

DECEMBER 2017

# TODAY IN THE WORD™



*God's dwelling place is now among the people,  
and he will dwell with them.*

Revelation 21:3

## GOD DWELLS WITH US

A devotional from



MOODY  
GLOBAL MINISTRIES

# TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

## Immanuel, *God Is With Us!*



When our children were little, Cheryl and I would enjoy watching the annual church Christmas pageant. Every year, the littlest ones would

sing the beloved Christmas carol, “Away in the Manger.” In that moment of simple, childlike adoration, it was easy for us to see our Savior as a baby, nestled peacefully in an animal’s straw-filled feeding trough: “Away in the manger, no crib for a bed / The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head / The stars in the sky looked down where He lay / The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.”

The Son of God was not born in a gilded palace but arrived in the dusty confines of our human existence. The birth of Jesus clearly reflects God’s desire to dwell with His creation: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The word *dwell* means to remain for a time or to live in a place. When we establish a dwelling, we are putting down stakes or setting up our home. A dwelling is where our lives happen, the place where we eat, sleep, love, and grow.

The name *Immanuel*, given to Jesus, reflects God’s desire to dwell with His people, both by existing on Earth in human form and by providing a way for us to remain in relationship with Him. Matthew’s Gospel explains, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, ‘God with us.’” (1:22–23).

As we celebrate this Christmas, remember that God chose to dwell with you and me in an intimate and extraordinary way! And He continues to dwell within us through the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit. As the apostle Paul explains in his letter to the church in Corinth, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

The final verse to “Away in the Manger” was added after the original lyrics had been written. It says, “Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay / Close by me forever, and love me, I pray / Bless all the dear children in your tender care / And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.” The birth of our Savior is a reminder that God loves us and dwells with us still. He is, indeed, our Immanuel. ■

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

## Closer Than Skin: The Indwelling Presence of Christ

Sunday school teachers sometimes speak of inviting Jesus into our hearts with a picture of a red heart with a door in the middle. Of course, this is only figurative. Jesus does not live in little room in the organ that pumps blood through our body. But what does the Scripture mean when it speaks of Christ dwelling in us?

Colossians 1:27 describes this truth as having been hidden for ages but has now been revealed to the Lord's people: "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." This previously unrevealed truth was God's acceptance of the Gentiles as His people, made possible through the work of Jesus Christ. This verse emphasizes not a physical location but rather the intimacy of the relationship.

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16–17, in which he reveals how this "indwelling" takes place, also reflects this emphasis. Christ's presence within us happens by faith and through the Holy Spirit. We enter into a relationship with Christ by faith. Once we have trusted in Jesus, we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit so that we can both enjoy a relationship with Christ and live for Him. The role of the Holy Spirit mediates Christ's

presence to us, which allows us to understand how the incarnate Christ can be located in heaven and also dwell in our hearts.

This experience takes place in "the inner being," the nonmaterial part of us that makes decisions and relates to others, the seat of our affections, the locus of volition, and the source of our sense of self. Only those who have trusted in Christ's saving work for them can claim to be indwelt in this way.

The indwelling of Christ is also described as "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). This hope is grounded in the expectation that one day we will be transformed into Christ's likeness (1 John 3:2). As a result of the saving work of Christ, we will both see Christ in His glory and reflect it ourselves. Even now, the presence of the Holy Spirit provides us with a foretaste of glory by providing assurance that we belong to Christ and empowering us for obedience.

Christ does not live inside our bodies in a literal sense. His presence in us is closer even than skin. ■

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *The Indwelling Life of Christ* by Major Ian Thomas (Multnomah).



From all of us at *Today in the Word*,  
wishing you a blessed Christmas as we  
celebrate the birth of our Savior, the

# Light of the World

Whoever follows me will never walk  
in darkness, but will have the light of life.

John 8:12

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# TODAY IN THE WORD™

## God Dwells with Us

Poland's road from communist dictatorship to democracy can be traced back to June 1979, when Pope John Paul II visited his home country. As he led the service in Warsaw's Victory Square, the huge crowd began to proclaim: "We want God! We want God!" The cries grew louder and louder. As people publicly declared their faith, they realized that Christ had never left Poland and no oppressive regime could take Him away. The Pope echoed the feeling in his sermon: "Christ cannot be kept out of the history of man in any part of the globe, by any longitude or latitude." Christ is also the future, he said, "our Polish future."

