

Christmas Day, December 25, 2022

Readings: Exodus 40:17–21; 34–38; Titus 3:4–7; John 1:1–18

The Living and Life-Giving Word of God Dwells among Us in the Flesh

In the beginning God created all things through His Word, His Son. But man fell into sin, and with man all creation was cursed. Therefore, God spoke His Word again, this time into the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle of our human nature (Ex. 40:17–21, 34–38). *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:1–14). The Son of God took on our flesh and blood and died on the cross in order that we might receive the right to become the children of God through faith. Baptized into Christ’s body, we are made partakers of a new Genesis, *“the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”* (Titus 3:4–7). In Christ, the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man has truly appeared.

Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

You might be wondering what in the world we read today, because it doesn't exactly sound like you might think the Christmas story should sound. I mean, John doesn't really talk about the birth of Jesus very much except in verse 14 where he says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory." Therein lies the key. We have seen His glory. That tells us why in the world we read this Exodus passage. The Exodus passage, this is Moses and the people of Israel in the desert. They're wandering around, they're following after this pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And that was the manifestation of the glory of God, literally. They saw it on the mountaintop. They heard the voice and that was when they received the 10 commandments. Moses received it. And when they heard the voice of God and all Israel heard it, they told Moses, "Please, you go up and talk to God because we're scared to hear His voice. So you go up and you talk to Him and we'll stay here away from all of that glory and majesty and might," because the presence of God in all of its glory filled them with fear. They were afraid lest they be in the presence of God and they die. And you know what the Lord's answer was to them when they said that? He said, "Yeah, they're right. If they do come into my presence unclean as they are, they will die. And so it is right for you to send a representative, Moses, an intermediary between God and His people."

And in the Old Testament it was Moses, the primary one, the chief prophet of the Old Testament. And what does he do? He receives the 10 commandments and then he's told also to build this tabernacle, and the ark of the covenant, and all the dietary laws, and all of this ceremonial laws, and everything else that the Old Testament people had to do. But here we're going to focus on the tabernacle because God designed a place where He would show His presence to the people, where the people would know with absolute certainty that He was present with them because the pillar of cloud would descend and fill the tabernacle and they could see it being filled with what they knew was the presence of God.

And at night, can you imagine the glory of God filling this tabernacle, a burning fire that does not consume the tabernacle itself. It reminds you of the burning bush in some ways where the fire is there, but the bush is not consumed because the presence of the Lord is there. And so they see at night. I mean, what a nightlight that is, the glory and majesty of God in the center of the camp. God came to the tabernacle, to the ark and the

mercy seat and He allowed His presence to be seen by the people so that they knew they were being guided by God and God was in their midst.

Now you and I, we don't see a pillar of cloud today and we didn't see a pillar of fire last night. And yet the glory of God was here with us and is with us today. In fact, in the New Testament, when it talks about Jesus coming and dwelling among us, the Word there means God came and tabernacled with us. It's very much connected to the presence of God in the Old Testament. The tabernacle was a place where God's presence dwelt. And it was a place where Moses, the intermediary, would go in and communicate and offer praises and sacrifices to God for the covering of their sins. But now we don't see a pillar of cloud or a pillar of fire, but we see the body and blood of Jesus Christ tabernacling with us, dwelling amongst us. Not only that, when we received our baptisms and the pastor made the sign of the cross and poured the water over us, he said, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And you were filled with the presence of God.

Now the strange thing of the New Testament is that God tabernacles not just with us but in us and through us. He is present in each and every one of us. He dwells with us. His presence is always there and we receive the body and blood, His presence, on a weekly basis. God comes. His glory comes to us just like it was in the Old Testament. Except that when we experience the presence of God, we do not cower in fear, afraid of the glory and majesty and might and justice of God because of the greater intermediary, Jesus Christ. Moses was a sinner. He needed to confess his sins and offer sacrifices for his sins before he could enter the Holy of Holies. Jesus Christ did not need to do that. He was the Holy of Holies. He was the glory of God personified in the person of Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.

And every once in a while His glory shines out. We think of the transfiguration where it just burst out and you could see that fire in Christ so that the disciples had to bury their heads and could not look at Jesus for the glory was so majestic. The glory of God come to earth for us and for our salvation. So we thank God for His presence that He tabernacled with us.

That's very important because it is really communicating that God is present here, just as He was present in the Old Testament. In fact, what does John say? No one has ever seen God, the only God, but who is at the father's side has made Him known. In other words, whenever we see God show up Old Testament or New Testament, it's the Son who is the Word of God. Every time we hear God speak, even in the Old Testament, that is the Son of God acting as an intermediary between us and the Father. He is always there. He is always standing in the gap protecting us by His blood because as we are covered by the blood of Christ, we have received our salvation and we have received the righteousness of Christ given to us.

And so we know that we are saved not by our own works, not by what we have done, but by the washing of regeneration. The washing that should sound familiar, should sound like baptism, like we have been washed in the waters of Christ that are connected to His blood being offered as a sacrifice. And through this spiritual washing we are cleaned and we can enter the Holy of Holies without fear because the Holy of Holies is here with us at all times and in all places. There is no veil separating us from the glory of God. There's simply Christ who has forgiven us, who has redeemed us, who has saved us.

Ultimately, you'll hear this again when we get to Easter, when Christ rises from the dead. The tabernacle eventually became the temple. Same structure, same design, same perspective. And the Holy of Holies is still there, but it's permanent in the temple. But what happens when Christ rises from the dead? Actually no, what happens when he dies? Got the timing off a little bit. When he dies, what happens? The curtain that separates

the Holy of Holies is ripped in two. Because no longer do we need the veil to separate us from God. Christ brings us into His presence. And in His presence we no longer need to be afraid. But we are at peace. Peace because God has forgiven us, because we know the love of Jesus Christ given to us freely and therefore we are heirs of eternal life, heirs of God in all of His glory.

And what a glorious music that will be on that last day when He comes again. We will sing the praises of God and we will joyfully rejoice in His presence. We celebrate His coming and we anticipate with joy His next coming. Because as glorious and magnificent as it was that God came to dwell with us, how much more amazing is it going to be when we get to dwell with Him in His home, which is ours, the new heavens and the new earth, Paradise, where we are free from illness and sickness and war and rumor of war, where every tear is wiped from our eyes and we will sing the glories of God all the days of our lives, which will never end. May we always look forward with joy and hope for that day.

And in the meantime, let us communicate the joy and love to those around us. Because there are people out there who need to hear the peace which surpasses all understanding. Goodwill to men and peace on earth. That's what they need to hear. That's what they need to have. And that's what we have to offer.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.