

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Christmas Day – December 25, 2024**  
**John 1:1-18 – God Makes His Tent With Us**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

In the name of Jesus Christ, our newborn King. Amen.

Let the earth resound with praise! Thank and praise him forever! For today, you behold the surpassing love of God in Christ Jesus. No one has ever seen God; but the only God, who is at the Father's side, God the Word, he has made him known. The Word who was with God in the beginning, who was God – the Word by whom all things were made, the same Word is now flesh. He dwells among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Rejoice, for “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

But these familiar and beloved words of John's Gospel, unfortunately they lose something in translation. In Greek, Saint John's description of the incarnation of God the Word is even better, even more vivid. For John does not merely say that the Word “lived” or “dwelt” among us. He could have used the word for “abide,” but he did not. What John actually says is *skenao*, “tented”. The Word became flesh and *skenaoed* – he pitched his tent among us.

The reference is clear. John is referring to the tabernacle of Moses, the tent in the midst of the camp of Israel, where God came down and made his dwelling with his people. John is saying that the birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament tabernacle, in Exodus.

For in ancient times, the tabernacle was the tent of meeting, erected at the center of the camp of the tribes of Israel. And we read in Exodus that Moses set up the tabernacle according to the pattern that was shown him on Mount Sinai. He laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars, and spread the covering of the tent over it. And he took the tablets of the Law and put them into the ark, and put the poles on the ark and set the mercy seat above on the ark, and he brought the ark into the tabernacle and set up the veil of the screen, and screened the ark of the testimony.

And now, says John: All of it was a shadow and a type of the incarnation of our Lord. A picture of God entering the living tent of a human body, to dwell in our midst.

The cloud that covered the ancient tabernacle points ahead to the glory of the Most High overshadowing the virgin Mary. And the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle points ahead to the Holy Spirit filling her with his glory, to conceive and bear the Son of God. For the child of Mary is our Mercy Seat, the ark of our covenant. His human flesh is the box of the ark that contains not words of the law carved on stone, but God the living Word. His skin is like the skins of the tabernacle, sown together as a covering, concealing the living God inside.

For inside the ancient tabernacle, inside the holy of holies, and inside the ark of the covenant, at the heart of it all were the two tablets of the law, the Ten Commandments. But these demand death for sinners. The law is powerless to save. No one can keep the law. We cannot obey it fully from the heart. And for our failure, the punishment is death.

But John is saying: This Jesus, the Word made Flesh, he is far better than the old tabernacle, and its old covenant of the law. He is far better than the high priests who ministered there. He is the minister of a better covenant, with a better sacrifice to offer. He is come to fulfill the law, to do what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. He is come in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, to condemn sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

Yes, God is here, to tabernacle among us, in Jesus Christ. God is found in the tent of a human body. God the Word is made flesh to pitch his tent in our midst, to walk among us, in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, to save his people from their sins.

The God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” now he has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

But there is more to consider about this central word of the Incarnation, this word *skenao*, “tent”. For the Bible often speaks about human bodies as tents, especially to show our frailty and mortality, like tents that can be taken down or knocked over. Tents are not permanent, they are easy to tear down.

So Saint Peter in his second letter writes of his coming death, calling his body a tent, “I think it right, as

long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my tent will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.”

Yet now, when the Word becomes flesh and makes his tent among us, these lovely words reveal how our God takes on frail, weak flesh like ours, flesh that can suffer and die, like us, for us.

By pitching his tent among us, God the Word is showing us that he is born to die. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the perfect sacrifice better than any of the sacrifices offered in the Old Testament tabernacle. His body is the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world. His lifeblood will be poured out for us all, to appease the wrath of God against sinners.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me.”

For this is the new high priest of the new covenant, the eternal high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He will offer his own body as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. He will suffer as true man in the tabernacle of his flesh.

But then, as true God, Jesus will also rise again. For as God, he has the power of an indestructible life. So now, Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father’s throne, as an eternal man.

He still wears the tent of human flesh, but now his tent has overcome death and mortality. He lives and reigns in a body that can never be destroyed, to give eternal life to all our mortal flesh.

Therefore Paul encourages us in 2 Corinthians 5, that in Christ, our mortal bodies will be set free from this earthly tent. “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened –not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”

This is the promise for all who are baptized into the death of Christ. All who have died with him in the body will be raised in bodies like his, to live with him forever.

So rejoice! God is man, and he is yours, in the flesh, in a body, for all time.

Rejoice! For now he is building you up, not as a frail tabernacle or tent, but as the enduring temple of his body, the Church. For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Therefore all the saints worship him. “For they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will pitch his tent upon them.”

“For behold, the tent of God is with man. He will pitch his tent with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

Thanks be to God our Savior this Christmas Day, thanks to God the Word, who makes his dwelling with us, who covers us with his heavenly tent, who takes our frail sinful flesh and puts it to death, that we might live in him forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.