

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

“It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men.” C. S. Lewis ¹
My desire as I did the research was to try to understand what it means to be found in the Presence of God. My study led me to three aspects that I feel reveal the Presence of God, the Shekinah Glory, the Incarnation and the Indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Shekinah Glory as a concept is used to describe the “abiding, dwelling, or habitation” of the physical manifestations of YEHOVAH God described in Exodus 24:16, 40:35 and Numbers 9:17-18 — where “shakan” is used. It is also used to describe the mystical “Shekinah” presence in the Tabernacle. The word “mishkan,” (mshkn), a derivation of “shakan” (shkn), is often translated “tabernacle.” The Hebrew for tabernacle is more often simply “ohel,” ‘ohel, or tent. “Mishkan” means “dwelling place” — that is, THE “DWELLING PLACE” OF “HIM WHO DWELLS” OR “SHEKINAH.” ²

The Ark of the Covenant, an acacia wood chest overlaid and inlaid with gold, was part of the furnishings of the Old Testament tabernacle. It was positioned within the veil in the most holy place, the Holy of Holies. The Lord said “In the Ark put the testimony and there I will meet with you.” It contained the 10 Commandments, the law given the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Aaron’s rod that budded was also kept inside as a reminder that God had assigned the priesthood to the Levites and a warning to the people to put away complaining. A jar of Manna was also kept inside as a memorial of God’s provision for them, that they may see the bread with which He fed them in the wilderness.

Above the Ark of the Covenant containing the law, rod and Manna was the mercy seat. It was made of gold and it covered the top of the Ark completely. Two cherubim made of one piece of hammered gold not cast but beaten and formed, rose from the two ends with their faces turned down toward the mercy seat, perhaps longing to look into the mystery of redemption (1 Peter 2:12.) God’s Divine Presence dwelled above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim and above the Ark of the Covenant. The priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year to offer the blood of the sacrifice for the sins of the people. “The blood covered the mercy seat to cover the broken commandments man couldn’t keep. So the blood covered the broken law. Christ’s blood was shed and His blood covered the sins we’ve committed. His blood covers the sin in our hearts.” ³

The Ark of the Covenant created by direct revelation from God became an actual literal dwelling place of Jehovah with His people. God desired to dwell with His people and wanted them to grasp the reality of His Presence with them. God dwelled with them in a visible, local sanctuary. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. The Old Testament tabernacle was a physical, moveable residence of God.

Just as the Ark of the Covenant was a holy place where the priest had to enter to pour blood on the mercy seat for forgiveness no one can get forgiveness without coming to the Father to get it. Jesus said “I am the way the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Me.” Jesus said “I came to seek and to save that which was lost to give my life a ransom for many, to call sinners to repentance. (verse)

One of most interesting things I learned about the Ark of the Covenant was from the *Pulpit Commentary*. The Ark of the Covenant pre-figures a revelation of the gospel in that it represents a place where mercy and truth can meet together and righteousness and peace can kiss each other. (Psalm 85:10) ⁴ Here was God’s way of uniting mercy with justice. The righteous demands of the law could not be met and without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sin. The mercy seat over the law was the place where truth and grace met through the blood sacrifice. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven whose sin is covered.” (Psalm 32:1)

In summary, the Ark of the Covenant with the mercy seat and the elements inside, in its place in the tabernacle, was a physical representation of the Presence of God dwelling with His people. Just as the Ark of the Covenant provided a holy space for the Presence of God it foreshadowed the coming of God in human flesh, the Incarnation.

1 <http://www.experiencingworship.com/articles/general/2001-7-Great-Quotes-on.html>

2 <http://www.hope-of-israel.org/glory.htm>

3 Sermon note from Tim Kemp, 14th Street Mission Church, Parkersburg, WV, April 21,2011

4 “The Pulpit Commentary” Genesis, Exodus Funk & Wagnalls, page 244

The Incarnation of God in human flesh is the ultimate representation of the Presence of God with His people. One of the fascinating things to me about God coming in human flesh is that Mary, His mother, is a representation of the Ark of the Covenant. She was the vessel, the container which carried the Holy Child, the Word made flesh, Immanuel, God with us. As the Presence of God resided within the veil, above the Ark of the Covenant, in the tabernacle, Mary's womb housed the Holy of Holies, indwelt by God Himself in the form of a tiny baby. This is not meant to deify Mary but to highlight an often overlooked reality of Mary's part in God being revealed in human flesh. Mary was the new Eve whose Seed would crush the serpent's head, Mary, in humility answered God's call with willingness to follow and accept what God asked of her.

The New Testament Incarnation of God in Christ was His Presence in flesh and blood manifest in the world. "The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory." (John 1:14) He came to fulfill the law not abolish it. His name was called Jesus, which means He shall save His people from their sins. "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12-13) The law inside the Ark of the Covenant distinguished for the people the difference between righteousness and sin. It shed light on the way they were to live. Jesus is the Light of the world.

Jesus said "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35) Just as the manna represented God's provision for His people in the wilderness, it pre-figured Jesus Christ Who is the Bread of life. When Christ died for our sins He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption, cleansing our consciences from acts that lead to death, so we may serve the living God. So you see the prefiguration of Christ in the Ark of the Covenant as the Word, the Bread, and our High Priest.

Jesus' death on the cross is our sin offering. "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14) At the last supper He had with His disciples He said "Take, eat; this is My Body." and He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28) Jesus told the disciples to remember Him in breaking bread and drinking wine to commemorate His death until He can share it with them again in His eternal kingdom.

