

There is an old belief, that before God created the world He first created a stone, the Foundation Stone that glowed like an emerald. Around this stone, God built the world.

The ancients saw Jerusalem as the center of the world. The temple was the center of Jerusalem and the temple rested on the Foundation Stone.

But of course the first reading today does not use the word temple. It uses the word house. David wants to build a house for God, a dwelling place for the almighty, a place where God touches the earth and lives among His people. But God would not let David do this. The building of the temple was left to his son Solomon. One tradition tells of the building of the temple in this way.

King Solomon called everyone together, the rich and the poor, the princes and the priests and said to them, “The temple will be a holy place for all the people, so all of the people shall have a share in building it.”

Then he cast lots for each of the four walls to see which group would build which wall. The lot of the northern wall along with the pillars and stairs of the temple fell to the princes. The priests would build the southern wall and tend the Ark and its’ curtain. The wealthy merchants would build the eastern wall as well as supply the oil for the sanctuary lamp that would burn forever. The western wall, and the job of weaving the temple curtains fell to the poor. It was also their lot to pray for the temple’s completion. Then the building began.

The merchants took the golden jewelry of their wives and paid workers to build their wall, and it was finished quickly. The princes and priests likewise found ways to have their wall built for them. But the poor had to build their wall themselves so it took much longer.

Everyday the poor came to the site of the temple and they worked with their own hands to build the western wall. And all the time they worked on it their hearts were full of joy, for their love of God was very great.

At last the temple was finished. Nothing in the world could compare with it. It was the jewel in the crown of Jerusalem. And for years after when the poor went to the temple, fathers would say to their sons “Do you see that stone in the wall? I put it there with my own hands.” And mothers would say to their daughters “Do you see that beautiful curtain in the temple? I had a hand in weaving that curtain.”

When the temple was destroyed, many years later, only the western wall survived. Some said that God sent His angels to protect the wall, for it was most precious of all in His eyes.

Even today the western wall is still standing. It is sometimes called the Wailing Wall. Did you ever wonder why? Every morning drops of dew collect on its' stones. The people there say the wall cries at night for the loss of the temple. All who visit there testify that they feel the presence of God in that place.

God promised David that his house and his kingdom would endure forever. But the temple was destroyed and the people scattered. If he did not mean the temple and the kingdom of Solomon, what did He mean?

David's vision, to build a house for God, is too limited and God offers him a covenant that far exceeds David's humble ambitions.

A covenant is a pact or an agreement. But it is much more than what we think of as a contract. A covenant implies family. Two parties entering into a covenant are in effect adopting each other into their respective families. A marriage, for example is much more than the union of a man and a woman, it is a covenant making two families, into one.

God has a plan to bring us back to Him. That plan involves a series of covenants. Each successive covenant expands God's family, from His first covenant with our first parents, to Abraham, to Moses, to His covenant with David, which encompassed an international empire, and finally to the New Covenant, a worldwide kingdom stretching to the ends of the earth and embracing all nations.

The covenant with David, is the last of the Old Testament, the word testament itself means covenant. God will not allow David to build Him a house, but God will build a house for David, a royal dynasty. A son of David will sit on the throne and rule over the kingdom. This son will build the temple and establish a dynasty that will endure forever, and

God will call Him His own. What's more, God will not disown this son as He did with Saul when Saul proved himself unworthy.

This covenant with David fulfilled the promise God made to Abraham and affirmed with Moses. But for us, God's adopted children, it also speaks to the New Covenant that is to come, the New Testament.

The house God begins to build with David will be brought to conclusion and made perfect in David's descendent.

We see the beginning of that conclusion and that perfection in the Gospel reading. It is through the virgin, herself of the House of David, betrothed to Joseph, also of the house of David, that Jesus is a "son of David," greater than Solomon. It is through Mary that God will touch the earth and live among His people.

God's plan for us, His New Covenant with us, is fulfilled with the coming of Jesus. Jesus is the true Son of David who will reign on David's throne forever. And His kingdom extends over all peoples and nations. Christ is the cornerstone, the foundation stone of the new temple. The old temple was built by all the people, out of cedar and stone, transient things that pass away. But the new temple is built of the people, living stones that will last forever. The true Kingdom of God is His Church, and we, the people that make up that church, are His temple. And so in that sense, it is also through each one of us that God touches the earth and lives among His people. Each one of us manifests God to the world.

The temple God is building for Himself will be complete only when all the nations are brought to the obedience of faith. This final construction is addressed to the world as a whole. The temple built by God always points beyond itself to something greater, a work that will only be finished when Christ has put all His enemies beneath His feet, and destroyed every sovereignty and power. When He has rest from His enemies, then He will hand the kingdom over to God the Father.

We are entering into the final week of Advent. Advent is a time of preparation; we prepare for the coming of God, both as a child in Bethlehem and as a victorious king at the end of all things. Because by these signs we know that God has fulfilled His covenant and kept His promise.

The coming of the Messiah, the anointed one, was foretold from the very beginning. When Adam and Eve fell from grace they were promised one would come who would strike at the head of the serpent. Throughout all the Old Testament the coming of a savior was spoken of. All of these prophecies and signs are fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the anointed Son of God.

This has been a difficult year for many. People have lost jobs and income and are unsure what the new year will bring. As a result, the way we celebrate Christmas this year, may be very different from years past.

Decorations may be sparser, gifts may be fewer, gatherings most certainly have been affected. Some even talk of Christmas being cancelled.

But of course, Christmas is not cancelled, it cannot be cancelled.

Perhaps the most precious gift we have been given this year is the time to reflect upon what we are truly celebrating. God is coming to us, as a child born to a couple of meager means but of royal heritage. On Christmas Day the divine touches the earth and everything is changed. How will we prepare to stand in the presence of God? Have we asked forgiveness of those we have wronged? Have we forgiven those who have wronged us?

How have we answered God's call to serve Him by serving our brothers and sisters? Are we generous with our time and talent and treasure, or are we selfish?

Can we say yes when that yes seems to go counter to all our plans and hopes for the future? Do we have the courage to follow the example of our mother and answer with "let it be done to me according to thy will?"

As Christmas draws near, Mary reminds us that the best Christmas, indeed the only true Christmas, is that Christ be born, not in a cattle stall in Bethlehem, but in the inner sanctuary of our own hearts.