

December 24, 2023
Fourth Sunday in Advent
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 1:26–38 (2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16; Romans 16:25–27)

GOD COMES LIVING IN A TENT.

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

Tomorrow morning, Christmas morning, we will hear St. John the Evangelist declare:

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14)

In the original language, the word ***“dwelt”*** means literally to ***“live in a tent”*** or ***“to pitch a tent.”*** (Kittel, TDNT, 385–386) After leading His people Israel out of bondage in Egypt by His mighty hand, (cf: Exodus 3:19) God instructed Moses atop Mt Sinai to build a Tabernacle... a portable, holy tent, where God would dwell among His people. (cf: Exodus 25:1–9) Once Moses had completed the construction, the cloud of the Lord overshadowed the tent. It was the visible manifestation of God’s glory and presence with His people. (cf: Exodus 40:34)

In our Old Testament reading we hear that some four hundred years after Moses pitched God’s Tabernacle tent, much had changed. God’s people had entered the Promised Land and Jerusalem was their capital. (cf: 2 Samuel 5:5) The Lord God had taken a lowly shepherd boy named David and made him ruler over all of Israel. By God’s grace, David was a great king. The Lord even granted him peace from his surrounding enemies. (cf: 2 Samuel 7:1) David was so beloved by other nations that Hiram, king of Tyre, sent cedar trees, carpenters and stonemasons to Jerusalem to build for David a house. (cf: 2 Samuel 5:11)

As David grew in knowledge, he became aware of the optics of living in this grand cedar house. He was a sinner who lived in a spectacular house while the almighty God who made him great, still lived in the Tabernacle tent. David knew it should be the other way around. He wanted to set things right. He called Nathan the prophet and told him of his desire to build a house for the Lord. But God alone chooses when and where His tent will be pitched. Through the prophet Nathan, the Lord said no. He didn’t want a temple... at least not yet.

He would later have David’s son, Solomon, build a magnificent temple with expensive furnishings later. The Lord God had greater plans for David. And those plans were ***not what David was to do*** for God – but ***what God would do*** for David. God made him a promise, saying:

“... your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:16)

God wasn’t talking about David’s grand cedar house. He wasn’t talking about the city and countryside where David’s house was located. No. These ***would*** all pass away. God’s promise was that David’s household, his family name, would never end. Never ever! One of his

descendants would sit on God's throne and reign for all eternity. One of David's descendants would be the Messiah.

God was content to live in a tent for the time being. David would neither live to see God's temple built, nor to see the Lord's glory overshadow it. But while David didn't see these things with his eyes, he had God's Word on it. He had God's promise. It would happen. And it did.

Almost a thousand years after David died the angel Gabriel appeared to a humble, poor girl named Mary, living near Nazareth. (cf: Luke 1:26-27)

"... [Gabriel] came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!'" (Luke 1:28)

"... behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:31-33)

Of all the great nations, mighty kingdoms, and powerful dynasties ever to exist in the history of the world, every one of them has come to an end... except for one. The fruit of Mary's womb. This Son would be the new Moses. This Son would be the greater David. This Son is the Son of God, Christ Jesus who will rule over God's eternal Kingdom which has no end. But there was a problem:

"... Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?'" (Luke 1:34)

Gabriel explained that nothing is impossible with God. (cf: Luke 1:37) He said:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

It's the same Spirit that hovered over the waters and participated in the creation all things visible and invisible. (cf: Genesis 1:2) It's the same Spirit would descend upon Jesus at His baptism. (cf: Luke 3:22) And it's the same Spirit that was given to you in your Baptism. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God assumed the human nature in Mary's womb, where He would be clothed in a tent of flesh and bone. Yes, God entering His creation, living in a tent, Tabernacling among His people.

While sitting in his luxurious palace in Rome, Caesar Augustus decreed that a census be taken. So the Word, that was becoming flesh in Mary's womb, was moved from Nazareth and taken to Bethlehem where the Son of the Most High would be born in a stable. (cf: Luke 2:1-7) King Herod the Great didn't like the idea of competing against the Newborn King. So he gave orders from his palace that all male children in and around Bethlehem ages two and under to be killed. Being warned in a dream, Joseph and Mary would flee to Egypt with the Christ child (cf: Mt 2:13-16)

After Herod's death, an angel of the Lord called the holy family out of Egypt and back to Israel. (cf: Matthew 3:19) But upon hearing that Herod's son, the tyrant Archelaus was now in the palace, they withdrew to Galilee. The Son of the Most High, would be raised in a life of poverty in Nazareth.

