

# **ADVENT 2021**

***“God Has Dwelt Among Us”***

*John 1:14–18*

Sunday December 19, 2021

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## **Scripture Reading**

***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:14–18, ESV).***

**O** LORD, we pray, rise up in power, and come among us, and with your great might, comfort us; whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are hindered in running the race that is set before us, may your bountiful grace and mercy may help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, world without end. *Amen.*<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

Today is the fourth and final Sunday of the season of *Advent*. As a preparatory season before Christmas, Advent is a season of worshipful expectancy and longing. In Advent, we posture our hearts in alignment with the ancient Jewish people who yearned for the coming of the great Messiah and God’s kingdom of peace in the midst of our fractured world. However, as Christians we celebrate this season by looking back to the historical fact that not only has the Messiah already come, he is coming again to make all things new.

The word Advent comes from the Latin word “adventus,” which means “arrival.” And today we are going to examine the dramatic arrival of Jesus Christ of Nazareth within human history.

We will explore one of the deepest and most brilliant truths of all Scripture—the extraordinary truth that ***“God Has Dwelt Among Us.”***

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<sup>1</sup> The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 95.

## **Context**

Now that phrase “*dwelt among us*” comes directly from verse fourteen of today’s Scripture reading, and it is a theologically loaded term. The Greek verb for “dwelt” (ἐσκήνωσεν) literally means he “*tabernacled*” among us.

Now, I’ll admit, the word “tabernacle” is not a familiar of word in our culture. However, in terms of biblical vocabulary, “tabernacle” refers to the place where man meets with the presence of Almighty God. By associating this word with Jesus, John is making a profoundly bold claim about how Jesus connects to the presence of God. And, as I’ll show you, *the presence of God among humanity is one of the largest mega-themes of biblical literature.*

In beginning, God created the heavens, the earth, all living creatures, and people and it was good. And thanks to our collective stupidity and rebellion, the happy part of our story lasts for about two pages.

Those first two pages of Genesis are, nevertheless, massively important. In those two pages, we see that our existence has purpose and intention. Life is more than matter in motion caused by quantum chaos and confusion. Humanity was created to steward God’s good creation in peace and harmony. Humanity was created to flourish in life and love. And most importantly, humanity was created to walk in communion with our Creator. We were created with a spiritual need to know God and be known by God. At the dawn of humanity, in the paradise of Eden, God walked among us in immediate, unhindered, glorious presence.

However, the perfection of paradise was shattered by humanity’s self-absorption and sin. We chose to look to creation rather than our Creator, and we became enslaved to the tyranny of selfish desire and the powers of darkness.

Yet still we *hunger* for Eden. We may try to find it in relationships or ambition or money or substance, but we are never quite satisfied. *We were created with an infinite void within our hearts that will only be satiated by an Infinite God.* But sin has created a barrier between us and the presence of God. That could have been the sad ending to our story.

But God, being rich in mercy, did not forsake mankind or his creation. Instead, even when we were dead in our sin, God began to unfold an elaborate plan of rescue and redemption. Even at great cost to himself, he would go to unfathomable lengths to dwell among his people. This plan began the family of a man named Abraham, who alone of all people on the earth walked with God. Abraham’s family became a nation named Israel.

Israel became enslaved to the empire of Egypt. But with great power, God delivered the people of Israel from slavery and oppression. He even gave them the gift of his words,

which included instructions for something called the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was essentially a tent that would be used for God's presence to abide with men yet again.

However, the problem of sin remained. In order for God to be present among his people, the Israelites had to prepare blood sacrifices of innocent animals to atone for the ways that sin had fractured God's good creation.

Now, the practice of sacrifice certainly sounds barbaric to our enlightened ears, but the sacrifices were not about giving God something he needed, as if he lacked anything we could give. Rather, a sacrifice was a visible portrait that sin—our selfishness, our pride, our injustice, our rebellion against God—leads to death and decay.

Eventually, God led the nation of Israel into a Promised Land where they built a mighty kingdom. The portable Tabernacle became a permanent Temple through which God was present among his people. However, Israel rebelled against God and rejected his Lordship, replaying the same tired sin that occurred in Eden.

