us”** who are so confident of our own strength.

{Lk 4:18; Jas 2:6; Jer 5:28} **“Among us”:** **“the poor... the prisoners... the oppressed”** *and* **“among us,”** **“the rich”** **“who have grown... sleek”** and **“do not defend the just cause of the poor.”**

■ {Jn 1:1, 3, 14} It is a great wonder that **“the Word”** who **“was”** **“in the beginning,”** who **“was with God,”** who **“was God,”** and **“Through [whom] all things were made,”** **“became flesh.”**

☑ Fifteen centuries ago, Augustine of Hippo attempted to capture this incredible mystery in this poem:

**Maker of the sun,  
He is made under the sun.  
In the Father he remains,  
From his mother he goes forth.  
Creator of heaven and earth,**

**He is born on earth under heaven.  
Unspeakably wise,  
He is wisely speechless.  
Filling the world,  
He lies in a manger.  
Ruler of the stars,  
He nurses at his mother’s bosom.  
He is both great in the nature of God,  
And small in the form of a servant.**

Amen! Yet, is it not equally astonishing that he **“made his dwelling among us”?!**

{Php 2:6; Ps 97:9; Ex 15:11; 1 Ti 6:16; Mk 16:19; Rev 7:11} He **“who [is] in very nature God,”** **“Most High”** and **“exalted,”** **“majestic in holiness”** and **“awesome in glory,”** who is seated **“at the right hand of”** the Lord Almighty and before whom the angels **“[[fall] down on their faces”** – he **“made his dwelling among us”?!**

■ John 1:14: **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”**

It can be difficult to live among others.

☑ When I was in seminary a friend needed a roommate to make his housing more affordable. I was in the same boat: money was, as they say, “too tight to mention.”

I liked Charlie. I respected his character. I admired his work ethic. He was funny and intelligent and deeply committed to Jesus. So when he asked me to move in and split the rent, I really wanted to.

There was just one sticking point: the urn of *kimchi* on his counter. *Kimchi* is a Korean food of

highly spiced fermented vegetables. There are hundreds of recipes but it is inevitably spicy, sour, and pungent – uniquely, overpoweringly pungent to most Western noses.

In 2008 a Korean astronaut had a spot on the International Space Station. His participation was contingent on this condition: before he went into space, scientists had to find a way to reduce the odor of *kimchi*. The project cost millions of dollars, but they did it.

Among Koreans *kimchi* is more than a staple food: it is *the* Korean national dish. Every one of the Korean students I knew loved *kimchi* and made it in his kitchen.

I was not proud of my weakness, but I knew that I didn't have it in me to be Charlie's housemate. His *kimchi* came between us.

Surely, the stench of dirt and decay and death is far worse in the nostrils of the God-man than *kimchi* is in mine. Even so, he willingly **“made his dwelling among us”!**

☑ Years later Beth and I and our older girls were living in Essex, Iowa, when a new family moved into the house across the street.

Early on we tried to be friendly; but they wanted nothing to do with us. That was interesting, since they welcomed many visitors in for short visits, usually between the hours of 11 p.m. and 1 a.m.

This couple had a little daughter. She had poor hygiene; she played outside unsupervised for hours at a time, and her manners were atrocious even for a three year old.

The family kept a pit bull dog. With better owners, it might have made a good pet. But they mistreated the animal and it was a menace. Once, while I was picking up

the mail from our box on the street it decided to use my arm as a chew toy. (I am grateful for tetanus shots!)

It was evident that our neighbors were running a drug house. The police knew they were manufacturing and selling methamphetamine, but a suspected leak on the force delayed their arrest.

Finally, after some intensive praying, our street was crowded with state troopers, sheriff's deputies, local police, fire fighters, EMTS, and a Hazardous Materials crew from Kansas City. We were relieved that our neighbors were busted and we no longer had to live anywhere near them.

Surely, immorality, injustice, and idolatry are far more offensive to the sinless Son of God than to us. Even so, he willingly **“made his dwelling among us”!**

No one here ferments *kimchi* in their house. (Trust me, we would know it if they did!) Yet there are things about my body (and yours), my personality (and yours), my habits (and yours) that would make it impossible for some individuals to live with me (or you).

To the best of my knowledge, no one here makes or deals illicit drugs. Yet each of us who has passed the age of accountability is guilty of horrific sin. Never mind that our offenses are not prosecutable in an earthly court of law. We have earned the death penalty.

■ Nevertheless **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”**

**“God demonstrates his own love for us in this”** wrote the apostle Paul: **“While we were still**

**sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). Messiah’s voluntary and substitutionary death is, indeed, amazing!

{Jn 1:14, NLT} He could as well have written, **“While we were still sinners, Christ” “became human and lived ... among us.”** His fellowship with sinners like us is no less generous, no less merciful, no less sacrificial, than his death!

God in Christ chose us for his neighbors!

He chose us before we repented of our sins!

He chose us before we believed and confessed!

He chose us before we were transformed by the renewing of our minds!

He chose us before we even began to be conformed to his likeness!

That is not all. Messiah has drawn near to us knowing that many will never draw near to him!

Our Maker has endowed us with the freedom to respond as we will. The Lord Jesus has shed blood, sweat, and tears to woo us; yet he has never compelled anyone to believe and receive and love him.

{Jn 1:10} He granted this liberty, knowing that many of the beings to whom he gave life would **“not recognize him.”**

{Jn 1:11} He granted this liberty, knowing that many of **“his own”** would **“not receive him.”**

{Is 53:3} He granted this liberty, knowing that he would be **“despised and rejected ... one from whom people hide their faces... held... in low esteem.”**

■ {Jn 1:14} All of this notwithstanding, he has chosen us! **“We”** are lowly creatures, yet we **“have seen his glory,**

**the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

{Jn 1:12; Ro 8:17} It is the same here as in Palestine, the same now as in the first century: **“to all who [do] receive him, to those who [believe] in his name, he [gives] the right to become”** more than his neighbors, more even than his friends – **“he [gives] the right to become children of God,” “heirs of [his Father] and co-heirs with [him]!”**

God the Son has chosen us. Will we choose him?

He has made his home with us. Will we make our home with him?

He has become our neighbor. Will we be his?

He has become our friend. Will we be his?

He has come to make us the children of God.

Will we be his brothers and sisters?

**“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** This is the meaning of Christmas.