The Incarnation was God coming in human flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Word became Flesh. As we follow Him in faith and obedience, and come to Him for forgiveness our hearts become containers for the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Indwelling Holy Spirit communes with God in the believer's heart and brings holiness and righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross. Just as the Ark of the covenant contained the commandments, Mary's womb housed the Holy of Holies, our hearts and lives become the temple of the Holy Spirit. "God desires this righteousness to characterize His people. This goal John sees on Patmos, where the fine linen that will clothe the Bride of Christ for the marriage supper of the Lamb is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Revelation 19:8) The righteousness of God as it is progressively revealed seeks embodiment, reflection in God's people, so that they will be like Him." ⁵

Isaiah 61:10 says "He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." "the righteousness to be revealed has a concrete and visible character. It is outward transformation as well as

inward spiritual change. God's revelation of Himself is redemptive in purpose and leads to a final universal embodiment of His glory." 6

God dwells in the soul of the believer. The Ark represents God's dwelling place where the Lord meets and communes with us. The Word inside the Ark is the light concerning righteousness and sin. A New Covenant was promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." The Holy Spirit takes up His residence in us indwelling us. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) As the Ark of the Testimony my heart ought to be a sanctuary of God where His will has a cherished place in the desires of my heart and my affections. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5)

Revelation 11:19 records John saying that "the temple of God was opened in heaven and the Ark of His Covenant was seen in His temple." The Ark manifests His Presence in the New Jerusalem where "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its Light. (Revelation 21:23) Heaven is the ultimate container of the Kingdom of God and the Throne room of the Lamb where He is given glory and honor and thanks and worship forever and ever. (Revelation 5:11-14) "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and He will be their God." (Revelation 21:3)

As a result of the research for this assignment I have a new appreciation for the Ark of the Covenant and a coming together of the terms of justice and mercy found within the Ark of the Covenant, a greater understanding of Mary as the new Eve whose Seed would crush the serpent's head, and Mary's womb symbolizing the container of the Holy of Holies, The Incarnate God in the flesh, and a renewed awareness that our lives and hearts are containers of God's Presence, a sanctuary for His indwelling and ought to reflect the Holy God we serve.

The artist's pages and artwork linked to this site will hopefully edify the viewers. Included also on the site is a recent artwork created by Makoto Fujimura for Crossway in celebration of the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible. Here is an example of an artist working in the power of the Holy Spirit to produce a work that is created on pages of the English Standard Version of the Bible. I really resonate with what Gerda Liebmann has written on her blog site at <http://www.gliebmann.blogspot.com/> "About God & Art" on her post entitled "Gathering." She says "As believers, we are called to live our lives in Christ. So if our living, breathing and being is in Christ, then our art will be in Him also."

My goal in selecting the topic of studying The Ark of the Covenant, "In the Presence of God" was to introduce you to spiritual images combining creativity, Scripture and visual thoughts that might be a catalyst of edification to spur you on to consider His Presence with you. The "Testimony" section on the web site gives you a way to respond if you wish and to share your stories, images and verses as a testimony to His Presence with you.

Bibliography

Shekinah Glory

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<http://www.gerdaliebmann.com/16998/index.htm>

“Because of the Smoke” painting by Gerda Liebmann

<http://www.gerdaliebmann.com/16996/index.htm>

“Fire Pillar” sculpture by Debbie Young

<http://debbieyoungart.com/sculpture/05.html>

Incarnation

“The Annunciation” painting by Fra Angelico

<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/advent/feature-2002-12-day5.html>

“Life in the Womb” video by AngelTwins2

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVOZUZMkU-U>

“The Visitation” sculpture by Sir Jacob Epstein

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=4112&searchid=25702>

“The Song of Simeon” oil on canvas by Rembrandt

<http://www.thewords.com/gallery/rembrandt-6.htm>

View sketch by Gwen Hannan Meharg a description of “Agony”

dance performance by Maxidus

<http://maxidus-maxidus.blogspot.com/2011/04/agony-brief-description.html>

Visit “Daily Cross” blog by Gerda Liebmann to see slideshows of crosses from all over the world.

<http://gliebmann.blogspot.com/>

“Jesus of Nazareth as Christus Imperator” mosaic by anonymous master Mosaic, Circa 494-520, Cappella Arcivescovile, Ravenna, Italy

<http://www.all-art.org/history136-2.html>

“Communion” banners by Gerda Liebmann

<http://www.gerdaliebmann.com/16998/index.htm#back>

Indwelling Holy Spirit

“The Wind Blows Where It Wishes” video of installation by Gerda Liebmann

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj1hhHzEQgg>

“Being Filled” video by Gerda Liebmann

http://www.youtube.com/user/liebmann?blend=1&ob=5#p/u/0/MwaRboD6__g

“Offer Them Christ” sculpture by Carolyn Rock

View the video about “the Four Holy Gospels” created in celebration of the 400th anniversary of the King James Version Bible by Makoto Fujimura

<http://www.makotofujimura.com/four-holy-gospels/>

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Summary

1 <http://www.experiencingworship.com/articles/general/2001-7-Great-Quotes-on.html>

2 <http://www.hope-of-israel.org/glory.htm>

3 Sermon note from Tim Kemp, 14th Street Mission Church, Parkersburg, WV, April 21, 2011

4 “The Pulpit Commentary” Genesis, Exodus Funk & Wagnalls, page 244

5 “Themes in Old Testament Theology” page 55

6 “Themes in Old Testament Theology” page 56