

Opening Christmas Presence
Matthew 1:18-23, Isaiah 7:10-16
Second Sunday of Advent, December 10 2017

1. The greatest of all presents is God's _____.
Psalm 16:11 ***You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.***

2. People have experienced God's presence in _____ ways.
Genesis 3:8 ***Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.***

Exodus 13:21 ***By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.***

II Chronicles 7:1-2 ***When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. 2 The priests could not enter the temple of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled it.***

Isaiah 6:1-4 ***In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.***

Ezekiel 10:18 ***Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.***

Matthew 1:22 ***All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us")*** (See John 1:14, 10:30, 14:9, Colossians 1:19-20.)

John 14:15-17 ***"If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.***

II Corinthians 5:8 ***We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.***

I Thessalonians 4:17 ***After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.***

3. Only the _____ experience God's presence.

Psalm 24:3-4 *Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? 4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.*

James 4:8 *Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

I John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

4. We experience God's presence through _____: both public and private.

Psalm 100:4 *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.*

II Chronicles 6:18-19 *“But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! 19 Yet, Lord my God, give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence.”*

Matthew 18:19-20 *“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”*

“The Lord desires perfect obedience from us, including praise and worship. ‘As you prepare for Advent, enter into My presence. Be My hands, reaching out and touching the community.’” [Corporate Listening Prayer at the Woodbury Session Meeting, November 2017]

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■ **Don't let anybody fool you. Christmas is all about the presence.**

1. The greatest of all presents is God's presence.

Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

2. People have experienced God's presence in different ways.

Genesis 3:8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Exodus 13:21 By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

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to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

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■ **Incarnation.**

■ **John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

■ **John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.”**

■ **John 14:9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”**

■ **When Jesus was born in a stable, God was born in a stable.**

- **When Jesus turned water into wine, ...**

- **When Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor ...”**

- **When Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you ...”**

- **When Jesus suffered outrageous agony on the cross, ...**

Colossians 1:19-20 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

- When Jesus conquered death and won eternal life ...
- When Jesus said (in John 17:3), **Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.**

→ God was bodily present in Jesus Christ.

- This is why I say Christmas is all about the presence. God is with us in Jesus Christ.

John 14:15-17 ***“If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.***

- God is with us now by the Holy Spirit.
- Better than “Jesus is right there.” “Jesus is in here!”
- One day we will be in the presence of the Lord in an unmitigated way.

II Corinthians 5:8 ***We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.***

I Thessalonians 4:17 ***After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.***

- But this most precious of all presents isn't for everyone.

3. Only the pure experience God's presence.

Psalm 24:3-4 ***Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? 4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.***

- Now there's a problem. My hands are filthy and my heart is polluted and putrid.

- There are two ways to have clean hands and a pure heart.
 1. Never sin.
 2. Trust in Christ.

James 4:8 ***Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.***

I John 1:7 ***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.***

- **Gospel**

- So once we are purified, how do we experience God's presence?

How do we enter God's presence?

How do we open the Christmas presence?

4. We experience God's presence through worship: both public and private.

Psalms 100:4 ***Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.***

II Chronicles 6:18-19 ***“But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! 19 Yet, Lord my God, give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence.”***

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“The Lord desires perfect obedience from us, including praise and worship.

‘As you prepare for Advent, enter into My presence. Be My hands, reaching out and touching the community.’” [Corporate Listening Prayer at the Woodbury Session Meeting, November 2017]

- Last week we talked about reaching out and touching the community with the fliers. (Thank you. There are more)
- Today we’ve focused on entering His presence.

- The Christmas presence is available to all of us, but we leave it wrapped up under the tree. We never even open it.
- Think how different our Christmas will be if we will simply open the Christmas presence!
- Spend time daily in God’s presence. Strive for an hour a day for the next 2 weeks. (45 minues? 30 minutes? It depends on how much you want to enjoy His Presence.)
(Wanda: A tithe of our time, 2.5 hours)
- Listen to music that ushers you into God’s presence. [play CD]
- Read Scripture and picture it. Revelation 4-5
- Brother Lawrence *The Practice of the Presence of God*
- Come to church.
- Prepare for church. Come with praise and thanksgiving.
- Pour your heart into worship.
- Christmas is all about the presence.
- It’s time to start opening the Christmas presence.