

4th Sunday of Advent

Why do you live where you live? A small number of you may have lived in the same area or even house all your lives. For most of you your work or family connections may have shaped your decision. It may be a pleasant environment, or simply somewhere you can afford. Within an area, you will have your own reasons for choosing the kind of house, or exact location.

Where does God choose to live – and why? Of course he is to be found everywhere, and yet in the Old Testament he chooses a particular people to live among, the descendants of Abraham. When the time comes for them to leave Egypt for the Promised Land, God accompanies them through the desert. God gives Moses the Ten Commandments. He also tells him to construct a kind of travelling container for the stone tablets of the Law. This wooden box is covered with gold, and will form a kind of throne for the unseen God. It will be carried between poles, and rest in a special tent. This tent becomes known as the ‘tent of meeting’ because Moses goes into the tent to be alone with God when consulting him about important decisions. This is not a fixed home, or shrine. Location does not matter to God. What is important is to be at the heart of his chosen people.

In our first reading King David has conquered the city that will become the capital of his kingdom, Jerusalem. The people will settle down in one place and give up many of their nomadic ways. This is symbolised by David giving up his tent, and building a palace. David has qualms of conscience. If a tent is not good enough for the king, shouldn't God have something better too? Later God will approve Solomon's project for a temple, but now he gives David a message through the prophet Nathan. It is not David's place to build him a house. The house he wants is not built of stone, but David and his family. It is a play on words. God cannot be tied to a place, but he does bind himself to David and his line. Temples come and go. The Babylonians would destroy Solomon's temple. The second Temple would be destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., and not be rebuilt. But God would keep his promise. He would not abandon his people.

The Gospel tells us how God keeps this promise. He chooses Mary, a young girl of David's lineage, and through the Angel's message, promises her a Son who will inherit David's throne, and reign for ever. For nine months Our Lady will be a living temple for the most high God. This is why in devotions such as the Litany of Our Lady we apply to her the Old Testament imagery of Ark of the Covenant and House of Gold. Once again it is not a place that God chooses, but a person. At the beginning of his Gospel St John tells us that the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us.

Where does God choose to live today? He is everywhere, of course, but in a very special way he dwells in our midst in the Tabernacle. The word tabernacle is simply the Latin for tent. Christ comes into our midst at each Mass under the outward appearances of bread and wine. He remains with us after Mass in the Holy Eucharist reserved in the Tabernacle, so that he can give himself to the sick who cannot be with us at Mass, and as a focal point for our prayer and love. However, the home he wants most of all is in our hearts. He is unconcerned about who we are or what we look like. He loves you, and chooses to make his home in you. What an awe inspiring thought! We think of David's reaction. We think of how Our Lady's astonishment at Gabriel's message. If we are not awe struck at the thought of ‘God with us’ – ‘God within us’ – we have not really taken on board the enormity of God's promise.