

Advent Midweek 3 – 2025
(Will God Really Dwell on Earth – The Mercy Seat)
Exodus 25:10-22 ~ Colossians 1:15-23

One of my best good buddies' dad was a radiologist. Not a technician, but an actual M.D. He died of cancer. Being around the x-ray machine was so habitual that my buddies' dad became casual about his proximity to the radiation – that's what the "ray" in x-ray is for, radiation. High dose occupational exposure – it's hazardous. He was a wonderful man but he was cavalier with something that he shouldn't have been. When I was in the Navy, I received hazardous duty pay when I worked on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. If you make a high altitude jump out of an airplane, if you handle ordinance, if you do lab work with dangerous viruses, if you are a submariner then you are eligible for hazardous duty pay. Why? Because your life is at risk moreso than if you have a commonplace vocation. Hazardous duty – have you ever been engaged in hazardous duty?

Nadab and Abihu were sons of Aaron, the first High Priest. They were in a hazardous situation. Nadab and Abihu were priests, serving in the tabernacle and they offered "unauthorized fire." Unauthorized fire was an innovation dreamed up by Nadab and Abihu – it was strange fire, different from what God prescribed, illicit, and it was an affront to God's holiness. What were they thinking? Perhaps they were thinking that their conduct didn't matter. Perhaps they thought that God's holiness was a thing that they could trifle with because they were the High Priest's sons, elite, entitled to do as they thought right. "Fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:2). Why would God not tolerate man's arbitrary worship procedures? Does that seem a bit harsh to you?

On another occasion, a man named Uzzah was accompanying the Ark of the Covenant as it was being brought up from a neighboring town to Jerusalem. It began to wobble on its cart and Uzzah put out his hand to steady the Ark. But Uzzah was not a priest. Uzzah had not been sanctioned to touch the Ark. It was to be carried by the poles constructed for that purpose and then only by those who were specially consecrated for this task. God's holiness created a hazardous environment for those who treated it cavalierly. What do you think of that? Do you believe that God's holiness is neutral, inert, inconsequential like a Big Mac or a pair of Wrangler jeans? Is there any awe in your heart as you consider God's holiness? Why or why not? One will never begin to grasp the humility, the wonder of God residing in a vulnerable baby unless one understands the striking nature of God's holiness. The holiness of Almighty God is so far beyond us, so profound, so astoundingly pure. Holiness belongs to God alone and He wills to share it, to have us participate in it, but it retains its hazards.

The Ark of the Covenant had a cover, a removable cover. It was called the Atonement Cover or the Mercy Seat. On the Mercy Seat were two cherubim, angels, with their wings spread outstretched toward one another, overshadowing the Mercy Seat with their wings (Exodus 25:10-22). "There I will meet with you" (Exodus 25:22). Love, a desire to enlarge our lives, prompted God to locate Himself among His people, but His holiness was to be guarded. God does not keep His holiness to Himself, nor does He use it to distance Himself from His people, but His holiness is not a commonplace like your TV remote or a box of Kleenex. Man either shares God's life, God's holiness, or man remains profane and will reap an end that is riddled in

darkness and despair. Over and over we read in this Scripture this formula: “I am the God who sanctifies you” (Leviticus 20:8; 21:8; 22:32). We don’t sanctify ourselves – we don’t have the ability. God makes us and keeps us holy.

I’ve felt icky lately, how about you? The news has been horrible; world events have been horrible. The world is profane, perhaps more than ever. I don’t think that I need to recount recent examples for you to concur. I’m not at home in the profanity of the world. Why do you suppose that is? I used to be (I totally used to be). At one time I was a reckless, self-indulgent hedonist who enjoyed plowing through polite barriers. Now, I am entirely different. Why do you suppose that is? Is your body holy? This flesh and blood humanity that is integrated to our soul, is our body holy? God has sanctified your soul, but is your body holy? St. Paul wrote this: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” (1 Corinthians 6:15). Why? Because that would profane Christ’s holiness which God has caused to dwell in you. Why do we not serve Holy Communion to an unbeliever? Because it’s dangerous, because they will receive it to their judgment, their detriment, not to their benefit. We don’t trifle with God’s holiness. We defend it, protect it, savor it appropriately. God’s holiness is faith’s nourishment. We need it. We flourish beneath it.

All of that holiness, all of God’s majestic beauty, all of His limitless power and His omnipotent vitality and His eternal goodness comes into our rustic and petty domain. God becomes man. God is incarnated. God takes on the form of servant. God tabernacles in our flesh (John 1:14). Like you; God becomes like you in every way yet without sin (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15). Humble, ordinary-looking, and yet the Lord Christ is LIFE, He is LIGHT, He is TRUTH (John 1:4; 8:12; 14:6). And He comes to lift us out of the profane. Can you ever go back? Could you ever deny Him? Could you ever discard His holiness and go back to the pigpen? I suspect that you couldn’t. Why? Because you have tasted, genuinely tasted God’s holiness! Because you have known the joy of being forgiven, being a participant in Christ’s life, because you have been elevated above the profane. You have a deep and abiding awareness of holiness (God Himself has seen to it). St. Paul wrote this as a description of me: “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (Colossians 1:21-23). St. Paul wrote that as a description of you as well.

You could dream up all sorts of worldly answers for why the Christian church has persevered on earth for two thousand years. You could postulate all kinds of humanistic theories for why Christianity has spread across the globe to all people groups, all nations and tongues and generations. Atheists tell us that religion is a crutch for the weak, a sociological and emotional lifeline for the man who is confused by chaos and needs a supernatural anchor, needs a stable port while the storms of life blow. You know differently. You know that God’s holiness pulls at you. You know that His holiness is real and present and that you have been changed.

The Son of God *died* to make you holy. That’s the point. Christ and His cross, Christ and His empty tomb, Christ and His means of grace *is* the Mercy Seat made real, made permanent. The

Mercy Seat was preparatory. You now eat Christ's body and you drink His blood. His holiness is real, it is present, and it is active. Will God really dwell on earth? Oh, yes! The crucified and risen King serves you with His atoning sacrifice and the result is that you are holy! That's why we celebrate Christmas. That's why we celebrate the nativity of our Lord. That why this year we will celebrate it with great joy.