This month, we'll trace God's plan of dwelling with humanity—from Genesis, through the Old and New Testaments, to its future in Revelation. We'll rejoice in the Lord's love and commitment to His people Israel as we study the Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants. In the New Testament readings, we'll look at the church as the temple where Christ dwells. We'll also see that Christ indwells every heart that's open to Him.

Be encouraged this holiday season with Christ's abiding presence in your life! If you don't know Him as your Savior, think of the roaring sound of people declaring their need for God in Poland and dare to do the same—tell God you want Him. Invite Him to dwell with you this Christmas! ■

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*In the beginning God created  
the heavens and the earth.*

Genesis 1:1

## God's Relational Intention

A prayer used in many churches each Sunday begins: “Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself ...” The words of this prayer remind us that God’s intention for humanity from the very beginning was for His own delight in being with His creation. This month, our study will focus on the ways God’s desire to dwell with us persists from Eden to the End.

Beginning with Genesis 1, we see God’s initiative toward creation, for it was He alone who “created the heavens and the earth” (v. 1). His intimate presence was there from the very beginning as “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (v. 2). From the start, Scripture highlights not only God’s power to create but also His intention to be present with His created world.

Then God spoke and all that exists came into being. As Genesis 1 proceeds, we see the care, creativity,

and order of God’s creation. Our world is no random, haphazard result of impersonal forces and chemical reactions. It is the product of a loving God of beauty and design. First, each realm is created—day and night, sky and earth, water and land. Then the inhabitants of each realm are brought forth—stellar bodies, sea creatures, birds, and animals. Like a great artist, God formed His world with purpose and order.

Finally, Genesis 1 demonstrates God’s goodness toward His creation. Throughout the chapter, God beheld His new creation and “saw that it was good” (vv. 10, 12–18). He “blessed” the creatures He had made (v. 22). The creation account in Scripture reveals God’s purpose and initiative toward the world, His care and design in bringing it into being, and His goodness and love for it. The stage was now set for the climax: the creation of humanity.

### APPLY THE WORD

In these days before Christmas, reflect on how God’s intention to dwell with us is demonstrated in all of creation. If weather permits, spend time outside noting the ways God’s presence and care are manifested. Then pray that God would use this month’s study to deepen your understanding of His desire for relationship with you.

### PRAY WITH US

Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody’s president, welcomes your prayers as he shares the gospel tonight at Candlelight Carols. May hearts be softened and filled with joy through his message and the celebration of Christ’s birth.

*We all . . . are being transformed  
into his image with ever-increasing glory.*

2 Corinthians 3:18

SATURDAY  
DECEMBER

2

## God's Image in the World

Icons are images or symbols that represent something larger than themselves. We see icons every day on computers and phones; when we open them, the program they represent becomes present.

In the same way, today's Scripture tells us that humans are made as "images" (a word that could also be translated "icons") of God. As "icons" of God, humans have the gift of a unique and intimate relationship with our Creator. Humans alone are made in God's image; no other creature is given this designation. Human beings are made to represent God in the world, to make God's very presence known wherever we go.

This truth should make us ask an important question: how do our lives point to God and represent Him in the world? First, God declared: "Let us make mankind in our image, in our

likeness, so that they may rule over" the rest of creation (1:26). Notice the purpose given for being made in God's image is so that we might rule. God's divine kingship over His creation, His presence in the world, was represented by mankind. Careful care of creation was intended as a way for mankind to bear the image of the Creator God.

Second, this gift of being image-bearers was coupled with God's word of blessing. "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (1:28). God's "icons" in the world were to multiply and fill the earth, not just biologically but spiritually as well. God's presence and kingship were to spread throughout the world by means of the multiplication of image-bearers. The end of our passage, then, demonstrates the perfection of God's creation after mankind. He declared the world "very good" (1:31) and then "rested from all his work" (2:2).

### APPLY THE WORD

We regularly fail in our responsibility to be "icons" of God in the world. Thankfully, because Christ is the perfect "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), our union with Him enables us to represent God to those around us. Consider one way you might bear the image of God in the world today by your creativity or caring for one who needs a friend.

