

## God With Us | The Tabernacle and the Advent

### The Lamb and the Altar

Exodus 25.1-9, John 1.1, 14-17, 26-29, 35-37; 2.18-21

11.29.15, Week ONE

Exodus 25.1-9 *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. <sup>3</sup> "This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, <sup>4</sup> blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, <sup>5</sup> rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, <sup>6</sup> oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, <sup>7</sup> onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. <sup>8</sup> "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. <sup>9</sup> "According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.*

John 1.1, 14-17, 26-29 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" <sup>16</sup> For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ... <sup>26</sup> John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. <sup>27</sup> "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." <sup>28</sup> These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. <sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

John 1.35-37 *Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*

John 2.18-21 *The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*

Today, is the first Sunday in the Season of Advent and Advent celebrates "God With Us", i.e. the Incarnation of God at a point in human history, when God stepped into time and space and the Spiritual became Physical. The Advent or arrival of God in Jesus Christ: "She shall call His name Immanuel which translated means, God with us" (Isa. 7.14, Mat. 1.23).

That's where we got the name of this present sermon series: God With Us – The Tabernacle and the Advent.

Now, if you're visiting St. Andrews you may feel lost already...and I could understand why. These are all words we rarely use – Advent, Tabernacle, Incarnation ...AND I have to warn you: there's going to be more. We're going to look at some big ideas and some dense, weighty words. And I really don't want to be doctrinaire/obscure...It's just that THESE ARE big, heavy ideas AND we'll be making some connections between parts of the Bible that aren't always connected...SO let me ask you and invite you to be patient and stick with us (at least til Christmas) AND second, to be OPEN to stretch and open to wonder.

That's one of the Big Goals of this series: to foster a sense of wonder...to help us marvel and be amazed. And I THINK that's appropriate to the Season (not to get all Norman Rockwell on you or sentimental) but it IS okay at this season to become a little child-like.

So let's see what happens. Today, we sort of define our terms – Advent, Tabernacle, Incarnation...and a lot more (this section in John is full of weighty words)... so, we'll just try to get on solid footing with words.

Second, we'll BEGIN to make some connections between parts of the Bible you may not have seen before – connect Exodus (what we've been seeing on Sunday mornings) with Christmas/coming of Jesus Christ.

Third, we'll try and take our first steps in the direction of wonder: an invitation to astonishment for a generation that's seen it all...on our devices!

#### Definition – Connection – Invitation (to Wonder)

Okay...what's going on with these readings from VERY different places in the Bible – Exodus and the Gospel According to John? Let's define/explain:

Well, in Exodus, Moses is on Mt Sinai and he's being given the initial charge to build this sanctuary or sacred space that will be called the Tabernacle. Let me note a few key ideas at this point.

First, the meticulous "pattern" that will take some 16 chapters to describe stands in stark contrast to the Golden Calf incident we saw last week. THEY had no care...just threw their earrings into the pot and out jumped this calf... And it turned into a chaotic riot. It's a contrast between the Holy Revelation that comes down and the synthetic religion that climbs up.

Second, God is engaging the heart – "whoever's heart moves him to give". It's a part of worship from the start.

Third, these materials were evidently taken from the Egyptians as plunder when they left. In a way it was partial back-pay for the years of slavery.

Fourth – lots of colors, layers textures, and even smells...there would be sounds too...of bells. To worship YHWH would be a sensory experience (beauty).

Lastly, the word Tabernacle comes from the Hebrew word for to DWELL. It's the same root of a word you MAY know (if you've been around church and the Bible) i.e. shekinah. So, "Shekinah-glory" was some show or display of visible significance or weightiness or majesty that DWELLED OR REMAINED in one place.

Now, the second passage, is St. John's description of the Advent or Coming of Jesus Christ. John won't tell the narrative of the birth and manger and Shepherds that Matthew and Luke tell. John describes the coming of the Idea, the Mind, the Word of God, "the Logos"...who was with God and who IS the very Mind and Self of God... And the Logos, the Self of God became flesh. That's the meaning of "incarnation" – the "en-flesh-ment" of God, God become Man, God dwelling in human form among us, God With Us.

Then, there's a contrast with John the Baptist who kind of represents the Hebrew Prophets...and Jesus Christ who IS a Prophet but also much more. The prophets express the mind of God, Jesus Christ IS the Mind of God, the perfect and final expression of God's Mind personified...the Word become flesh.

John also calls Him "the Lamb of God"... the One who would come to be sacrificed for the sins of God's people just like the lambs were sacrificed for centuries...HE would be the final/perfect sacrifice.

And finally, the last paragraph (John 2.18-21) is the moment after Jesus Christ went into the Temple (the dwelling place of God on earth) and He did NOT find grace and truth but instead... SALESMEN selling sacrifices and exchanging foreign currencies...and He drove them out.

The Temple Officials asked Him for proof of His credentials and He says, "You wanna see My credentials? Tear down this Temple and in three days I will raise it again...BUT HE WAS SPEAKING OF HIS BODY..." which IS, of course, The Temple, the Tabernacle, THE TRUE DWELLING OF GOD ON EARTH.

John uses these heavy words...like glory: "We saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." That reminds us of one of the most significant texts in the Hebrew Bible, so often quoted in the rest of the Bible, when Moses is on the Mountain and God passes by Him and God proclaims, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and full of lovingkindness and truth" (Exo 34.6) And JOHN writes that he and his fellow eyewitnesses saw the glory of Jesus Christ, and HE was "full of grace and truth". For the early readers, they would think immediately of Moses seeing the glory of God, that God was full of

grace and truth and that Jesus Christ was full of grace and truth. The first readers would NOT miss that!

