

## The Tabernacle of God with Men

A Christmas Eve Family Talk in Two Parts, by Rev. Michael Gladish  
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### I.

In the prophecy that we read as a recitation this evening Isaiah was told lift up his voice with strength and cry out, saying to the cities of Judah, “**Behold your God!**”

Everybody knows this is a prophecy of the Lord being born into the world, which is what we are celebrating tonight. But what confuses a lot of people is how this PERSON, Jesus, and especially this little BABY, could possibly be the God of all the universe, the same God who created everything, even ... well, Himself!

So we’re going to talk about that a little tonight.... But first, let’s remember some other prophecies in the Word that teach this same thing.

Turning back in Isaiah, for example, to chapter 9, we find a beautiful saying that is represented on the big banner up here on the wall, where the prophet said, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father (and) Prince of Peace” (9:6) *Notice:* even though He was born as a Child He is called “Father,” for He is our heavenly Father born as a baby on earth.

So in chapter 25 it says, “And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him and He will save us. This is Jehovah; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation’” (25:9).

But that’s not all. In chapter 43 Isaiah quotes the Lord, Jehovah, saying, “I am Jehovah your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.... Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I am Jehovah, and besides Me there is no Savior” (43:3, 10-11). And in chapter 44 we read, “Thus says Jehovah, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer [that is, the Redeemer of Israel], Jehovah of hosts: I am the First and I am the Last; and besides Me there is no God” (44:6).

This might also remind you of several passages in the book of Revelation where Jesus appears to John and plainly says He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, *the First and the Last*” (1:8, 11 & 22:13, e.g.). We could go on for a long time about this, but for now let’s just read together what is printed on the front cover of our order of service today.... Ready? This is also from the book of Revelation where John said, “Behold, the **Tabernacle** of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and **God Himself** will be with them and be their God” (21:3). This of course is the same Jesus who was born as a baby to Mary and laid in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

Imagine! No room for the One who created everything and who was now making Himself visible in His own natural human form! But you can sort of understand why: after all, He didn't *look like* the Lord of the universe; He looked like a helpless baby! And so even today people wonder about this. Maybe you do, too?!

So here's the basic idea. God created everything according to order, including what we call the laws of nature. They are HIS laws for how nature works, and so even though there are many things we don't understand about the world, we know that everything in the world works according to these laws. So when God needed a physical body to make Himself visible to people in the world, to teach and lead people in person and to work out some serious spiritual problems by living as a Man in the world, He created that body like every other human body, in the womb of a human mother, to be born at first as a tiny, helpless baby and *then grow up*.

Of course, HE was *not exactly the same* as anyone else because His soul was perfect: it was made up of pure, infinite love. Only His body was like ours. But His MIND, the part half-way between His soul and His body, the thinking and feeling part of Him, was a wonderful combination of Divine and human, infinite and finite, perfect and imperfect parts. So there were times in His life when He absolutely knew He was God, and there were other times when He wasn't so sure.

I know, it sounds strange, and in a wonderful way it IS strange, because there's never been another case like it in the history of the world. But here's the point: by coming into this world as a little baby and then growing up here He was able to bring His infinite love and wisdom down to a level where people could really see them working, AND He could use His power inwardly to correct or overcome all the bad ideas that would come into his mind from the world around Him *and* from the terrible spirits (demons) who tempted Him. This was something no one else could do because no one else had enough wisdom or understanding to do it properly. No one else had enough pure love to handle it. But by creating His own human body and mind He was able to bring everything that was wrong or disorderly in the natural and spiritual worlds under control *in Himself*, right here on earth, and in the process make that body and mind not just partly pure but 100% pure, 100% GOD – which is why, after His work was finished, after His crucifixion and resurrection, He disappeared and returned to the highest heaven.

Now we can't see the Lord anymore with our *natural* eyes, but we can see Him with our *spiritual* eyes when we understand what He was doing in the world, *and what He is still doing for us every day*, helping us fight against all the wrong or disorderly ideas that come into OUR minds as long as we respect and do what He did and what He teaches us to do in His Word.

