

THE GLORY OF GOD IS PRESENT WITH HIS PEOPLE

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church on this Feast of the Nativity:

And Moses was not able to go into the tent of meeting thus the cloud dwelt upon it and (the) glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Merry Christmas! The glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.

It is fitting that the two prime readings for this Holy Feast are the last words of the Book of Exodus and the first words of the Gospel of St. John. They both speak of the glory of God dwelling with His people in the means He chose, to bring them forgiveness, life, and salvation. Intertwining with those texts are the words of the Apostle Paul, “when the generosity and the philanthropy of God the Savior of us appeared, not from works of righteousness which we did, but according to His mercy He saved us through (a) washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”²

Merry Christmas! The glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. It is fitting that you be merry today, joyful, and even happy, for again you have heard of God’s gracious Presence being among His people. In the Old Testament narrative, the people of God, Old Israel, were forbidden to go into the Presence of God’s throne of

¹ *Exodus* 40:35.

² *Titus* 3:4-5.

Grace. In the New Testament narrative, the people of God, New Israel, are in the Presence of God in our flesh. These texts make this clear:

And Moses was not able to go into the tent of meeting thus the cloud dwelt upon it and (the) glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle.³

And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we saw the glory of Him, glory as only-begotten alongside the Father, full of grace and truth.⁴

According to both eye-witness testimonies you just heard, the glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. In both instances that Presence is veiled. In the first, it is behind curtains of cloth and animal flesh. The Old Testament calls this the tent of meeting. In the second, it is behind a curtain of cloth and human flesh. The New Testament names this the Word enfleshed.

(Did you come here to hear about a Baby in swaddling cloths lying in a manger? If so, you are, for our Gospel text reveals God's mysteries in wrapping Himself in the Baby's flesh. These texts, and their connection to the veiled Presence with God among His people are critical to the Faith. Saving Faith clings to the God, the only God, Who, when He in sacrificial love sees the chief creatures of His creation lost, condemned and in the darkness of sin, breaks through with His light to release and find them).

The Nativity of our Lord is a big event. The glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. For, in the enfleshment of the Word, God willed to take

³ *Exodus 40:35.*

⁴ *John 1:14.*

away our need for human mediators, priests, and gave us one Mediator between God and man, Jesus the Christ. God in the sacrifice of the Christ, in His death alone, abolished the requirement for humans to submit blood-offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. That is the reason we greet with one another with “ I wish you a blessed Nativity, “ or, “Happy Christmas,” and so forth.

Dear ones in Christ, you know, for you have heard, that the God who gave His Holy Law to Moses – to show the people their sins and need for the Savior – that same God has given us His Holy Gospel in Christ. The glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. In the tent of meeting, in the tabernacle of the Old Covenant, barriers were instructed, constructed and placed to keep God’s holiness from annihilating the people in their unholiness. This is declared in the following narrative:

And [Moses] brought the Ark into the tabernacle and set the veil of the screen and screened over (the) ark of the testimony as YHWH commanded Moses.... And the cloud covered the tent of meeting and (the) glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle.⁵

The veils, the curtains, the screen were there to prevent even the then mediators between God and man from being consumed. When that glorious cloud descended in God’s holy brilliance and fire, the people knew not to approach. Even the one who spoke with God on the Mountain, who received the tablets of the Ten Words, who had seen the back parts of God, whose face glowed from being in the Real Presence

⁵ Exodus 40:21,34.

of God, even Moses could not approach when the glory of God filled the holy places behind the veils. The Bible states:

Thus (the) cloud of YHWH was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in (the) eyes of all (the) sons of Israel.⁶

There could be no mistaking the Presence of God with His people in the Old Tabernacle. Day and night His glory was there in their sight. His Holy Word, engraved on tablets of stone by His own Finger, lay in the Ark of the Old Covenant. From that Word in that Ark, the people were to know their sins, and to remember that they needed the mediators God appointed, the priestly class, to intercede for them, with blood.

That time has passed. It will never return. The Old passed away when the New came into Creation. The glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. In a burst of Divine Grace, Mercy and Love, the Real Presence of God entered into our flesh – from the womb of the Virgin – from the Word and the Spirit who worked faith in her through that Word of God. He who had been present with the often faithless and unbelieving Old Israel – who saw His glory over the Tabernacle and still sinned daily – now entered into His people’s fallenness to become one with them.

