

Expecting Christ in Exodus
The LORD Will Dwell Among Us in Glory

Exodus 40:33-38; John 1:14; Luke 2:25-33

Advent 2014 Sermon Series

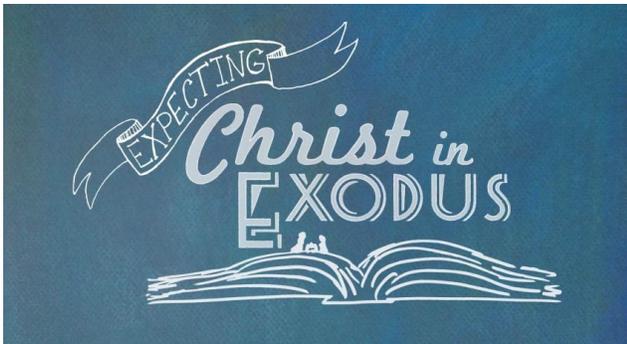
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

December 21, 2014

TEXTS: Exodus 40:33-38; John 1:14; Luke 2:25-33

This Christmas Sunday morning, we conclude our Advent series *Expecting Christ in Exodus*. This is the time of year when we direct our attention to the birth of Christ as our Savior, and my



prayer throughout the series has been that we would see Christ as those who saw Him for the first time described Him; that our hearts would be set on fire with the same ardor and affection for Him and that we would share Him as those who first encountered Him did. We began with the profound parallels that Matthew sees between the first redeemer,

Moses, and the last Redeemer, Christ. We saw Luke draw our attention in the song of Mary to how the Lord will reach out with an outstretched arm to save. Last Sunday, we saw that the death of Christ on the cross was prefigured in the striking of the rock in the wilderness, as the Lord takes the blow for the sins of His people. This morning, we turn our attention to the glorious conclusion of Exodus where God tabernacles among His people, and we lean forward

to the fulfillment of these things for all the world in Christ. These are topics into which angels long to look, that the Lord will dwell among us in glory. The passages of Scripture that we just read may at first glance seem unrelated to each other and unrelated to Christmas, and yet they share a profound relationship. Christmas is a season of peace, the peace of Christ, and there is no greater gift than the gift of God's own indwelling, covenant presence with us. I shared throughout this series a quote from Charles Spurgeon who said: "There is a road in every little village in England that leads to London, and so it is the case that in every passage of Scripture, there is a road that leads to Jesus Christ, and we must take that road."



I want, this morning, to give you the wider context into which this quote was originally given. Spurgeon writes this:

“You remember the story I told you of the Welshman who heard a young man preach a very fine sermon—a grand sermon, a highfaluting, spread-eagle sermon; and when he was done, he asked the Welshman what he thought of it. The man replied that he did not think anything of it. ‘And why not?’ ‘Because there was no Jesus Christ in it.’

“It is at that point that the quote I shared comes, that every passage has a road that goes to Christ. The young man was still not knocked off of the high horse of the hubris of youth and said: ‘What happens to me then if I have a Scripture passage that does not seem to have a road to Christ?’ and the Welshman said, ‘Young man, I’ve been preaching for forty years and I’ve never found such a Scripture, but if I ever think I did find one I would go over hedge and ditch to find Him that my Master might be revealed.’”

So it is our sacred task this morning to pursue the road, which in this case is well marked out. It is like a superhighway taking us to Christ. The Lord will dwell among us in glory. We begin in Exodus 40. The great ending of Exodus is that God dwells with His people. Remember that redemption leads to relationship; freedom from Egypt is for following the Lord. God takes us into covenant. It is the realization of His promise at the burning bush: “I have come down to save you, to redeem you, to take you into covenant, to teach you My ways, and to dwell among

you as My people.” Finally, at the end of Exodus, we read that after elaborate preparations have been made, Moses sets up the courtyard around the perimeter, defining the sacred space of the tabernacle and altar. He places the curtain separating the entrance of the courtyard from the common space. We read that Moses finishes the work. That’s a great line in the Bible; it’s a line that I hope to be able to say on my last day in this world: “I finished the work that God has given me.” It’s a line that I want all of you to be able to say as well: “I completed what God has given me to do.” For those reading the Bible in Hebrew, this line jumps out at you because it echoes Genesis 2:2:



“And on the seventh day God finished His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done.”

So, we see that this new creation is beginning in this plot in the wilderness, and that God finishes His work. Moses completes the work God had given him, and then the most remarkable thing happens: God Himself actually comes and fills the sanctuary. The cloud covers the tent, and the glory of God filled the tabernacle. In language that is recalling Mount Sinai, the Lord is

really there. Moses cannot enter the tent of meeting because the cloud of God's glory is so heavy upon it. He had to wait until he was summoned, just as on the mountain. The cloud of God was there for six days before the Lord called to Moses to come up to the mountain. Wouldn't it be great if someday someone came into the narthex here at Kenwood and said: "I can't quite make it into the sanctuary because the presence of God is so heavy there." I would love to hear that. You see, if God is not here, then the gathering has no meaning and no gravity and no purpose. But God said, "I will meet with you, and I will speak with you when you gather." And so the cloud covers the tabernacle, and it is there, in the sight of all the people, the glory of God fills the sanctuary, and we are left with the enduring image of God physically present, for real. The God of the Bible is not absent, but present. It's not a symbolic presence; it's a real presence. Though God is visible in the cloud, He is veiled, His image and glory are reflected in a man adorned with splendor. God, the Redeemer, King, and Covenant Lord is really there, dwelling among His people.

