

Christmas 2, Year C 2022
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
January 2, 2022
The Very Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

Gospel reading used: John 1:1-18

Tabernacling ... and regifting

It is a huge leap from baby Jesus in the manger to “in the beginning was the Word. It has been said that might be a season of twelve days because we need that long to make sense of God who comes to us in the form of a person in a manger. I am sure that I am not alone in thinking that it will take much longer than twelve days for me to get my head around “Lord Jesus” sleeping in a feed trough; it has been a lifetime’s work so far.

And just when we might begin to dwell in the mystery of “God with us,” Immanuel, in Bethlehem, from the gospel of Luke, we hear from the Gospel of John. John does not write about mangers, shepherds or Bethlehem, Mary, or Joseph. John’s writing takes us back to before the beginning of time, and we find that Jesus was there. Before there was time, before there was “Earth,” before we had ancestors, there was Jesus with God. What a wonderful mystery!

The Word, Jesus, God with us before we were, came to live among us. Not only in our individual hearts – the verbs here are plural – the Word came to “tabernacle” with us. We remember the idea of tabernacling in from Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain. Our beloved Peter, upon seeing Jesus and Moses and Elijah, says, “let’s tabernacle here!” Let’s camp out here in a big tent, and stay long enough that our hanging out with Jesus is not a vacation or a visit, but this very place becomes our home. Let’s dwell here awhile.

The tabernacle in the Old Testament was considered to be the place where God lives. The tabernacle was 75 feet wide and 150 feet high. Imagine a **tent** that big. At the far end of the tent

was the Holy of Holies, a room separated by a heavy curtain. Think about a grand theater curtain lined with gold and embroidered pomegranates. Behind that elaborate curtain was the Ark of the Covenant, a special holy box. It was a big box, befitting a place in a big tent, about 45 inches long, by 27 inches by 27 inches. Inside the box was the Ten Commandments and a bit of manna. This box, called the Ark of the Covenant, was the most sacred place where God lived: in the tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies, in the Ark, and **most sacredly**, in the Ten Commandments.”

Hear the Old Testament bible stories come to mind: Moses smashing idols and the Golden Calf, and then God in the book of Exodus commanding Moses to build this Ark. It was made of acacia wood, lined with gold ... we remember this time of wandering in the desert, out from being slave in Egypt, walking toward the land – a dwelling place – that God would provide. Maybe Peter, having grown up with this history as a sacred story, thought that the mountain top was, finally, after the destruction of two Temples, this promised land, with Jesus being the New Moses. For the ancient Israelites, the Ark was the manifestation of God on earth, complete with Gold cherubs on top and fire that scorched the ground below.

The scandal of the gospel – have you heard that term? Is that, with Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, the place to see the living God is in the **person**, the flesh, the body, the heart, the mind, of Jesus. To find the best image of God, we do not look in the Ark of the Covenant, behind a curtain, to a place holy above others. Or to the stars, waterfalls, or whatever other, truly magnificent *evidences* of God that we may find. Evidences of God are found in many magnificent – grand or minute – things, but to *find* God, *know* God, and to visit the place God dwells, is to go to the person of Jesus.

You know by now that there is good news and more good news. God is in the stars, as maker and creator of an ongoing creation. God is not finished with us yet – with the stars, with the planets, and with us. God is found in the miracle of every infant, every baby, every person. Maybe that is why God came to us as a baby: so that we could see the miracle, recognize the miracle, and throughout our lives – not in just twelve days – come to see the miracle of God incarnate, Immanuel, Jesus.

In the meantime, that baby needs a minimum of food, clothing, and shelter.

How do we feed Jesus?

By caring “for the least of these;” by feeding the hungry with good food, food being produce and the creations that God has given us, and feeding spiritual hunger with the word and truth of God.

By keeping the word/Word of God alive in ourselves and in our corporate body by reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Holy Scriptures.

We feed the entirety of our personhood by feeding on that which God has given us.

How do we clothe Jesus?

By clothing the naked in garments made of fiber and spiritual garments made by the body of Christ.

How do we shelter Jesus?

By welcoming Jesus into our homes – this home of The Church of the Redeemer and holy homes that have nothing to do with this building. We shelter Jesus by saying “welcome” over and over again, until all feel at home “tabernacle-ing” with Jesus.

When we have fed, clothed, and sheltered Jesus, Immanuel, we have something else to do with our precious gift. We “re-gift” Jesus into the world. The “regifting” of Jesus has nothing to do with our gift being the wrong size, the wrong shape, or something unwanted. This gift that we have harbored, dwelled with, must be shared, Because the light of Christ cannot be hidden.

Because we find so much joy in dwelling with this gift that we could not possibly keep it to ourselves, not because we understand the mystery, but that we are in wonder and awe ... and Because this gift is light and grace and truth, we cannot live into that fullness all on our own.

This Christmas and beyond, in what we say and do and live as ourselves and in the body of Christ we give Jesus to the world, that the world might become God’s kingdom.

And although in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God,
I invite you back to manger,

Because maybe we can make it to the manger,

To meet the Christ-child,

To pick him up and talk with him and sing with him and hold him and stay there for a moment,

And then, like a joyful parent or relative or neighbor and friend,

We share Jesus,

God,

Because we know God and hold God and dwell with God, and God in us,

We share God with the world.

Merry Christmas! The Lord is come!