## II.

So now let's turn our thoughts to the prophecy of Malachi, the last prophecy before the coming of the Lord, where we read,

“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the Lord (Jehovah) of hosts.” (Mal 3:1)

Notice that there are two messengers in this verse, the first is the messenger who would prepare the way, and that of course was John the Baptist, but the second was the Messenger of the *covenant*, namely, the Lord Himself. And the idea that He would come *suddenly* means that He would surprise everyone by coming when they didn't expect it, even though it had been predicted for hundreds of years.

But what is this temple that He would come to? On one hand, sure! – it was the big stone temple in Jerusalem, where He taught people when He had grown up. But on the other hand early in His ministry when He talked about the temple being destroyed and being rebuilt in just three days (John 2:21) we know that He was talking about the temple of His own body. So when we think of the Lord coming to His temple we can think of Him coming to us in the Divinely human body we were talking about a few minutes ago. And why did He do that? As He said again and again throughout His life, it was to teach us the way to heaven. So it was in His body that GOD as the Word “became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Now this is interesting – and important – because if you look around you might think that you can't see God anywhere. In fact because they can't see Him many people think He doesn't exist at all. But how can you see something that's infinite and everywhere?! Even if you know that He created a body for Himself and became a Man in this world you might think that because He rose with this whole body and disappeared when His work was finished, He is invisible again, just as He was before. But listen carefully: the truth is we don't ever really see with just our natural eyes; these eyes only bring light from the world into certain nerve cells that carry information to our brains, which affects our MINDS, and *it is in our minds that we actually see when we understand.*

So even though we – today – can't see the Lord's physical body we actually CAN see Him everywhere when we know and understand Him. And THIS is why He came into the world. This is why He created a body for Himself: *not* so that we could worship that body or claim to be saved simply by paying attention to what

He did, but so that we could understand, directly from His own personal words and deeds, what He is all about – and then truly love Him and cooperate with Him.

So now, once again, I'll ask you to turn to the front of our printed program and read the quotation from the book of Revelation. You can read it silently this time, but notice especially the first words, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men."

The tabernacle of God is just like His temple, but portable – sort of like a tent. And just as God is in His holy temple, so He is in His tabernacle, which is His body, only now it is not just a body of muscles and bones 5 or 6 feet tall, but a body of *teachings* that we can think about and understand. And where are these teachings? Of course they are found in the story of His life, that is, in His Word, but the Word is only paper and ink until we read it and take it into our minds. So the tabernacle of God is really the knowledge and the understanding of Him that we have *in our minds*. THIS is where the Lord really dwells with us, but He does so very particularly because He has shown us His love and wisdom and power in His Divinely Human life on the earth.

This, then, is what and why we celebrate at Christmas. His birth of course was just the beginning, but what a powerful and important beginning it was! Angels, miracles, a Baby *in a manger?*, shepherds in the hill country, wise men from afar following a star, many ancient prophecies fulfilled; and let's not forget about young Herod, who was so afraid of the little Baby that He wanted to have Him killed as soon as possible. The whole story is full of intrigue, doubt, faith and drama, and, you know, it is also the story of our own lives! It is the story of how God comes to US today so that WE can behold Him, and He can dwell with us, and we with Him.

At first, especially when we're going through dark and difficult hard times in our lives, the Lord appears to us as a little baby – very sweet and innocent, but not very helpful as far as we can see. Then as we consider all the teachings we have about Him, all the prophecies and what they really mean, all the miracles and what they represent, little by little He grows in our minds and becomes strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God so that we can turn to Him for help with ANY problem and discover that He really can redeem and save us if we trust Him, cooperate with Him and allow Him to lift us up into a truly peaceful, heavenly state.

May the Lord our God and heavenly Father be with you all as you celebrate His Divinely Human presence in your lives, learning and growing in your faith so that He can live and grow in you.

Amen.