Eventually, the once mighty kingdom became divided and defeated. And, just prior to the Old Testament period known as the Exile, in a haunting scene in Ezekiel, after detailing abomination after abomination, the prophet describes the presence of God leaves the Temple (Ezekiel 8-10).

This too might have been the end of the story. God could have left us to our own devices; so that we would consume our world and one another until there was nothing left but a ruined, dead planet floating in the cold abyss of space.

But God did not abandon his people. He did not forsake those who were created in his image. He determined to make a final dwelling place for him to share communion with mankind. His presence would come to dwell not in a garden, nor in a Tabernacle or Temple – but within *a Person*.

Through Jesus—the ultimate Tabernacle –God would not only establish a mediated presence among his people, he would reestablish a redeemed union with his people.

### **Exposition**

For the remainder of our time, I want to take a look back at the mere five verses of today's Scripture text, and I want to unpack *three redemptive unions* that are accomplished by God dwelling (or tabernacling) among us. They are: **1.) *The Union of God and Man*, 2.) *The Union of Grace and Truth*, and 3.) *The Union of Mystery and Knowledge*.**

Now, I warn you, these are rich, beautiful, and very deep truths that will require us to stretch our minds. But sometimes, the greatest treasures require us to plunge into the depths. So, with that in mind, let's take a deeper look at the passage before us.

## 1.) The Union of God and Man.

Let's look back at verse fourteen: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a)*. God becomes incarnate. The Creator enters his creation. Divinity joins with humanity. Jesus Christ is completely God; yet he is also completely man. He forever exists as *one person with two natures*, that are neither separated apart nor confused together. Theologians call this mystery *"the hypostatic union."*

The earliest Christian heresies were teachings that attempting to distort or refute this doctrine about Christ. And make no mistake: this biblical claim affirming the complete Godhood and manhood of Jesus Christ is of central, *salvational* importance to Christianity. For without Jesus being completely God and completely man, we could not have a savior.

*Only a man could endure death, but only God could overcome death—and the messiah needed to do both.* God has provided such a Redeemer, through whom he has found a way to end sin without ending us. There is one who is God, man, and messiah. This reality is summed up in his title: he is the *Lord (God) Jesus (Man) Christ (Messiah)*.

Moreover, by becoming the union between God and man within his person, Jesus is now the true and better Tabernacle and Temple. He is the place where Heaven and Earth interlock and join together. This means that—*through Jesus*—you now can come to actually know, relate with, and know communion with the God who created you!

## 2.) The Union of Grace and Truth.

We'll continue with our text: *"...and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:14b-17).*

These verses again reiterate a theme that has already been address in John's prologue: from Moses to John the Baptist, all of the story of Israel is intended to anticipate the coming of Jesus as Messiah. However, there something even more happening. John, the author, is making yet another profound claim: *in Christ we are able to see the very glory of God.*

Now, this is a big deal, because in the Old Testament when people saw the glory of God they risked death. When Moses asked to see the glory of God, he had to be hidden within a crevice of a mountain, so that God's presence might pass before him. Even then, he was not able to actually see God's face. But, with Jesus, things have changed. And because of this, Jesus is even greater than the great Moses.

This comparison would have shocked and scandalized the Jewish people of the first century. Moses was the epitome of a holy man. He was the man through whom God led the people of Israel out of bondage. He was the man through whom God graciously gave

his people the Law. But, if you know the story of the Old Testament, you know Moses was not able to lead God's people into the Promise Land. That job belonged to one named *Joshua*.

And even still, Moses cannot get you to the true and better Promise Land either. That job belongs to one named *Yeshua*. Or, as we say in English, that job belongs to one whose name is *Jesus*.

The Law (as personified in this text by Moses) is intended to confront us of our need, so that we might forsake our self-sufficiency and cry out for a Savior. The Law of moral performance cannot save us, but it can point us to the One who can.

The Law of Truth came through Moses, but grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. And make no mistake: Jesus comes with grace and truth.