Caesar, Herod and Archelaus would ride mighty war horses into the cities, but Jesus would ride a donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. (cf: Luke 19:35–36) These powerful rulers would sit on thrones of majesty and wear golden crowns, but Jesus would be nailed to the wood of the cross wearing a crown of thorns. They would die kingly deaths and be buried in royal tombs. Jesus would have His earthly tent of flesh torn, die a criminal's death, and be buried in a borrowed tomb. (cf: Luke 23:53)

To the casual observer, Jesus appeared humble and ordinary compared to those mighty earthly rulers. But when mighty Caesar, Herod and Archelaus died, they remained dead. But not the humble Jesus. He would be crucified, die, and be buried. But then He'd descend into hell to proclaim victory over sin, death, and the devil. (cf: 1 Peter 3:19) And three days later He would be raised from the dead. (cf: Luke 24:1–6) Yes, Jesus died but now He is risen. And He has ascending into heaven where He reigns as King, just as God promised David.

Of all the great nations, mighty kingdoms, and powerful dynasties ever to exist in the history of the world, every one of them has come to an end... except for one. Christ Jesus, the Son of the Most High, reigns forever as the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. (cf: 1 Timothy 6:15) He left the glory of heaven and was born to a poor family living in humble means. He didn't come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. (cf: Mark 10:45)

“... though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Some call it the great exchange. He lived the perfect, sinless life in exchange for the one you could not. He died your death on the cross in exchange for the death you deserve. His resurrection is proof of a future exchange. St Paul tells us your old worn out body will one day be exchanged. He says:

“... the Lord Jesus Christ... will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body...” (Philippians 3:19-20)

It's been almost two thousand years since the birth of Christ. Countless kings have ruled and died. Empires have risen and fallen, civilizations emerged and disappeared. But Jesus remains King of kings and Lord of Lords for now and for all eternity. You have God's Word on it. The almighty God who gave His Word to David and to Mary still gives His Word today. Christ the King still gives His royal and binding decrees.

In Baptism, by His Word, the King claimed you as His own, adopting you into His heavenly family. He gave you the Holy Spirit and clothed you in the tent of His righteousness. In the absolution, by His Word, the King proclaims your sins forgiven. In the preaching of His Word He overshadows you with the Holy Spirit, sanctifying you and keeping you in the true faith. By His Word, the King comes to you in humble means of bread and wine, giving His true body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins and to strengthen your faith unto life everlasting. On the

last day, the King will come to judge all mankind. For all who trust and believe in the King, He will welcome them into His heavenly kingdom. All who disbelieve, He was cast into eternal damnation. You have His Word.

Until His return on the Last Day, He calls you to abide in the King in Word and Sacrament. In the words of St Paul:

“... [He] is able to strengthen you according to [the] gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the [Holy Scriptures which are able] ...to bring about the obedience of faith.” (Romans 16:25–26)

Paul is saying that the Gospel preaching and Holy Scriptures have the power to create in you a response of your faith. (cf: Middendorf, Romans 1–8, Concordia Commentary, 60) When you hear the Word, the Holy Spirit creates and establishes faith in the heart, enabling you to respond in faith... responding by bearing fruits of repentance and faith, serving and loving your neighbor just as God in Christ serves and loves you.

In this sinful world, you’ll always be tempted to look for Jesus in places of grandeur... in the glitz and glamour... in feelings and excitement... in the palatial auditoriums with eloquent preachers. Or perhaps you’ll be tempted to despair because it seems the world continues to circle down the drain while it Lord has abandoned His creation. But when you’re so tempted, remember that He has made you part of His household of faith, not household of sight.

The Son of the Most High, conceived by the Holy Spirit, clothed in a tent of flesh and bone, and tabernacled among His people, still tabernacles among you today. He dwells among you in His Word which creates and establishes faith in the heart, enabling you to respond in faith, and He dwells among you in His Sacraments, where His Word is attached to ordinary means to deliver to you forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

“Rejoice greatly... Shout aloud... Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation...” (Zechariah 9:9)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.