

CHAPTER 2

THE WORD BECAME FLESH...

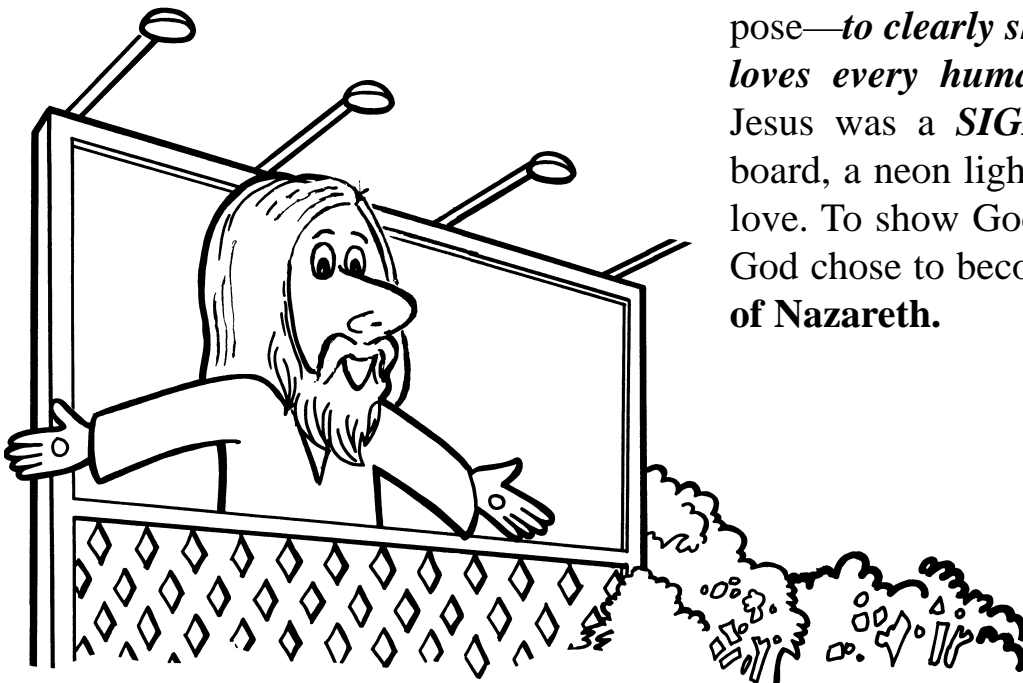
For thousands of years, people struggled to understand God's nature. And, God continued to be active in creation, guiding the lives of God's children. But, we were disobedient creatures and refused to love God and each other. When God *spoke* to us through the prophets, we refused to listen.

God saw that the people needed a living, breathing, example of love. God sent God's son, Jesus Christ, to live among us—to *show* us without a

doubt what God is like and what we can become. Both fully God and fully human, Jesus showed us that God's nature is *totally loving* and that our potential is *to be like God*.

God was no longer interacting with humankind through a "middle man." God came *in person* to speak directly to people. God lived with us, loved with us, suffered with us, cried with us, and finally died—all *for* us, a once-and-for-all-time expression of God's totally unturnoffable love.

Christians believe that both the life and death of Jesus had a specific purpose—to *clearly show how much God loves every human being!* In short, Jesus was a **SIGN**, a poster, a billboard, a neon light, showing us God's love. To show God's total love for us, God chose to become a **SIGN**—Jesus of Nazareth.



The Sovereign Lord has filled me with his spirit. He has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to announce release to captives and freedom to those in prison.

Isaiah 61:1 TEV

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.”

Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, as he said to them, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.”

Luke 4:16-22 TEV

JESUS COMES HOME

Join with several other members of your group and read the scripture account above about the return of Jesus to his home town synagogue. Enact the event as you think it might be covered today as a story on the Nightly News. One person can be the on-the-spot reporter interviewing persons who were present at the scripture reading. The other members will act the part of persons who heard Jesus read the prophecy from Isaiah and proclaim himself to be the fulfillment of that prophecy. Try to react honestly to the situation. Imagine that you have grown up in the same town with Jesus. You have known him all your life. You may have even attended school with him, or perhaps whittled scraps of wood with him in his father’s carpenter shop. Could you accept him as the Messiah? Keep in mind that you know nothing of his death and resurrection.

After the role play, share your feelings about what happened with the others in your group.