### PRAY WITH US

Please raise up in prayer the students singing and playing in today's performances and working behind the scenes at Candlelight Carols. Ask for endurance, joy, and good recall as they present what they've practiced all semester.

*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

Genesis 2:15

## Eden as God’s Dwelling

Imagine the opening scene of a movie that starts with a view of Earth from outer space and then moves downward, telescoping towards a particular continent, country, city, neighborhood, and then one particular house. This is the progression of Genesis, from the grandeur of “the heavens and earth” (Genesis 1) to the specific scene in the Garden of Eden in today’s passage.

As we focus on Genesis 2, Scripture presents Eden as the special place of God’s presence and blessing. This was the place where He dwelled on Earth.

Within Eden, the abundant blessings of God were available. There were “all kinds of trees grow[ing] out of the ground” (v. 9) and a life-giving river flowing from the garden. Outside its boundaries was a land full of gold and other precious resources.

Into this garden, God placed an image of Himself—humanity—and commanded mankind “to work it and take care of it” (v. 15). Interestingly, the instructions “to work and take care” are also used in priestly contexts later in Scripture. For example, Aaron and the Levites were told to “take care of the sanctuary and altar” and “work at the tent of meeting” (Num. 18:5–6).

Like the Ark of the Covenant, which resided in the midst of the temple and those who touched it suffered death (see 2 Sam. 6:7), so in the middle of the garden was “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (v. 9). Those who ate of its fruit were subject to death (v. 17).

God’s creation was complete, Eden was established, and His image was set in its midst. Unfortunately, not all would remain well for long.

### APPLY THE WORD

As you pray, sing, and offer your heart to God, recall that Scripture links worship with our task as God’s image-bearers in the world (v. 15). In response, dedicate your worship this morning to the glory of God, and ask Him for the wisdom and strength to take that spirit of image-bearing worship with you into your daily activities of the week.

### PRAY WITH US

Join us in prayer for Dr. Bryan O’Neal, vice president and dean of Moody Bible Institute Distance Learning. He and his team seek to equip students around the globe to be ambassadors for Christ. Would you pray for them?



*Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant.*

2 Samuel 7:28

MONDAY  
DECEMBER

4

## Temptation and Trust

In popular books and films, temptation is often portrayed as the dark desires for things like sex, power, or money. While those things certainly can become temptations, today's reading shows us that at root, temptation is fundamentally about whether we trust God's intentions for us or not.

The serpent's underlying strategy was to raise doubt about God's good intentions for humanity. The serpent began by calling into question God's reasonableness: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (v. 1). Why would God be so restrictive? Of course, God had actually said that they were "free to eat from any tree in the garden" except one (Gen. 2:16-17), but the serpent's ploy was effective.

Eve responded by restricting God's word, misquoting God's command by adding the clause: "you must not

touch it" (v. 3). She then minimized the consequences of disobedience. Whereas God had said that if they ate of the tree, "you will certainly die" (Gen. 2:17), Eve simply stated: "you will die" (v. 3). Thus, having produced a seed of doubt about God's character, the serpent went for the kill: "You will not certainly die" (v. 4). The serpent depicted God as a liar who was trying to prevent humanity from attaining godlikeness.

In response, Eve looked at the fruit in a new way. It was "good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom" (v. 6). It was no longer a danger God was trying to protect her from, but rather a sinister means God was using to hide something from her. Adam and Eve's act of disobedience, like all sin today, stemmed directly from the temptation to mistrust God's loving relationship with us.

### APPLY THE WORD

**Temptation is ultimately rooted in a mistrust of God's intentions. If you have things you struggle to trust God for in your life, these are likely the greatest areas of temptation. One way to resist the temptation to doubt God is to list those areas in which you struggle to trust the Lord. Then pray over your list, asking God to increase your trust.**

### PRAY WITH US

We ask you to pray for Gayla Gates, Holly Porter, and Stephen Brasel in Counseling Services. May they be able to listen well and speak with wisdom and discernment as they profoundly influence students' lives.

TUESDAY  
DECEMBER

5

*[Christ] gave himself for our sins  
to rescue us from the present evil age.*

Galatians 1:4

## Consequences of Sin: Punishment and Promise

A popular pet video shows the owner interrogating her three dogs about who had made the mess downstairs. It's not difficult to discern which pooch was guilty—while the owner asks, “Who did this?,” one dog slowly backs away and tries to hide in another room.

