

4 S. in Advent 12/20/20
Luke 1:26-38 B

SERMON TEXT: is the Annunciation, from the 1st chapter of Luke's Gospel, our Gospel lesson for today.

"Where was God?" Covid hits. Cancer is diagnosed. An accident claims a loved one. Crisis hits your family, and what do you hear? "Where was God?" You've maybe even spoke those words yourself. Even if you have never spoken those words, you've thought that, felt that way, yourself.

Our Gospel lesson for this 4th Sunday in Advent, the Annunciation as it is called, answers that question for us. Where is God? **The Annunciation teaches us that God is with us in Christ.**

God's desire has always been to live with us. Creation teaches us this. In Eden, God dwelt with man. That is, until Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and brought sin into creation. And, that sin separated us from God, as the curtain in the temple reminded us.

When our first parents heard the sound of the Lord God in the garden, "they hid from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (Ge 3:8). Even then, it was God who came looking for His creatures.

When Israel was enslaved in Egypt, God came to deliver them. He delivered them through the 10 plagues and the Red Sea waters. In the years of wandering in the wilderness, God was with His children by a cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.

In the wilderness, God commanded His people to construct a sanctuary for Him and it was there that He would dwell among them (cf. Ex 25:8-9). This sanctuary was called the tabernacle. The most important part of the tabernacle was the ark of the covenant. "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will

meet with you and give you all my commands,” God promised Israel (Ex 25:22).

Above the Ark of the Covenant, between the cherubim, behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies. Dwelling above the ark, God led Israel through the Jordan River to the promised land of Canaan.

Which brings us to our Old Testament lesson for today. The enemies of Israel were conquered; the kingdom was secure; the king, David, had a beautiful palace of cedar in Jerusalem. The house of worship for the one true God was still a tent, one that had been in use for 400 years. So, David called Nathan the prophet and announced his plans to build a glorious temple. But, the Lord God said no. He didn't want a temple, not just yet.

God did not need a temple made of wood and brick, built by human hands in which to dwell. A building made with human hands was for His people's benefit, **not for God's**. A building, a physical place, that the people could see and physically come to, **told them that God was with them**.

But, the time did come for the Temple to be built in Jerusalem. Under King Solomon, Israel built the Temple and God promised, “I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel” (1 Ki 6:13). When the ark was brought into the Temple and placed behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies, “a cloud filled the temple of the LORD” (1 Ki 8). The cloud was the sign of God's presence. The cloud was God's way of saying that He would be with His people.

For generation after generation, God dwelt among His people in the Holy of Holies, above the ark. But, now, God comes to dwell among His people **in His own Son**, Jesus.

“The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of

David. And the virgin's name was Mary" (vv. 26-27). Through Gabriel, the Lord spoke in her ear words – holy words – that brought about the virgin being with Child, "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" (v. 35)." For nine months, the Holy of Holies was the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for the Holy One of Israel dwelt in her womb.

Then on that silent night, that holy night, when all was calm and all was bright, the virgin gave birth to a Son. The Holy of Holies dwelt in a new place, in a manger in a stable in the city of Bethlehem, for there was no room in the inn. And there came shepherds to worship their newborn king at an altar made of wood and lined with straw, for that is where the Holy One Himself lay.

Where Jesus is, there is the temple, for His holiness fills it. The book of Hebrews teaches us that there is no need for continued sacrifices, every morning and every evening, in accordance with the ordinances of God in His Law, because Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament for us. There was no need for the Temple any more, at all. So in 70 AD, God sent the Romans to destroy the Temple, so that not one brick remained standing. God was teaching us that He no longer dwelt among His people Israel in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. God dwelt among us in Christ.

Take heart, saints of God! I bring you good news of great joy: God comes to you as the son of Mary.

Where is God? He is with you -- **in Christ**. Although you don't see Him, He is here and is wherever you are. You are not alone. Christ is Emmanuel, God with us.

Remember the tent, not the palace. Remember Mary in Nazareth. Remember the manger and cross and crown of thorns. Your King comes to you in simple means. He comes to you in the simple means of His Word and His Sacraments to give you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

He was with you at your baptism to make your body a temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ dwells in you and you dwell in Christ.

He is with you when He comes to in the words of absolution, "I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

He is with you at His table when He says "Take, eat; this is the true body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given into death for your sins...Take, drink; this is the true blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, shed for the forgiveness of your sins."

God is with us in Christ. And, Christ is with us today in His means of grace. Wherever and whenever the Gospel is proclaimed and taught; wherever and whenever water is applied in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; wherever and whenever His Body and Blood are given to eat and drink under the bread and the wine, there is God in Christ: the hospital bed, the nursing home, the battle field, the kitchen table.

Saints of God, the weakness of your flesh will always be tempted to look for Jesus in the glitz and glamour, the flash and sizzle of this world, in feelings and emotion. You will be tempted to think that God has abandoned you, withdrawn His face from you, because you do not "feel" His presence, or because things have not gone according to your will, to your whims.

When you are so tempted, remember His promise, "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20). Mary heard the Word of God spoken by the angel

Gabriel and it strengthened Mary to confess, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (v. 38). Mary heard and believed. You have heard and that word creates and strengthens your faith. We do not walk by sight, nor emotions, nor whims; **we walk by faith** -- faith in the sure and certain promises of God.

And our faith continually cries, “Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay” (*LSB* 364:3). He became flesh and dwelt among us. He comes to us today in Word and Sacrament. He will come again to take us to heaven to live with Him there.