



God's Home
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:26-38
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (December 24, 2023)

Growing up, the adults who took me to church made sure I understood I needed to behave in church because I was about to step into *God's house*. That information kept me in awe and, somewhat, in fear. I was a guest in God's house. What an honor. And at the same time, I certainly didn't want to do anything that was upsetting or disrespectful.

I was also very curious and expectant to see God anywhere in the building. I got to admit I looked for God all around. At times, I even searched under the pews...to no avail.

I think adults waited for me to be "of age" before they taught me that God was present in Spirit *at the altar* in the sacramental form of bread and wine and was present *among the people*, in Spirit still, but in the sacramental form of community.

The sense that God was *with* us was very clear. People perceived and believed the closeness and presence of God. At least they said that when all was well. But could God be *in* us also? In our body and flesh? All the time? Would God be in us even when things don't go our way? I don't think I ever heard that. And yet, that is a very biblical message: God desires to reside in us, to dwell in our hearts, eternally.¹

God wants to grow on us. God wants a deep, redeeming, transforming, sanctifying relationship. "Salvation" is to live in God's love, light, peace, freedom, and healing presence. That's what it means to be reconciled with God.

¹ Among the many passages, my favorite is John 17 (especially v. 21), the prayer of Jesus in Getsemany.

Second century theologian, St. Irenaeus of Lyon, said what is now a very famous line: “God’s glory is the living person.”² But in the same book, a little earlier, he also wrote that “a person’s glory is God.”³ God is the glory of people who receive in faith God’s wisdom and power.

In fact, Irenaeus explains that “if man perseveres in God’s love, and in obedience and gratitude to him, he will receive greater glory from him. It will be a glory which will grow ever brighter until he takes on the likeness of the one who died for him.”

You might ask: “What would God be doing in our body?” Great things: works of compassion, hospitality, and healing. God would offer peace, compassion, and forgiveness. God would acknowledge each person as a precious and beloved child. Are we that transparent an incarnation of God’s mercy? Are we channels of his love? Do we mirror God?

The more we grow in our humanity the more we are capable of manifesting the divine Light.

Franciscan priest, Fr. Richard Rohr, explains:

Whenever the material and the spiritual coincide, there is the Christ. Jesus fully accepted that human-divine identity and walked it into history. Henceforth, the Christ “comes again” whenever we are able to see the spiritual and the material coexisting, in any moment, in any event, and in any person. All matter reveals Spirit, and Spirit needs matter to “show itself”! What I like to call the “Forever Coming of Christ” happens whenever and wherever we allow this to be utterly true for us. This is how God continually breaks into history.⁴

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we hear in 2 Samuel how God prevents David from building a Temple to God and instead promises to

² The complete quote is: “For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God. For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.20.7

³ *Ibid.*, 3.20.4

⁴ Richard Rohr, *Cosmic Christ*

build us a home, a place where we feel comfortable and secure in God's presence.

Through the centuries, God has been busy building the foundations to that home, and with today's gospel, we witness another stage of this work in progress.

God sends Gabriel to Nazareth, a backwater village of about one hundred people, one well, one bath. The village is located in the northern territory of Galilee, famously shunned for centuries for its lighthearted approach to the faith.⁵

Gabriel is sent to see a very young teenager, Mary, and bring her the message that she is highly favored by God and will give to the world the expected Messiah. From rebellious and belligerent Galilee? That's not where respectable, pious Jews are to be found. Most Galileans were not even circumcised, and they were, therefore, considered lesser Jews!

Galilee is where one would hear of armed resistance against the Roman occupiers. Wannabe Messiahs would also show up there. Less than honest people would turn to banditry to cope with economic pressures. To Judeans, in general, Galileans were not the best of people.

Judean life, on the other hand, focused on the Temple and the Torah. Judeans had kept the purity of the race and not intermarried with foreigners. Wouldn't make sense that the Messiah came from the South? But no, God chooses otherwise. A little girl. From Nazareth. In Galilee. Isn't that always the case with God? Hasn't God always favored the least conspicuous, the lowly, the shunned, the infamous?

A girl. Luke makes sure we hear well her status by repeating three times that she is a *virgin*. One girl among many living amid precarious times in a precarious place, in a territory occupied by a powerful army, bent to make sure the local men are consistently humiliated into subjugation through any form of harassment: forced labor, taxation, unjustified

⁵ For this section I am indebted to Kelley Nikondeha's *The First Advent in Palestine*, especially ch. 3

incarceration. Harassment even through the rape of their women. Shame them into submission. Dare them to raise their heads and rebel.

A girl will carry the God who comes to the afflicted in solidarity to offer a different kind of peace, to propose a different world order.

In her young age, Mary is exposed to violence and abuse all around her. She can see the forceful hand of the empire. Her people are familiar with collective trauma.

She is struck in awe as the angel announces what God is up to. And she is chosen to be part of that plan. God asks for her consensus.

She makes up her mind quickly: she is not going to respond to the negativity all around her with more negativity; she knows that violence only begets violence. She is going to be part of something beautiful, something constructive; something that will be life-giving and able to heal so much hurt through the assistance of God's Spirit who is going to overshadow her.

But this "something new" God is about to do is going to be controversial and will bring much pain. She is going to give birth to the Son of God. Isn't Caesar, the son of god, going to resent that? Is she going to be able to stand the opposition she and her son will face? Yes, with God's help, for nothing will be impossible with God.

Mary listens and pays attention to Gabriel's words. She knows in her guts that the Almighty can do great things, fulfils promises, comes to the aid of Israel, brings down the powerful and raises the lowly.⁶ And so, in all earnest she commits herself: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

May Jesus' mother and our mother, Mary, a young and vulnerable girl from Nazareth, inspire us to listen to God's word and to jump at the opportunity to give God a courageous heart to dwell in. Amen.

⁶ See Mary's Song, the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55