

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Maundy Thursday
Thursday, April 6, 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

“God’s Most Holy Place”

In the letter to the Hebrews, there is quite an extensive section which explains Christ as our High Priest. And the comparisons are made to the Old Testament high priests serving at the Temple in Jerusalem. They would offer sacrifices every day. They would enter the Most Holy Place once per year – on Yom Kippur; the Day of Atonement.

They would come with blood that is not their own. They came with the blood of a goat – the scapegoat. And with that blood, they would make atonement for all the people. But when you read the description of that day in Leviticus 16, you hear that atonement is not made directly for the people, but rather the high priest would make atonement for the Holy Place of God, particularly the Ark of the Covenant, because of the uncleanness and transgressions of the people.

Why would God have the high priest come into the Most Holy Place – and this is the only time he would come in the entire year – why would God have him

come and put blood on the golden Ark of the Covenant to make atonement for the Ark? This was “the footstool of God”. This was the place where heaven and earth were joined together in the most tangible way. When Moses would come out of the Most Holy Place, the glory of God lingered on him and his face was radiant. It would seem, if there is any place on earth that doesn’t need atoning, it is the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle or Temple where resided the Ark of the Covenant. This is the place where God dwells on earth.

The Letter to the Hebrews says, the “holy places made with hands” were “copies of the true things.” What was going on in the Most Holy Place was a copy of a greater reality which is revealed in Christ.

Christ comes to earth and becomes the place where God dwells on earth. John writes in the beginning of his Gospel, “the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” Literally, He “tabernacles” among us. And He came to make atonement for the people once and for all.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled blood on the Ark of the Covenant to make atonement for the Ark, because God had willingly chosen to take the sins of the people upon Himself. Therefore, atonement had to be made for the Most Holy Place of God.

When Christ entered the world, once again God willingly chose to take the sins of the people upon Himself. Paul says, “He who had no sin became sin for us.” Christ became sin personified. All the guilt of the world was placed upon Him, and He carried that burden to the cross and the grave.

What happened each year among the Israelites was a foreshadowing, a copy of the greater reality. Christ came as our High Priest and made a once and final sacrifice of Himself. There is no need to come back year after year and shed His blood.

We have a new reality. God still dwells on earth. The temple He has chosen is you. The Holy Spirit has come and you are God’s Most Holy Place. We have received God’s new and better covenant – a new covenant in Christ’s blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Christ’s blood, the blood of the ultimate and final scapegoat, which was shed for the forgiveness of our sins, is poured out. And atonement is made.

Now what happens here at this altar is not a re-sacrificing of Jesus. There was one final atoning sacrifice made at Calvary. His body was broken and His blood was shed once and for all. However, Jesus says, “do this in remembrance of Me.” The blood is real. “This is My blood.” The presence of God among His

people is real. “This is My body.” God dwelling in you making you His temple is real. You are His Most Holy Place.

What we have here is the reality, the “true things,” of which what went on in Old Testament times was just a copy, a foreshadowing.

What we experience here on earth with the angels, arch-angels, and all the company of heaven is reality – the true things. What the saints who have gone before us, what the Church Triumphant is experiencing in the presence of the Lord is reality. What all the saints, both in heaven and on earth, long for – the resurrection of the body and life everlasting is reality. These are the “true things.”

Our high priest, Christ our Lord; He is the first-fruits of the resurrection. The path is open. The grave cannot hold us. And we eagerly await to see Him face to face. Our eternal life has already begun in Baptism. We live under God’s grace. We long for the joys of the resurrection. We gather and we celebrate and we participate in the “true things” of God as atonement has been made for the people through the blood of the new and better covenant which has been given and shed for you. Amen.