Like a naughty dog whose mess has been found, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and then “hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (v. 8). Sin had produced its first consequence: a broken relationship with God. Instead of welcoming God's presence, they hid in fear.

A second consequence soon followed: broken relationships with each other. When questioned about his guilt, Adam quickly blamed Eve for giving him the fruit and even implicated God for giving him “the woman you put here with me” (v. 12). Eve, in turn, blamed the serpent for her disobedience.

Instead of continuing a life of fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden, humanity's sin resulted in curses and the loss of blessing. The previous command to be fruitful and multiply would now be accompanied by “painful labor” (v. 16). The previous task of caring for the earth would be performed “through painful toil” and “by the sweat of your brow” (vv. 17, 19). Humanity would experience the curse of death: “for dust you are and to dust you will return” (v. 19). Their enjoyment of the garden ended: “So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden” (v. 23).

And yet God did not abandon His intention to dwell in relationship with humanity! He offered a glimmering promise of hope, an offspring who would one day “crush [the serpent's] head” (v. 15) and reverse the damage done by sin. The rest of Scripture is the outworking of God's relentless commitment to that promise.

### APPLY THE WORD

The advent of Christ is the fulfillment of God's original promise to Adam and Eve. Through Him, the consequences of sin are reversed and our relationship with God is restored. In light of your own sin before God, give thanks that there is true forgiveness and reconciliation through Christ, the “offspring” promised long ago!

### PRAY WITH US

As final exams begin today on Moody's Spokane campus, please bring the Spokane Student Services department before the Lord as they encourage students. Pray for Daniel Ward, Kathleen Hills, Thomas Anderson, and Tina Armagost.

*This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature.*

Genesis 9:12

## Echoing Eden: The Covenant with Noah

Outside the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth is a tall, hollow steel structure known as the Vortex. In addition to seeing its striking architecture, visitors enjoy going inside to hear the cascading echoes of their own voices, hand claps, and foot stomps.

Like the echoes heard in the Vortex, God's covenant with Noah echoed His faithfulness in Genesis 1 and 2. Despite the ongoing, pervasive effects of sin in the world after Adam and Eve (6:11–12), God continued the initiative of pursuing relationship with His people and His creation. Now He made a promise to Noah, whom He had saved from the floodwaters.

Just as God's original creation came through waters (Gen. 1:2), God's re-creation came through the purging waters of the flood. Whereas God commanded Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Gen.

1:28), so now God reiterated that command with Noah (9:1). As God created Adam and Eve in His image and commanded them to rule His creation, God again reasserted humanity's unique status "in the image of God" (9:6), and reminded them that all creatures "are given into your hands" (9:2). And just as God's care for His whole creation is evident in Genesis 1, the cosmic scope of God's care was displayed in the sign of the rainbow.

Notice also that God's original promise of "offspring" (Gen. 3:15) is echoed in God's promise to Noah: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you" (9:8). Clearly the world was fallen and strained, but the covenant with Noah (and the eternal sign of the rainbow) stands as a wonderful echo of God's continued intention for relationship with humanity and "every living creature" (9:10, 12).

### APPLY THE WORD

**As God's image-bearers, we are supposed to reflect His care for creation. Some practical ideas include joining with others to pick up trash along the roadside or perhaps planning a community garden for next summer. Do these things with thanksgiving to a God who does not give up on His creation—including us.**

### PRAY WITH US

Moody Radio first went on the air in 1926. Now, almost a hundred years later, it's ministering to thousands around the globe. Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, is grateful for your prayers for Moody Radio's stations and staff.

THURSDAY  
DECEMBER

7

*I will establish my covenant . . . to be your God  
and the God of your descendants after you.*

Genesis 17:7

## A Sure Commitment: The Covenant with Abraham

Anyone who has moved knows the stress of packing up, saying goodbye to friends and family, and then transitioning into a new neighborhood. How much harder it must have been for 75-year-old Abram, who was called to leave everything and move to a new country!