Christ is merciful and kind. But because of his great love for you, he will confront you. He will tell you when you are wrong and in sin. If he didn't he would not be God and he would not be real. Only a god of your own design will agree with you all of the time and coddle your sin. But *Jesus shows us the greatness of our sin so that we might now the greatness of his salvation*.

### **3.) The Union of Mystery and Knowledge.**

The final verse reads: "*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known*" (John 1:18). In some ways this summarizes the theme of the prologue to John's gospel account. We are morally, intellectually, and volitionally incapable of being able to know the incomprehensible, transcendent, and mysterious God.

But the fascinating the claim of the Christian gospel is that in our condition of absolute inability and weakness to get to the inaccessible truth, Truth chose to come to us in the form of a person. And if we want to know who God is and what he is like, all we need to do is look at Jesus, who is "*the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature*" (Hebrews 1:3).

This means if you want to know how God feels about the outcast and the oppressed, look at how Jesus treats the outcast and the oppressed. If you want to know how God feels about self-righteous hypocrites, look how Jesus felt about self-righteous hypocrites. If you want to know about the kindness, the generosity, the fierceness of God's love, look to Jesus.

As New Testament Scholar D.A. Carson has commented on this verse: "*...the beloved Son, incarnate Word, himself God while being at the Father's side...has broken the barrier that made it impossible for human beings to see God, and has made him*

*known... Jesus is the exegesis of God... The revelation of the Word [is] the ultimate disclosure of God himself.”<sup>2</sup>*

Now, this is not just theological point. It is especially of practical importance for anyone who would claim the title of Christian. The world is no longer able to see Jesus. He now sits at the right hand of God, awaiting the day of his triumphant return. But the church is the body of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit of Christ, called to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. So in the same way that when we look at Jesus, we are able to see the truth of God, so too when the Church is faithful to the call of Christ, we are able to show the world the truth of God as well.

The same John who wrote the Gospel According to John writes this: *“No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12)*. It is when we love the unlovable, show grace to our enemies, display radical generosity, and selflessly serve our city and world, we are showing an unbelieving and cynical world the character and nature of God.

I pray that Redeemer Christian Church would image our God in this way in our small corner of the world.

## **Conclusion**

I want to conclude by yet again going back to this reference of John the Baptist in verse fifteen. It was the unique role of John the Baptist to bear witness to and announce that the Word of God has become flesh and dwelt among humanity. But it is interesting to note how he announced the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. He did not say, “Behold the conquering king who has come to reign!” He did not say, “Behold the mighty lion who has come to claim his dominion!” He said, *“Behold the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world” (John 1:29)*.

Why this designation? Why was this John’s announcement? I think it goes back to *Tabernacle*—and the theme of God’s presence among his people.

Remember, how was God’s presence able to dwell among his people? It was through blood sacrifice—specifically the blood sacrifice of an innocent lamb. By John heralding Jesus as the Lamb of God, he is saying, *“At long last the true and better lamb has come! By his cross and resurrection, Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice who will not only temporally grant access to the presence of God, he will restore the presence of God among his people eternally.”*

And as it turns out this is indeed the end of the Christian story: *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will*

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 134–135.

*dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:1-4).*

This is the hope of Advent. And today I invite you to put your hope in the Lamb of God who alone makes this hope reality!

So, Redeemer, may we be a people defined by this Advent hope. May we rejoice that God has become flesh and dwelled among us. May we be amazed that in our Messiah steadfast love and faithfulness have met; righteousness and peace have kissed. May we marvel, that in the face of Jesus, we behold the visible image of our invisible God!

Even so, come Lord Jesus!

*AMEN.*

### **Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities:**

- 1) *In John 1:14, the word “dwelt” literally means that the Word “tabernacled” among us. What is the importance of the tabernacle/presence of God theme in the Bible? What does this reveal about Jesus?*
- 2) *Verse 17 invites a comparison between Moses and Jesus. While Moses is a biblical character worthy of respect, why is Moses—and the Law of Moses—unable to save us?*
- 3) *Now after studying this passage in depth for the last three weeks, read John 1:1–18 in context. What are the big ideas that you have learned from this rich passage of Scripture? How should this passage of Scripture inspire you to worship Jesus in this season?*