

## AN ETERNAL HOUSE

The popular American poet Edgar Guest once wrote a line of poetry that's become a staple of American wisdom: *"It takes a heap of living to make a house a home."* Well, it may not be up there with Shakespeare, but it's not bad and we can all identify with the thought. Psychologists tell us that the house we live in as children often plays an important part in our adult dreams. I know it's true of me: I've had a lot of dreams over the years that involve my childhood home. Apparently it has a special place in my mind as well as my heart.

The ancient Israelites had a house that God dwelt in when he came to be among them. It was called the tabernacle, the "tent of meeting" and it had been constructed according to very specific plan which God had given to Moses. The tabernacle was ornate, very beautiful, and portable as well: the Israelites carried it with them during the entire forty years they spent journeying through the wilderness of Sinai. Every Sabbath, they would set up the tabernacle and gather for worship. As they worshipped, Yahweh would come down and fill the sanctuary with His presence—the smoke and fire which were called his *cavod*, His glory. And so God was continually *with* the Israelites and took care of them as he led them through the wilderness toward their destination. He sent them manna, bread from heaven, to feed them every day; he gave them moral instruction through the Law; and he forgave them their sins through their worship. He swept all of their enemies out of their way and at the end of their journey, He gave them a land of their own, just as He had promised to Abraham: a land of milk and honey.

After the Israelites secured their homeland under the leadership of Joshua and, later, David, they brought the ark of the covenant—the throne of God and the most holy part of the tabernacle—to Jerusalem. David wanted to build a permanent house for the Lord—a majestic temple where He would reside. It was a reasonable and a pious idea, but God had other plans. He responded to David through the prophet Nathan: *"Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?" "No,"* said the Lord: *"I will establish a house for you and Your house and your kingdom will endure forever...."*

David, of course, didn't understand. Even if he could have seen the temple his son, Solomon, built for the Lord, he still wouldn't have been able to understand. For as majestic as Solomon's temple was, it still wasn't the temple God had in mind. God made that clear when later he spoke these words about Solomon's temple through his prophet Jeremiah: *"...What I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers."* In other words, "I will destroy it." And so it came to pass. The Israelites flouted God's Law and polluted the worship He had given them and so God sent Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to destroy the temple Solomon had built. Later the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, and then increased in size and splendor by Herod the Great. And again the Israelites placed their hopes and their confidence in the great temple, as we read in the *Gospel of Mark*: *"As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!' "* But Jesus responded, *"Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."* And

so it came to pass. Fewer than forty years later, the Romans came and pulled down the temple, stone by stone, and flung them all down into the Kidron Valley. And the temple has never been rebuilt. On the mount where the temple once stood there now stands a pagan temple: the Dome of the Rock.

But if God was not referring to the temples of Solomon and Herod when he said “The Lord will establish a house for you,” then what was He referring to? What is the true House of David?

We are given a hint to the answer in our Gospel lesson for today, in the words of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary: *“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”* And so the

descendent of David of whom God spoke was none other than the Christ Child: Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God and Son of David. This was the one through whom God would establish his house. But what of the house? Where is the house? If not in Jerusalem, then where?

Again, the answer is supplied by the Scriptures, and it is given by Jesus himself as he stood in the temple talking with the Jews. They demanded a miraculous sign from him: *“Tell us by what authority you do these things!”* And Jesus replied, *“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.”* *“But it has taken us forty years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it up in three days?”* But, John adds, *“The temple he had spoken of was his body.”* And so the real tabernacle which was filled with the Spirit of the Lord, the real temple of sacrifice where God forgave all human sins wasn’t a temple of stone and wood, *it was the body of Jesus Christ*. It was in Jesus that God established his throne forever. It was in the Lamb of God whose blood takes away the sin of the world that the Lord offered his ultimate sacrifice for sins. And it was *to the temple of Jesus Christ*, the new and eternal Mount Zion, that God’s children, the New Israelites, would stream in order to be cleansed of their sins and receive eternal life.

