

*The night is far spent; the day is at hand; let us ... cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.* Romans 13:12

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*But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built.*

Maybe you recognise these words. Words of immense power and truth. They are the words of King Solomon; words spoken on the day that the great and glorious Temple in Jerusalem was dedicated. A temple so glorious that it defied description; so immense, so huge, that it diminished all the city around it; so richly appointed, with walls covered in gold and vessels of silver and bronze, that it was the envy of rulers from Egypt to Babylon and all places in between. So immense, so glorious, because it sought to capture in stone and wood and gold and silver the spiritual greatness and glory of God and his Kingdom.

But even Solomon, on the day that the new Temple was dedicated, [even Solomon] knew that no building, even one as great and glorious as this Temple, could even begin to contain all the immensity and power and glory of God.

*“But will God indeed dwell on earth”, Solomon asks. “Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built.”*

That’s the image that we need to have in our minds this day. That’s the image that we need to have in our minds if we are to understand what Jesus is doing in this week’s Gospel; if we are to understand the anger that moved him to attack those selling animals and changing coins in the Temple precinct; even though the selling of those animals and the changing of that money was perfectly legal.

For Jesus, this is a call for radical change, regardless of what Temple authority said about these things. For Jesus this is a call to return to their national and cultural and spiritual roots. A call to clear out; a call to clean up all the distractions. To clear out and clean up everything that served to hide the reality of God’s presence in that place. To clear out and clean up everything that distracted the people from the reason why the Temple was there in the first place; that is, to be the dwelling place, the house, of God forever.

That’s what the promise was: that at the very heart of the nation; at the very heart of the city; at the very heart of the Temple, in the Kodesh HaKadoshim; in the Holy of Holies, seated above the Ark of the Covenant, God would reside forevermore: always watching, always hearing, always caring for the nation which he had rescued with his own might. In effect, with his own arm.

Now all of that may be interesting enough, but what does it have to do with us, nearly 2000 years after the Temple was destroyed; and what does it have to do with the business that we are about today on the First Sunday in Advent? Because it doesn’t speak about babies being born in a stable; or animals being asked to share their manger. It has nothing at all to do with shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night; or thousands upon thousands of heavenly angels brightening up the darkness

of the sky; or stars leading wanderers to find a baby newly born. So it seems, in a way, that we are hearing this story out of order; out of time. It's a story that we might better hear on Palm Sunday; on that day when that newborn baby, fully grown up, entered the City of Jerusalem greeted by the people of the city as the Messiah, the Christ. But to know the answers to all of those questions we have to remember what St. Paul tells us about our souls and bodies:

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?<sup>1</sup>*

We hear the story of that moment when the Christ cleansed the temple as we begin our Advent journey, because of what God did to us and for us on the Day of Pentecost. When the God whose glory and power and majesty are all too great to be measured or contained, freely chose, of his own will, to make himself present; not in the Kodesh HaKadoshim; not in the Holy of Holies; not seated about the Ark of the Covenant; not between the Cherubim; not in the great and glorious Temple, but in your heart and soul. Turning your body into his own temple. Into that holy place where he might dwell forever. Always watching; always hearing; always caring for you.

Just as he had for Israel.

So when we hear today about that day long ago when Christ overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; calling the people away from all that blinded them to the incredible reality of God's presence in the Temple, we are reminded that we too must look at the distractions of our own lives – the metaphorical selling of animals and changing of coins that blind us from knowing in every way that we can possibly know that God has come to live in us.

To know that we are, by Grace, temples of the Holy Spirit.

And that if Christ is to come to us, this day, every day, and on that day when he has promised to judge the living and the dead, we must work to clear out all those things that clutter our souls; to cast out, in the words of both this week's Collect and Epistle, the works of darkness. Because our celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas, not so many weeks away, will have no real meaning at all, not now or ever, unless we're also looking for Christ to come again in glory.

That's not just the theme of our Advent journey; it's the theme of God's salvation.

It is nothing more or less than the reason for our hope.

The Word of God was made flesh that we might be reconciled to God; that we might be reconciled to each other in Christ. That's what his life and death and resurrection and ascension were all about. And it is what our souls most long for: not for pretty packages neatly wrapped and ribboned.

Our souls long for the love of God to make all that is wrong in this world right; and to make all that is wrong within us right. That's what these days of Advent are all about. Casting off and clearing away all the works of darkness; the works of selfishness and greed and impatience; the works of brokenness and sorrow and fear; the works of apathy and disinterest.

That's the journey that we begin today. A journey not just to a manger, but to glory. To wholeness and holiness. As temples of God. Waiting with joy for that day when he will come to make all things right. Including us.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20