In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” With these words John the Evangelist justifies the symbol that is associated with this gospel, the eagle, as can be seen at the feet of John next to the Jesus statue behind the high altar. Like the eagle who soars high and lofted above the earth, in the reading of this gospel we are brought to new and untold heights, to behold the one who dwells far above the earth, the one whom the heavens cannot contain. We are given insight into the mysteries of the triune God, for in the beginning, at the beginning of creation, the Word already was. Echoing the words of the creation account in Genesis, this Eagle Evangelist invites us to peer behind the very veil of time and see the beginning of the universe. With these opening words, John’s Gospel promises vision of what eye has never before seen, and to speak what has never before been heard: in the beginning, the Word was God.

But, immediately after peering behind the veil of time to behold the beginning of all creation, immediately after soaring up to heaven to contemplate the mystery of the relation between God and his Word, John brings us crashing down back to this ordinary earth: “the Word became flesh.” Just when we thought we might soar on eagle’s wings up to the third heaven with Saint Paul, just when we thought we might be given a mystical vision like that of Moses who saw the glory of the Lord pass before him on the top of the mountain, just when we thought we might hear the mysterious still, small voice with Elijah in the cleft of the rock, or perhaps turn a corner and find another burning bush, the eagle alights back down upon the surface of this mundane world to see what we all already know: human flesh. The Word became flesh. On this high and holy festival morning, we celebrate that it was God who alighted on this ordinary, mundane world. As the hymn has it, “mild he lay his glory by.” He put off his glory, so that he might put on human flesh.

The same Word which was with God in the beginning, the Word through whom God spoke all of creation into existence, the Word that was already God before all worlds began, this same Word became flesh. The same Word that appeared to Moses in a bush, the Word that freed Israel from Egypt, the same Word that gave the Law on the mountain, this same Word came to abide with humankind, and to do so as one of them. This word became, in the words of
Adam when he first beheld Eve, this word became “bone of [our] bone and flesh of [our] flesh” (Genesis 2:23). He became one of us.

The one who has known the love of the Father from all eternity, now looks to a mother for love and for comfort. The one who with the Father looked down upon his creation in love and delight, now looks up to his Father as part of that creation. Now when the Father looks down upon his creation, he sees his perfect Image looking back at him, but this time with a human face, a face like ours.

So we need not soar up into the heavenly places to see God, we need not ascend into heaven to contemplate the mysteries of the triune God, for in the Incarnation of God’s Word, the Glory of the heavens has come down to earth; in the enfleshment of God’s Word, Love now has a human shape, a human body. In Jesus Christ, the Creator has become the created. In this little infant, God has visited his creation. So now to truly soar with John the Eagle Evangelist is to look to this Christ-child, to contemplate the glory of God is to seek the one born in a lowly stable.

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” The Word of God did not just come to dwell with twelve men in first-century Israel. He came to dwell among us. Not just the “us” of Jerusalem, not just the “us” of first century Israel. This “us” encompasses, includes, all of humanity, the whole human race. He came to dwell with you, he came to dwell with me. He is Immanuel—as the children might remember and as some of you may have listened in and heard—he is God with us. He is not God against us. He is not God above us. He is not God looking down upon us. He is God in our very midst, he is God with us.

He is not with us as he had once been with Moses in a once seen burning bush. He is not with us as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He does not dwell with us as the mysterious shekinah glory between the cherubim mounted atop the ark of the covenant. These were all types and figures. These were all used by God for a specific time and specific purpose, but they all were pointing ahead to something else. Today we celebrate the feast that all of these other appearances were pointing forward to: the birth into our humanity of the very glory of God, glory as of the only Son from the Father; we celebrate the birth in human form of the light of the burning bush, the very Light of the world, the light that has shined out of darkness and enlightens every man, woman and child. All of these other appearances, and all that happened in and to Israel, was preparation for the Word to become flesh, it was the story of the Word becoming flesh. And so the glory of God, the light of God himself, shines forth from a little child. To soar with John the Evangelist and to see God is now to see the face of a human like us. Veiled in
flesh, the godhead see, veiled in flesh the godhead see, hail the Incarnate Deity.

So too we might say, veiled in a human voice, God’s voice we hear. When God speaks to us, when God speaks his Word, it is a human voice that we hear. As our epistle lesson from Hebrews says, “in many and various ways God spoke to his people of old by the prophets, but now in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son” (1:1). The Word through whom God spoke creation into existence, became a little child who yet needed to learn his first words. But he did this, so that when God would speak to us, it would be a human voice that we heard.

And so what I have to give you this morning are a few simple words: come, come let us adore him, him who is Christ the Lord. Come let us adore the one who in the beginning took dust and made spotless and innocent humankind, but in these last days came in the likeness of sinful flesh, so that sinful flesh might be made spotless and innocent once again. Come let us bow down before the one who breathed life into the lungs of our first parents, who had only ever breathed out life, but condescended to need to breathe in for his own life, who now needed to take his own first breaths, so that we might again know that life comes from God alone. Come let us walk with the one who walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, but who for our sakes would have to learn to stand, and to crawl, and would eventually walk through death and hell, so that we might walk with him once again. Come let us gaze in wonder upon the one who set the stars in their courses in the heavens, but came to earth to gaze up at them with the rest of us. Come, let us kneel before the one whom heaven and earth could not contain, but who on Christmas morning could not even fill the space of a food trough. Come, and receive this one’s human flesh. For as the heavens could not contain him, yet he could not fill the manger, so too will this bread that you receive probably not fill your hands or your stomach, but your body will be unable to contain the fullness of life that will be given to you in this meager and lowly feast. For under the veil of his human flesh, we encounter God. For us and for our salvation, this one came down from heaven, so that he might give his own human life to us, and with it, the very life of God, both now and forevermore.

Amen.