

"The LORD Comes to His Temple"

Sermon #6

"The Incarnate Word"

John 1:14

25 December Anno Domini 2002

The Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord - Christmas Day

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

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

Dear Baptized,

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Behold, a shepherd leaves his flock for a time. He walks from the place where some are gathered and far too many are straying. It's not that he doesn't care that he goes; it's that he does care. Thus he must leave them for awhile. At the appointed time, the shepherd goes over to that one particular place. God is come down there and the shepherd will be in the Presence of the LORD God Almighty. The shepherd could not ascend to God's glorious Paradise. Therefore Jehovah has come down in order that the shepherd might be in the very Presence of God.

Indeed, the Bible tells us that "Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; and he called it Tent of Meeting. And every one who sought the LORD would go out to the Tent of Meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose up, and every man stood at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the Tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, every man at his tent door" (Exodus 33:7-10).

While in the Tent of Meeting, Moses would hear God speak to him; in the Presence of the LORD Moses heard the Word. "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14). What a blessing for the children of God to be congregated in the Presence of the LORD and to be rested in His mercy and grace. The LORD was with them as they traveled in their exodus journey to the promised land, and the Word tented among them in the pillar of cloud standing at the door where eternity stood in time, even as the people of God dwelt in their aging tents. They were called to wait in the Presence of the Yahweh and in faith the same. For one day, the time would come when one of their descendants would be moved by the Holy Spirit to write the Good News: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

The Tent of Meeting was a temporary place. Thus in the fulness of time when, behold the new has come and the old has passed away. Thus the shepherd moves from the one tent to the new and recently completed Tent of Meeting where more than two or three are gathered. He inspects all

things whatsoever he was told that everything may be in accordance with the Word of God. The cloud moves from the old to the new.

"Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the Glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not set out - until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels" (Exodus 40:34-38).

With the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat covering the Law within ... with the basin filled with the Word's cleansing water and the bread of the Presence set at the Lord's Table ... with the Promise of God's Word of Law and Gospel with them, the Church journeyed and abode in the LORD. So the Word remained the Way and tabernacled among them.

Behold the son of David is about to speak for all things are now ready. After a week of years for its construction, the Temple is ready. On the eighth year the priests "brought the Ark of the LORD's Covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the Temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim" (1 Kings 8:6-7). These angels spread their wings over the place of the Ark and overshadowed the Ark. It is as if these angels were announcing the coming Presence of the LORD. For "when the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the Temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the Glory of the LORD fill His Temple" (1 Kings 8:10-11).

Listen, for Solomon is standing before the altar of the LORD and in front of the congregation and he is praying. We listen in on his prayer via the Word ... "Give attention to Your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that Your servant is praying in Your Presence this day. May Your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which You said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that You will hear the prayer Your servant prays toward this place. Hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive" (1 Kings 8:28-30).

Behold, the forgiving Word is the Truth and dwells among them.

The shepherds left their flocks and journeyed toward the House of Bread. As they hurried to Bethlehem, they had only the Word of the Christmas angel, "Fear not. I bring you Good News of a great joy that will be for all the people. For to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:10-12).

This is the Word of the Word. And what did they find? Dearly beloved, they found the Word become flesh and was among us. What Child is this? Dearly beloved, this is Emmanuel, that is, this little baby boy is God with us. And the disciple whom Jesus loved, would proclaim this Good News in Holy Writ ...

"Behold, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

In a world of hurt the Word became flesh in order to suffer the agony and Divine wrath for all the sins of the world ... thought, word and deed ... past, present, future. He came to take upon Himself the penalty due the original sin of the old adam and his heirs. The Incarnate Son of God atoned for the sins of Cain and Abel ... Saul and David ... Jezebel and Mary ... Judas and Peter ... and you. In a land of death the Word became flesh in order to die the death deserved by the world. In doing so Jesus gave Himself for the Life of the world. On the third day, behold, the Word that became flesh and tented among us rose from the dead. For forty days, Jesus tabernacled with His disciples and "spoke about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Then ascended into heaven and it at the right hand of the Father.

"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's Presence. Nor did He enter heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the Sacrifice of Himself. Just as man is appointed once to die, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him" (Hebrews 9:24-28).

Behold, a shepherd and a flock congregate in the House of Bread. And what of us? Does the Word become flesh now dwell among us? Yes, for that is His Promise and He has given us His Word on this. He Who, according to both His Divine and human natures, is in heaven, is also, according to both His Divine and human natures, is truly with us. We are in His Presence and this humble abode is where His Glory dwells. His glory is here but hidden, here not under the covering of a tent or in a cloud, but His glory is real - hidden and revealed in Word and Sacrament.

One is called to stand before the altar and lead the congregation in prayers, petitions and thanksgiving ... called to teach all things whatsoever the Lord Jesus has taught, especially that Jesus is the Mercy Seat Who has fulfilled the Law in our place. The Bread of the Real Presence of the Incarnate Christ is the Feast that is served at the Table in the Holy Place. Behold, here is the wine to gladden the heart of man (Psalm 104:15); that is, "the Blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God" (Hebrews 9:14); that is, the Blood of Christ which is poured out "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The font stands at the ready, waiting for the watery Word of Life to be poured out and proclaimed; that men, women, infants, aged are baptized and forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Dearly beloved, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us saying, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Amen.