



The Presence of God

As God brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt, he introduced them to His presence.

*“By day the **Lord went ahead of them** in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people”.* Genesis 13:21-22

They travelled to the base of Mt. Sinai and God said to Moses, *“I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you... Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the front of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because **the Lord descended on it in fire**. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.”* Exodus 19:9-19



After receiving instructions on how to construct a tabernacle at which the Israelites could worship, *“Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and **the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle**. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”* Exodus 40:33-35

Later, when Solomon built the temple, God’s presence entered this building as well: *“The priests then brought the ark of the Lord’s covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim...When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for **the glory of the Lord filled his temple**.”* (1 Kings 8:6-11)

Hundreds of year later, this same God, who had been continually present with his nation despite their disobedience and disregard for Him, left.

*“Then **the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple**. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord...Then the cherubim rose upward...Then **the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold**”.* Ezekiel 10:1-18

Imagine Ezekiel's emotion when he beheld God's departure. Imagine the Israelites' shock as Ezekiel communicated this vision. What would it have been like for them, after all these years, to know that God was no longer present.

70 years later the temple was rebuilt and rededicated (Ezra 6) but God did not re-enter it. It remained without His presence until, *"When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, **Joseph and Mary took [Jesus] to Jerusalem** to present him to the Lord... and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law."* Luke 2:22-24

There was no smoke and no fire, but some still realized the amazing miracle that was taking place. God had entered the temple again but this time as *"Immanuel – which means, "God with us."* Matthew 1:23

*"Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout... It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the Child Jesus ... Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, **"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel..."** There was also a prophetess, Anna...She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, **she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem"**. Luke 2:25-38*

As we go through this Christmas season may we, like Anna, speak about the child to all those looking for redemption. He is Immanuel, God with us.

Merry Christmas,

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