One day when Jesus was praying alone, the disciples came to him. “Who do the crowds say I am?” he asked them. “Some say that you are John the Baptist,” they answered. “Others say that you are Elijah, while others say that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.” What about you?” he asked them. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are God’s Messiah.” Then Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell this to anyone.

Luke 9:18-22 TEV

Who do you say that I am?

Jesus lived as a SIGN, showing and telling of God’s absolute love for us. His entire life was lived for the sake of others. He was moved by love in his relationships with those around him, and he valued his religious heritage as a guide for living. He was able to see beyond the letter of the Law to the spirit of justice behind it. Jesus taught those around him of the loving, merciful nature of God. He cared for the poor and the outcast of his society, and taught about the coming kingdom of God. Jesus committed his life to teaching us to love God and others, calling us to be his disciples.

The example Jesus set for us is a challenging one. And, we are able to follow that example with different amounts of success. *In the space on the next page, list three of the values you see expressed in Jesus’ life that you admire the most.* For instance, you may really appreciate the value he

placed on each person’s worth, or you may be excited by his devotion to God. Perhaps you admire his ability to relate to people with love in all situations, or his caring about those who were down-and-out. Think of all of the stories you have heard of Jesus, and *choose the three values he taught that you most admire.*

Then, when you have listed these three values, evaluate where you are in accomplishing these three in your life right now. After each value you have written down, write either *“doing well,” “doing about average,”* or *“I need help.”*

Finally, in the space provided below each value, list one new way you can think of to express that value in your everyday living. For instance, if one of your values is to care for others who are in need, you might decide to run errands for an elderly person living in your neighborhood.

VALUES IN JESUS' LIFE...AND MINE!

One value that I see in Jesus' life that I would like to make my own is _____

How I am doing _____

One thing I can do to show this value in my life is _____

A second value is _____

How I am doing _____

One thing I can do to show this value in my life is _____

A third value is _____

How I am doing _____

One thing I can do to show this value in my life is _____

After you have completed this activity, find a partner from your group and share your insights and feelings with one another.

My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. And you are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I heard from my Father. You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. This, then, is what I command you: love one another.

John 15:12-17 TEV

No man has greater love than this!

Jesus' lifestyle and ministry disturbed many of the people of his time because they were unwilling to give up their selfish ways to live a life based upon love. Jesus was so filled with God's love that he continued to love everyone at all times even though this led to his arrest, trial, and execution. The death of Jesus was the biggest SIGN of all. He died as a once-and-for-all-time expression of God's love for us.

This same lifestyle of self-giving love is the one that we, his disciples, are to make our own. There was no

greater demonstration the Son of God could have made to prove to us once and for all that God's nature is totally loving, than to live by that love even though it ultimately meant his death.

If the event had ended there, the incident would have been easily forgotten as just one more criminal execution, or the death of one more religious fanatic. But, the Christ was resurrected!

After the SIGN (the life and death of Jesus) had happened, God gave us the resurrection as a means of lighting up the SIGN, guaranteeing that it would always be seen and remembered. And, in an exciting and somewhat mysterious way, the resurrection of Jesus also set the stage for our own resurrection. We can be resurrected to new life just by seeing and understanding and believing the truth of the SIGN God made in Jesus! We become new beings—Christians—by accepting the truth of God's love which we see in God's son, Jesus of Nazareth.



AT JESUS' CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION

Read the accounts of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution in the Bible (Matthew 26:31-27:50, Mark 14:27-15:37, Luke 22:31-23:46, John 18:1-19:30). Jesus was both fully God and fully human. The scriptures tell us that he cried, he asked God if there might not be another way to prove God's love for God's people, and he asked God why he had been left alone. But, the scriptures also tell us that Jesus rose above his despair to accomplish his mission and glorify God. In the space below, pretend that you are one of the persons present at the crucifixion. You might choose to be one of the disciples, or one of the Pharisees, a Roman Soldier, or one of the thieves who were crucified with Jesus. Perhaps you will choose to take the role of Jesus, himself, or of his mother. Describe the events as they take place and your reaction to them. Try to use colorful, feeling words to express your ideas. Then share your work and insights with a friend.

I am _____

These are the things I see happening _____

This is how I feel about them _____

It is now the morning of the resurrection. In the space below, describe how the person you chose to be probably reacted to the news that Jesus has risen. Again, put yourself in that person's place and describe their feeling, thoughts, and actions as clearly as possible.

When I heard the news, I felt _____

Think back over the events of the arrest, trial, execution, and resurrection of Jesus. In what ways, if any, do these events show you that God loves you? _____
