

**THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD
ALL THE WORLD WITH HIS
FREE GRACE SUPPLYING
Is 52:7–10; Ps 2; Heb 1:1–6; Jn 1:1–14**

I'll be home for Christmas. Just mention the words and instantly, you hear Bing Crosby's voice, don't you? It's the magic of this time. Children home from college for Christmas. A reprieve from business travels lets you be home. And that crazy schedule of sports practice, music lessons, and social engagements is suddenly empty. It's not just you, but the whole family who is home for Christmas. The whole family, finally together.

But let's be honest, even with all that joy, a little tension is inevitable. How long will the tranquility last? It is only a matter of time before an argument erupts between siblings. At some point, you know the holiday tradition that you wish would die will come to life again—the comments on others' attire, the rolling eyes when a certain family member walks in the room. Being home means you need grace to forgive one another. Grace is yours because another has made His home with you. **GOD HAS PITCHED HIS TENT WITH YOU SO THAT YOU BEHOLD HIS GRACE.**

Today we rejoice, for the Word has become flesh so that He dwells among us. Can you imagine? The eternal, divine Son of God – the Word – took on flesh. He entered our world and has taken on a human nature, flesh and blood, in the womb of Mary and has been born in the flesh. That is why we celebrate today. But there is more to this verse, more reason to celebrate, that's revealed by a more precise translation. "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us."

In the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, God tabernacles among us. The tabernacle was a tent designed by God Himself so that He would have a place to dwell among His people. That design was given to Moses shortly after the exodus from Egypt. The tabernacle would serve for nearly five hundred years before it would be replaced by the temple, which had the exact same design but was a permanent structure rather than a tent.

Jesus tabernacles among us—pitched His tent among us. Jesus is the tabernacle. Everything that God promised about the tabernacle stands fulfilled in Jesus. He is the place where God dwells among us. No more need for a tabernacle or temple. Jesus is where it's at. And that is saying a lot.

The tabernacle was a place of awe. It was apparent that God was present in the tabernacle, because there you beheld His glory. It was a cloud that rested in the innermost part of the tabernacle, the Most Holy Place. While the Most Holy Place was not entered by anyone other than the high priest and even then, only once a year, but the glory of the Lord, that dazzling cloud, extended beyond the tent, reaching into the sky for all to behold. It was a truly awe-inspiring sight.

And now that awe is bound up in Jesus. He is born and appears as any other child. There is nothing in His appearance to make Him more glorious than any other man.

Yet you can still marvel at Him. In this seemingly ordinary man, the eternal God dwells! This child lying in His mother's arms is the very Creator of the universe, the One who made those arms that hold Him. Can you grasp the majesty of that? How great is our God to humble Himself, born of Mary, yet remain the source of all things!

For the same reason that the tabernacle inspired awe, it also produced fear. The glory of the Lord that could be seen coming out of the tabernacle was the same awesome glory that the people of Israel witnessed on Mount Sinai when the Lord descended to speak to Moses. It looked as if the mountain were on fire. A strict boundary was set around the mountain so that no person or animal would step on it, lest they die.

We should approach Jesus with a similar sense of awe and reverence. It's no small thing to be in God's presence. The Most Holy Place within the tabernacle was where God's presence was most concentrated. Even the high priest, before entering that sacred space, had to undergo elaborate cleansing rituals. To enter unprepared was a death sentence. Sinners cannot simply waltz into the presence of the holy God.

And this truth remains unchanged. Don't be deceived by Christ's humble birth. He is the holy God, the Creator of all things. A honest look at my own sin leaves me trembling at the thought of approaching the One in whom we behold the glory of God.

Yet there is reason why the faithful kept coming to the tabernacle. Yes, it is an awe-inspiring place as you behold the glory of the Lord. Yes, it is fearful to know you cannot hide your sin or explain it away as you behold the glory of the Lord. But there was also grace. You also have His Word. The Lord commanded Moses and the people of Israel to construct the tabernacle, and He told them why. He promised that it is where He would dwell among us, His people, with grace.

God desires to dwell with His people. But He also knows that they are sinners who cannot live to tell the tale if they behold His unfettered holiness. So He puts on a mask that He might truly be present with His people, and they would yet live. That is grace. That is the tabernacle. He knew they were sinners, unworthy to gaze upon His unveiled holiness. So, in an act of extraordinary grace, He veiled His full glory, making His presence bearable for His people. That's the essence of the tabernacle – grace.

And it is all bound up in Jesus. Here in the child born of Mary is God dwelling among His people with grace. He will not be apart from you, so He puts on human flesh as a mask. That's grace. All of that grace is in Jesus, and it explains why He took a human nature. Grace comes at a price, one that we cannot pay. So Jesus pays the price in His flesh. The glory of God will be revealed in its fullness at the cross. The night that He is betrayed, Jesus prays, "The hour has come; glorify Your Son." At other times, Jesus says it is not yet His time. His time is at the cross; that is the time of glory, glory that abounds in grace.

With unending grace, you have just the place to dwell—in the tabernacle, in Jesus. His presence, glory, and grace is no less available for you today than it was when He was lying in Mary's arms. He still veils His full glory so He can dwell with you. His glory was revealed in your Baptism, a glory that remains with you. You encounter His glory in Scripture. His glory is present under bread and wine. Right there, He comes to you with the same body and blood that Mary held in her arms, the same body and blood that was crucified for your salvation, the same body and blood that rose from the dead, the same body and blood that will come again for you on the Last Day, the same body and blood in which you behold His glory, the glory of the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus tabernacles with you—pitches His tent with you. So welcome home! You are home right here because here Christ is present through His Word, Baptism, and Supper. That means God is at home with you because of Christ. God's own Son is born a child to reconcile us to the Father... in this little child is our God and King ever reigning. God from eternity condescending to appear in human flesh and blood... all the world with His free grace supplying! In the name of Jesus, Amen.