

## “MAKE ABODE WITH HIM.”

The sublime note of joy with which the apostolate went out into the world, concentrated itself in the confession: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” The Gospel did not first come in Bethlehem, it resounded already in Paradise, and both Moses and the prophets are ignored, when the gospel of grace is said to have begun with the Apostles. Nay, rather the Israel of the Prophets had the selfsame Gospel as we. You need but turn to the writings of New Testament evangelists and apostles to find yourself again and again referred back to the Old Testament, to see the proof of the truth drawn from this ancient source, and to find sharply outlined, and to us frequently surprising, indications that the treasures of the new covenant have been deposited ages ago in the old covenant, even though at first in germ form.

No, the difference and the antithesis between what lies before and after Bethlehem consist in something else. There is undoubtedly a positive and an absolute difference between the gospel before and after the manger cradle. But this difference does not consist in greater or lesser riches of the Old or New Testament gospel. No, the old and new covenant only differ in this respect, that the Old Testament lacks the reality of the New Testament. This was generally indicated by speaking of the dispensations of shadows and of fulfilment; but this statement is far too weak. The difference can be expressed more accurately by saying, that in the Old Testament the image

is shown, but in the New Testament the reality itself has appeared in the person of Christ. "The law, which is given by Moses" (John 1:17) does not refer to the ten commandments. The law here is the name of the whole Old Testament, taken as an instruction, a revelation, a word of God addressed to Israel. This word, revelation, instruction which God gave in figure, began to assume a form with Moses. But when Bethlehem sees the birth of the Holy Infant, something entirely different appears. It is no more instruction and announcement, but it is truth that is given. And in this connection truth means what we call reality. The image is not the truth, the shadow is not the truth. Image and shadow in themselves are unreal. That which is true only comes, when in tangible reality he appears, whose image has been seen from afar, and whose Divine shadow has fallen upon Israel.

Therefore the Apostles emphatically declared that they had seen Jesus, that they had heard him, that they had handled him. They emphasized the fact that now the Word has received flesh, i. e. reality in the earthly. This emphasized no less the fact that Jesus has been foretold that he has appeared at times, and that he has vanished again, but that at last he has come in full reality, and that from Bethlehem to Golgotha he has dwelt among us.

To dwell in a place is really and permanently to tarry there. Not merely to come, but also to stay. Not to turn in for the night a single time, but continuously and permanently to reveal one's presence in one place. God dwells in heaven and his abode is in the light. But though the Scripture

declares that God dwells in the high and lofty place, it immediately adds that this same God looks down upon the children of men on earth. Heaven and earth are not intended to be separated, but to form a higher unity, so that the Lord our God dwells simultaneously both in heaven and on earth. It began like this. God dwelt in Paradise and originally the fellowship of man with God and of God with his creature was very real and unbroken. The separation only came when by sin man expelled God from this earth, drove him out of his own creation and from fellowship with his own most exalted creature. But God takes no pleasure in this. Expelled by sin, he returns in seeking grace. "Adam, where art thou?" is the call of God, with which he returns, and claims his world again.

At length God regains his abode on the earth. Provisionally in the cloud, in the column of fire and in the tabernacle, but fully symbolical on Zion. "This is my habitation. This is my rest," said the Lord, "here will I dwell" (Ps. 132:14). Zion by the side of Bashan indicates that God is still expelled from the world at large, but that in Zion he has prepared a place of rest for himself, an oasis of grace, a habitation of his own. This sacred symbolical return of God to this world prophesied age upon age in advance the glorious Bethlehem event. And when at length the fullness of time is come, and the Babe is born in Bethlehem, God no longer dwells symbolically in Zion, but in full reality in Christ. And therefore the Apostles preach with so much delight that God has been revealed in the flesh, and that re-

vealed in the flesh, i. e. in reality he has dwelt among us.

Hence Bethlehem is the real and actual return of God to earth, in order here on earth permanently to dwell with us and among us. This is the restoration of what was real in Paradise. And does this end with Golgotha, or if you please, with the ascent into heaven? By no means. For God to dwell on earth is only possible in the fullest sense through Golgotha and the Ascension. Between Bethlehem and Golgotha there was real dwelling of God upon earth, but in the most extremely limited sense. A dwelling which was confined to one people, and which among that one people was limited to the narrow circle of those who followed Jesus. The promise, however, ran, that God would dwell on earth among all peoples, in all parts of the world, and that he would be approachable from age to age by every soul that feared him.

And this full, extended, unlimited, permanent, ever continuous, and ever self-expanding dwelling of God among the children of men was only possible when Jesus was no longer seen and heard, and handled among one people, in a narrow circle, but when he was elevated to the throne of grace and glorified. From thence he could extend his working to every people and to every heart. For this reason he declares in the hearing of his disciples: "It is expedient for you that I go away," and also adds: "When I shall have gone away, I shall come again, and with the Father make my abode in you" (John 14:23).

Thus there is a threefold dwelling of God on earth. First, symbolical in Israel on Zion. After

that the reality of the flesh, when Jesus walked about on the earth. And now, in the third place, the dwelling of God among us and in us in all parts of the earth. Our heart is made a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Our heart is the real Zion, and therefore our redeemed human heart is the temple in which he dwells. Sin expels God. In grace, God resolves to come back and to dwell again among us and in us. This constitutes all the mysticism of real, godly religion. Religion does not begin with this. It rather begins with an outward confession; with knowing God only as one who lives above, and is always conscious of a fatal distance between self and the Most High God.

But grace for grace gradually works modification in this, and makes internal what began with being external. To have the Spirit, is to have God himself in one's own heart, to carry him about in one's own soul, and the new commandment of brotherly love is nothing but the commandment, that as you carry God about in your own heart, you should discover that same God dwelling in the heart of the brother, and that you should join heart to heart, because that selfsame God fills the heart of each. But although this is so, most people are afraid to face it. Though God dwells in their heart, they every time put him back into the corner of their heart. Thus they become aware again of distance, and for the greater part withdraw their heart from God. And this is the sin of the saints.

But grace holds on. God will not let you go. From the corner of the heart in which you hold him back, he comes every time again to capture

a part of your heart, till at length you throw up your hands, open your whole heart to him, and now experience with joy that he really in Christ has made his abode in you. This is the continuous Christmas gospel. Not a Christmas gospel that remains standing by the manger, but such an one as passes over from the manger into your own heart. First the jubilant note of the apostolate: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." And then the song of praise on the part of God's saint: "The Word was made flesh, and has taken up his abode in mine own heart."

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### "WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT THEE?"

Refreshment of grace is particularly rich when also in departing from this world the soul is privileged to be near unto God. On the death-bed highest bliss has often been enjoyed. Many have departed, not only strong in faith and in higher clearness of mind, but also with the foretaste of heavenly joy. No rule can be made for this. A blessed death-bed is not always the reward of holier-mindedness and of deeper spirituality. A death bed that enhances the glory of God has not infrequently been the portion of one who in life had wandered far away from his Lord. And on the other hand painful distress has been witnessed on the part of those who for many years had known the secret walk with God.

As a rule this depends upon all sorts of things that have nothing to do with a devout frame of mind and heart. First upon age, temperament,

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