We turn now to the New Testament with two complementary scenes to this great truth. The first scene is John's Christmas message. John is a master of brevity in expressing deep truth in simple language. In the Gospel of John, the Christmas story is seen in a single verse, John 1:14:

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us."

The divine Word, the Agent of creation, became a human being, and the world has never been the same. He didn't appear to be a human being, He really came as a human being: the God-man, the divine-human Lord Jesus Christ. He became flesh and blood to save flesh and blood like us. The second half of this verse says in the NIV that *He made His dwelling among us*. I scoured numerous translations, and most translations render it: *He lived with us*, or *He dwelt with us*, or *He made His home among us*. Eugene Peterson says: *He moved into the neighborhood*. While these capture something that's real and true, they don't reflect the word that John actually chooses. The word John chooses is literally that He *tabernacled* among us. The only one I could find that has this was *Young's Literal Translation*. It is a somewhat archaic version, but he renders it: *"The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us."* John wants us to see this connection between Christ in the flesh and the dwelling of God of old. We have seen His glory, the veiled, yet visible God of glory in Christ steps out from behind the veil, and we see His glory, and it is the glory of the One and Only. It is the glory of One coming forth from the Father, filled with grace and truth, as we see in John 1:14b:

"We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

For many people, the incarnation of God is a scandal. There are many objections to the message of Christmas in the world today, objections you can hear in coffee shops and cafeterias, objections you can hear on television, YouTube, and in the hearts of men and

women. Some of the objections are in our own hearts and minds.

I want to introduce you to a skeptic, an ancient skeptic named Celsus. He anticipates the modern objections to Christmas in many ways. Celsus has two big objections to Christmas. The first is a philosophical objection. He says that according to his thinking:

“God cannot change, distant remote from this world, knowable by only a few. He is the God of the philosophers, high, distant and remote. The last thing He would ever do would be to make direct contact with this material world.”

His second objection to Christmas is a materialistic objection. He says that he lives inside a materialistic world where everything that is is just a collision of chemicals. He has a very low view of humanity. He says:

“With regard to humanity, there is no difference between the body of a bat, a maggot or a frog, just chemical substance.”

Celsus’ objection to Christianity, to Christmas, is that God is not in direct contact with this world and that all that really is in this world is just material substance. That is why we need the Bible. That is why we need God to speak for Himself. That is why Celsus needs the book of Exodus, because in Exodus, God is a Redeemer who is directly involved with this world. He is not knowable by just a few; He is knowable by all. You can be seven years old and know that Jesus Christ has taken on human flesh and died for your sins; you can be 87 years old and realize that for the very first time, that Christ has come to save you. Celsus also needs the book of Genesis; he needs to know, that though human beings are made of real elements of this world, there is, in fact, a vast difference between a bat, a maggot, a frog, and a human being. We learn in Scripture that human beings are made in the image of God. What that means, more than anything, is not that you can say fancy words; it doesn't mean that you can do things; it doesn't mean you can play instruments, or you can create art or read poetry, or be a great athlete. Being in the image of God means, fundamentally, that you were created to know God and respond to Him in praise. This is what it is to be a human being. We need the Old Testament to know Christ.

Christopher Wright, an Anglican clergyman and an Old Testament scholar, says:

“The deeper you go into understanding the Old Testament, the closer you come to Jesus. The Old Testament tells the story which Jesus completed. It declares the promise which He fulfilled. It provides the pictures and models which shaped His identity. It programs a mission which He accepted and passed on. It teaches a moral orientation to God and the world which He endorsed, sharpened and laid as the foundation for obedient discipleship.”

When you are immersed in Scripture, Christmas makes sense. What a contrast there is between those immersed in Scripture and those who fashion gods after their own imagining, between Celsus, and those like him today, and the figure that Luke introduces to us, named Simeon.

Simeon was an elderly man soaked in Scripture, and God gave a promise to him. He was a righteous man, devout, and he was waiting for the consolation of Israel, waiting for God to finish the story that He began. God had given this elderly man an extraordinary promise, as we read in Luke 2:26:

"It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ."

Simeon was moved by the Spirit, and he went into the temple courts, the very place of God's dwelling. He looked across the temple courts, and he saw Mary and Joseph bring in the Child Jesus to make the offering purification, to dedicate their firstborn Son. Simeon took the Child in his arms, and he praised God. He said in Luke 2:29:

"Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You now dismiss Your servant in peace."

This is the peace of Christmas; it is a peace in seeing and knowing Jesus Christ. *"Dismiss Your servant in peace."* Why? Luke 29:30-31:

"For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people."