And “He dwelt among us”...that’s a transliteration of the same word from which we get “shekinah-glory” (glory that dwells). It’s the very same word as Tabernacle. In other words, Jesus Christ IS the Tabernacle of God...He is God with us...God dwelling, “Tabernacle-ing among us”. The Tabernacle in Exodus was given as a sign of something better to come. God would come in a better way, a more enduring and accurate home or dwelling among us...God would actually become One with us...the Mind of God would become Human...flesh...And Jesus Christ IS that Human dwelling of God...God Tabernacle-ing among us... God with us...Immanuel.

Turns out that these opening chapters of John’s Gospel are packed with references to Moses, so many parallels and comparisons, contrasts, fulfillments, allusions. 1:17 “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

These references reflect back to the Tabernacle and the time of Moses...John’s making very deliberate connections. He uses the Tabernacle to tell his story.

Now, here I am indebted to a local professor and theologian...I had heard of some of his ideas from his students and THOUGHT I agreed with him...but I wanted to hear it from the horse’s mouth.

So, I reached out to him and he was VERY gracious to meet with me and fill in the blanks...Warren Gage (formerly at Knox Seminary...) His idea is that NOT only does John see parallels between Moses and the Tabernacle and the Advent or coming of Jesus Christ...not only does he draw the readers attention to the similarities and the symbolism that pointed forward to that time when God would actually dwell among us in Human form...the glory ABIDING on one Person, the embodiment of residing glory, shekinah glory, glory that dwells/remains in Jesus Christ...but John goes on to organize the whole account of Jesus Christ’s Advent or coming using the symbol of the Tabernacle from Exodus.

The pattern (Ex 25.9) is replicated or followed by John who makes it HIS pattern for telling the story of Jesus Christ. God made the Exodus Tabernacle a complex sign...where so many of its parts and features pointed ahead to Jesus Christ.

So we’ll see...John witnesses Jesus Christ speaking and acting and John is repeatedly reminded of the Tabernacle...the features and characteristics, the furniture and the functions of the Tabernacle are pointers and are fulfilled in Jesus Christ...

And that’s what we hope to explore these next few weeks leading to Christmas...that Jesus Christ is the Word, the very Mind of God dwelling... “shekinah-ing”... “Tabernacle-ing” among us... God with us.

AND...even when we come to John Volume TWO...the second major work that the Apostle John wrote, included in the New Testament as the last Book, The Revelation of Jesus Christ According to John... He still sees the imagery of the Tabernacle right to the end of the end, the final chapters of Revelation USE this imagery... Jesus Christ is the TENT where God dwells...HE IS GOD WITH US, the clearest revelation, the Advent or Coming of God – THAT IS WHO Jesus Christ IS.

So...what basically DO we see...when God is manifest or revealed in the Flesh (incarnated) in this historical Person?...What do we see...what is God like? Has the God of the Hebrew Scriptures changed? Is the OT God different from the NT God?...

For instance, the God we saw last week, so wrathful when His people committed spiritual adultery with that Golden Calf ...is He now, in Jesus Christ...more relaxed/lenient? Is He, by now, so accustomed to human sin and rebellion that He's ...sort of Okay with our foibles and peccadillos and our little faux pas? Has God, IN Jesus Christ...sort of mellowed out and gotten past His anger against sin?

When He goes into the place of worship, the Temple...and God With Us, Jesus Christ, finds them twisting worship into a commercial enterprise ...when the grace that comes DOWN and is therefore totally different from ALL synthetic religion – this is NOT based on karma (what you do will come back to you) and NOT based on “quid-pro-quo” (“this for that” - YOU do for God and then HE does for YOU) – the God of the Bible reverses that, He rewards our obedience BEFORE we even obey, treats us as perfect when we ARE NOT...it's grace NOT karma...

And when Jesus Christ goes into the temple and finds that they've made a few little adjustments and turned grace into religion... “Step right up and buy a lamb...turtle-doves for sacrifice...today only two-for-one...step right up!” When Jesus Christ sees that ...He's cool with it...He's mellowed out since the OT...right?

NO...He cleanses the Temple...He overturns their tables. He drives the religion-peddlers OUT...He is STILL the unchanging God...the God who wants YOU...who will not share you with false gods who will enslave and addict and twist you and destroy you as you walk happily on the road to destruction stupefied ... entranced... He is jealous for us because HE ALONE can complete us and fulfill in YOU the purpose for which you were created... and that purpose is eternal wonder...it's worship...it's the opposite of stupor/sleep-walking... it's the eternal, magnificent, eye-opening, awakening that leads to the infinitely joyous sense of awe (Eph. 1.15ff; 3.14ff).

This is, I hope, what this series will be, at least on a small scale...our eyes opening a bit more to how the Big Picture holds together...how the glory abides on this One Person, the Incarnation of God, God with Us in human flesh... “Christ, our God, to earth descended , our full homage to demand.”

What we see...is not a God who is changed but THE God who is now revealed...the jealous God whose purposes for us are GOOD who will become our substitute (as we saw Him stand on the Rock and take our punishment in Exodus) now we see Him, revealed even more clearly...

He will become our Lamb...to be taken to the altar and as our substitute be sacrificed so that we can be free... To the degree that we see that...and WONDER at it...become enthralled and amazed by it...TO THAT DEGREE, we come out of our sleep-walking and we see things as they are...

We see...the world for the beautiful and broken place it is.

We see...ourselves for the damaged and destructive sinners we are and YET INFINITELY loved and secure by grace.

We see... God, the Father of Jesus Christ...LORD of Lords in human vestment...and the WONDER who will both captivate us and liberate us for all eternity.