Isn’t that just like God? We try to do something for Him and he turns around and does something much greater for us. We build monuments to glorify Him and He sends His Son to glorify us. Our home—our eternal home—is not the house or condo we own or the apartment we rent. They serve us well for the time being, but they can’t give us permanent lodging. The time will come when we won’t need them at all. Our real home, our eternal home, is in Christ.

And how do we live in Christ? First, by inviting Him to live in us and to make His home in our hearts. By allowing Him to lead us and defend us against our enemy as He did for the ancient Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness. By allowing His glory fill us and permeate our bodies and souls through worship like the smoke and fire of His glory filled the tabernacle in the wilderness. By bearing in mind as we toil and sweat for our daily wages that it is really God who provides the bread that keeps our bodies alive and His Word that nourishes our souls. By seeking his moral compass and correction by asking the Holy Spirit to show us our sins, to lead us to repentance, and help us grow in faith. By praying that He will impart to us the greatest gift of all: the mind of Christ that enables us to see clearly.

We let Christ live in us and we also live in Christ by dwelling in the Body of Christ on earth—His Church. It’s not a body of stone and metal and wood, but a body of saints—

all those who believe that their sins are forgiven through his shed blood and who by faith possess His righteousness. In other words, all who are saved by grace through faith. Luther defined the church as simply *“sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.”* And that is exactly what the church is: the fellowship of those who confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead. WE are the body of Christ and WE are the temples of His Spirit; we live in Him and He lives in us. He gives us our daily bread and he forgives our daily sins. He leads us away from temptation and He will deliver us from all evil. And through His Word and His sacraments, through prayer and fellowship, through the witness of faith and good works, we live out His commission to “go and make disciples of all nations.” He makes our body his temple and we make His body our temple.

What are we apart from God? Words like “empty” and “dark” and “dead” come to mind. The Psalmist wrote: *“Each man’s life is but a breath; [he] is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: he bustles about, but only in vain...”* *“Like the grass, [he] will soon wither...”* It has been estimated that the entire human body, reduced to the elements that constitute it, would be worth three or four dollars. We’re not made of precious elements like gold or silver or platinum; we’re made of simple elements like carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, iron. The name “Adam” was a simple noun that meant “clay” or “dirt.” That’s what God made us out of. But then He breathed life into us, and as long as we remain connected to Him through faith in His Son, we have life. As long as we live in Him and He lives in us, we will live forever.

But just as physical nature abhors a vacuum, so does our spiritual nature. Our spirits will be filled with one thing or another. They can be filled with the spirit of this world and all it has to offer or they can be filled with the Spirit of God. Those who set their hopes for happiness upon what the world has to offer are building their house on sand, and when the rain comes and the rivers rise and the wind begins to howl, their house will fall. But those who allow God’s Spirit to fill their spirits are building their house on the Rock of Ages and when the rain comes and the rivers rise and the wind howls, their house will stand firm and they will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Amen.

## **2 Samuel 7 (excerpts)**

7 Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, <sup>2</sup> the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” <sup>3</sup> And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you.”

<sup>4</sup> But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, <sup>5</sup> “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? <sup>6</sup> I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling.

<sup>11</sup> from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

<sup>17</sup> In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

**Psalm 39:1-7 What Is the Measure of My Days?** To the choirmaster: to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

<sup>39</sup> I said, "I will guard my ways,  
that I may not sin with my tongue;  
I will guard my mouth with a muzzle,  
so long as the wicked are in my presence."

<sup>2</sup> I was mute and silent;  
I held my peace to no avail,  
and my distress grew worse.

<sup>3</sup> My heart became hot within me.  
As I mused, the fire burned;  
then I spoke with my tongue:

<sup>4</sup> "O LORD, make me know my end  
and what is the measure of my days;  
let me know how fleeting I am!

<sup>5</sup> Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,  
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.

Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah

<sup>6</sup> Surely a man goes about as a shadow!  
Surely for nothing they are in turmoil;  
man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!

<sup>7</sup> "And now, O Lord, for what do I wait?  
My hope is in you.

### **1 Corinthians 3:10-17**

<sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup> If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

### **Luke 1:26-33 Birth of Jesus Foretold**

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."