He no longer dwells in a tent behind veil, screen and curtain. He no longer requires His people’s blood sacrifices for their sins to be poured out between the cherubim over the Ark of the Old Covenant. (As far as history knows, that Ark is lost. And, even if it were found, it would have nothing more than historical meaning. Its

place as the holder of the divine Word has been superseded). The glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.

A new Ark took the place of the Old. This Ark was not made of wood, nor covered with gold. It was an Ark of flesh and blood, clothed in simple cloth, humble, innocent, and very human. This Ark served its purpose, carrying the Word until the Word was able to enter the World to bring God's light to those wandering in darkness. (That Ark was Mary, and like the Ark of the Testimony of the Old Covenant, her place was to bear the Word. Her time has passed, and she rests, most blessed of women, in heaven's peace, joy and love, not troubled by the sins that afflicted her in this life).

The contents of that New Testament Ark, instead of being locked up and lost as were the contents of the Old Testament Ark, broke forth into the world. That is, while the Ten Commandments engraved on stone, Aaron's staff that budded, the jar of Manna, all are lost – likely dust and ashes. So is the body of the Blessed Virgin – gone, buried, dust and ashes. But the Word she bore still lives! St. John still says,

In Him life was, and the life was the light of men; and the light in the darkness shines, but the darkness did not overcome Him.⁷

While the Old Testament Word was hidden under the mercy seat of God, encased in wood and gold, covered by the blood of atonement once per year, the New Testament Word cannot be contained in His Ark. He was born of woman, and His blood

⁶ Exodus 40:38.

⁷ John 1:4-5.

was poured forth once unto death to remove God's wrath at our sins, to save us from sin, death and hell itself. This Word is Present. The glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.

It is here, among the faithful where the Word of God is purely proclaimed, and His Sacraments – the fruits of the cross – are poured upon and into the people of God. He is present with His people, and yet, still veiled – for our protection. Here, in the Word of Holy Absolution, God works. Here, in the Word of the Old and New Testaments, God tears down and builds up. Here, in the proclamation of God's truth sinners are turned to saints, sin is washed away, and new humans arise before God. Here, in the mystery of Water combined with the Word, all who are born dead in trespasses and sin die to them in Christ, and in Him rise to new life. Here, in bites of bread and sips of wine, Jesus enters into the mouths of His people, cleansing them to declare His praise. Oh, how much is contained in the beautiful readings assembled by the ancients! Here is life, and light and salvation. The glory of God still cover(s) the tent of His meeting with His people and that the (the) glory of YHWH still fill(s) the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.

Merry Christmas! A blessed Twelve Days of Christmas to you and yours!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT:

And it was the first month and in second year, first in the month, the tabernacle was built. And Moses erected the tabernacle, for he laid the bases and set up the frames and set the bars and set the pillars.

And he spread the tent upon the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent over it above as YHWH commanded Moses.

And he took and put the testimony into the Ark and put the poles upon the Ark and put the mercy seat.

And he brought the Ark into the tabernacle and set the veil of the screen and screened upon (the) ark of the testimony as YHWH commanded Moses.⁸

And the cloud covered the tent of meeting and (the) glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle.⁹

And Moses was not able to go into the tent of meeting thus the cloud dwelt upon it and (the) glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle.¹⁰

And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle and went forth the sons of Israel in all their journeying.¹¹

And if the cloud was not taken up, then they went not, until (a) day of the lifting up.¹²

Thus (the) cloud of YHWH was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in (the) eyes of all (the) sons of Israel.¹³

NOTES:

Regeneration includes both the forgiveness of sins, in Christ, and the following renewal of the Holy Spirit. This all flows from justification by faith. (cf. BoC. P.542).

The Holy Spirit's work is to make one born anew, to lead an inwardly new life with a new heart, mind, and soul. He opens the mind and heart by the Holy Scriptures (BoC, p. 526).

The water connected with the Word is God's baptism, a water of life and a washing of regeneration. (BoC, p. 349).

⁸ Exodus 40:17-21.

⁹ Exodus 40:34.

¹⁰ Exodus 40:35.

¹¹ Exodus 40:36.

¹² Exodus 40:37.

¹³ Exodus 40:38.

“The entire Holy Trinity, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, directs all men to Christ as to the book of life in whom they are to seek the Father’s eternal election. For the Father has decreed from eternity that whomever he would save he would save through Christ...” (BoC, p. 627).