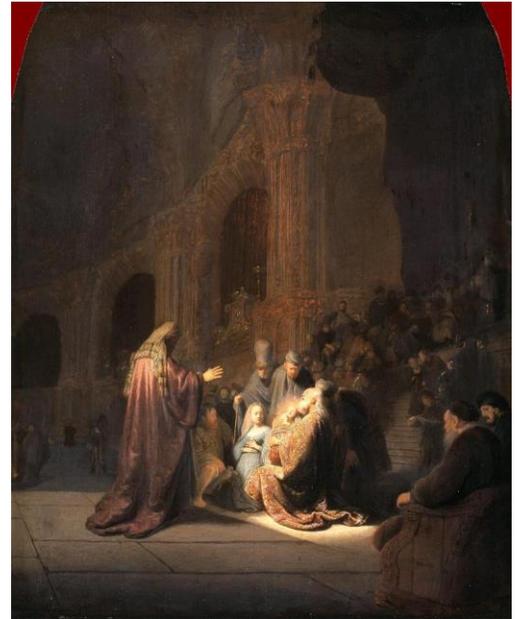
The peace of Christmas is for all peoples, not just a few. It is a gift that has been prepared from all eternity. Sometimes you receive a gift at Christmas time, and the gift is placed in a brown paper bag. It doesn't even have your name on it. You reach in, and it's not wrapped, and the price tag is still on it. It is not your size, not your style, and you wonder incredulously as the person says: "I really thought you." You see, part of the love of the gift given is in the preparation. It's your size; it's your style; it's wrapped, and your name is on the card; you're given full eye contact when it's handed to you. It is for you. Simeon said this is God's gift prepared from all eternity for you and for me. As you open the gift of Christmas, Simeon sees the light: it's the light of a revelation, an unveiling of God for all nations, and its glory for Israel. God's promise, is fulfilled and given to us in Christ, that we may have life in Him and peace.

The scene of Simeon's adoration of Jesus gripped the heart of Rembrandt, a great Dutch painter. The subject of Simeon's adoration form the subject of a great painting which Rembrandt executed at age 25. In this painting, Rembrandt captures the adoration of Simeon, holding the Child Jesus in the temple courts. Even the high priest is raising his hand in blessing. Rembrandt was known as a painter of light, a master of light. How do you paint light? This is 400 years before Photoshop, and there is nothing artificial about it. The light is shining around

the figure of Simeon and the infant Redeemer-King he holds. Throughout his life, Rembrandt came back to the scene of Simeon's adoration of Jesus with drawings and other work. The day after Rembrandt died, people came into his apartment and they found the last paintings that he was painting. He returned again to the scene of Simeon, the paint still wet. Rembrandt, now age 63, was again painting the scene of Simeon holding the Child born to save. He had worked on the painting for months, but he never finished it. Simeon, in the painting is the embodiment of hope and longing for this promised Messiah, the Holy One to come. In the painting, Simeon



holds the Child, his eyes are closed, and he seems to be having a vision, a foretaste of Christ's life, ministry, and death and resurrection. Behind him stands the prophetess Anna in the shadow, and Simeon holds the Child. If you look closely, his hands, underneath Jesus, are in a posture of prayer. Here lies the most pivotal moment in history. Simeon sees the Savior. He is here, and the light shines on Him in an atmosphere of sacred solemnity. Art historian, Simón Schama, says of this painting that it is illuminated by an almost unearthly brilliance.



The Redeemer-King is born. The good news of Christmas is the peace of Jesus Christ. If you have Christ, then you have this peace, a peace that is independent of your circumstances, that does not fade away. If you don't have Jesus Christ, though, the peace that you have is an illusion. It will fade away; it will not support you in a day of trial. But the peace of Christ remains: the peace of Christmas. It is this peace which is celebrated in the carol, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*:

“Hark! the herald angels sing,
 ‘Glory to the newborn King!’
 Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
 God and sinners reconciled

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
 Join the triumph of the skies;
 With th' angelic host proclaim,
 ‘Christ is born in Bethlehem.’

Hark! the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn King!'"

My prayer this Christmas Sunday is that you would see Him, and that if you see Him, you would love Him, and that you would embrace His radical vision for human living called the Kingdom of God, and that you would enter into His Covenant bond of hope, faith, love, and peace. Inside this Covenant bond, God is present; He is there; and He will comfort you with His love. He will satisfy your desires with good things. He will teach you to walk in His ways, and engage you with work that eternally matters. He will pick you up when you fall and guide you in His paths of peace. Is there any greater gift that the world has ever received? Hallelujah! Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we praise You this Christmas Sunday morning. We sing Hallelujah, the infant Redeemer is born. Lord, these are things into which angels long to look. We praise You, Father, that You have prepared this gift from eternity past, a gift of the peace of Christ: Christ with us! Emmanuel: Christ in us, the hope of glory. We honor You this morning, Lord Jesus, and I pray that the peace of Jesus Christ, which surpasses understanding, would flood and fill every heart even now, that in having Him, we have everything. We join our voices with men and women and children from days gone by: Glory to the newborn King. Hallelujah!

Amen.