God’s call and covenant with Abram demonstrated His initiative and commitment to the promise of Genesis 3. Where Adam and Eve experienced the loss of Eden, God promised Abram the land of Canaan as an “everlasting possession” (17:8), an abundant land “flowing with milk and honey” (Deut. 31:20). Moreover, instead of curses, Abram received God’s blessing: “I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing” (12:2). And do not miss the universal scope of God’s intention. This covenant was not just for Abram and his descendants; instead, “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (12:3).

Most important, the covenant with Abram reaffirmed God’s commitment to the promise of “offspring” in Genesis 3:15. God told Abram that he would be a “great nation” (12:2) and “very fruitful” (17:6); to Abram’s “offspring I will give this land” (12:7). The crux of the promise is summed up in the name change: “Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations” (17:5).

At the heart of the Abrahamic covenant was God’s original intention for relationship with His creation—“to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (17:7). Abraham would have to wait decades to see the beginning of God’s promise of offspring, and it took millennia until the ultimate “offspring” arrived in the person of Christ (Gal. 3:16). Nevertheless, God always remains true to His word. The history from Abram to Christ makes that clear.

### APPLY THE WORD

God desires to bless us and be in relationship with us, even when the confusions and detours of life raise doubts. Who in your life needs encouraged about God’s faithfulness to His word and to us? Seek that person out and offer a reminder that the coming of Christ demonstrates God’s deep love and commitment to each of us.

### PRAY WITH US

Pray for the Moody Radio’s WMBI Chicago team: Desiree Owen, Diana Berryman, and Hannah Pflederer. They encourage people, bring them the gospel, and expand Moody’s reach by bringing more people in the Chicagoland into the Moody community.

*This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.*

Exodus 3:15

FRIDAY  
DECEMBER

8

## God's Promise of Self: the Great I AM

Imagine a small child separated from her mother while shopping. One minute the child was enjoying the colorful toys on the shelf, the next she found herself lost, alone, and crying. Just when it seemed like the mother had forgotten her, she appeared and embraced the child with a huge hug.

Perhaps the Israelites felt similarly about their experience in Egypt. Under the cruel oppression of slavery for hundreds of years, they had been crying out to a God who seemed to have forgotten them. But God's interaction with Moses in today's reading teaches us that God had not forgotten or abandoned His people. Notice God's care and attention: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out . . . and I am concerned about their suffering" (v. 7). That concern was more than sentimental

sympathy. God promised action: "I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (v. 8).

God's promises of rescue and land were then combined with the most important promise of all: Himself. He told Moses: "I will be with you" (v. 12). And then, when Moses remained uncertain, God gave His very name: "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (v. 14). In the ancient world, to give your name was to give your very self. God's desire, as from the beginning, was to be in relationship with His people. That desire was reiterated here with Moses, and would be demonstrated with mighty power in the coming Exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 4–14).

### APPLY THE WORD

The name God gives for Himself ("I AM") is both personal and intentionally open-ended. Whatever our needs may be, God is the "I AM" who comes near to meet them. What are the needs and concerns of your life right now? You can share each of them with God in prayer, confident that the great "I AM" hears you and is able to provide.

### PRAY WITH US

Continue to remember our WMBI-FM team as you request God's favor for the station, the listeners, and the people on air. Pray for Karl Clausen, Jon Hemmer, Nancy Turner, and Matthew McNeilly as they share God's love and truth today.

*You will be my treasured possession . . .  
a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*

Exodus 19:5–6

## Responding to Grace: The Covenant with Moses

This past summer, North Korea tested an intercontinental ballistic missile that traveled nearly 600 miles. The launch demonstrated Kim Jong-un’s growing military power and deepened global anxiety over North Korea’s intentions about using their weaponry.

In today’s reading, God’s display of power and might reinforces His *good* intentions for Israel. Having rescued Israel from Egypt, God declared, “You will be my treasured possession” (19:5). God’s intention was to be in relationship with His people. He cherished them as His own. And there was more! God said, “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (19:5–6). Out of all the nations of the earth, God had specifically chosen the Israelites. As a “kingdom of priests” they were to represent God to the rest of the world. As a “holy nation” they were to be set apart from the nations around them.

In particular, the Ten Commandments were the means by which the Israelites were to live as a priestly, holy nation. The first four commandments delineated their relationship with God. They were to worship God alone, not carved images; they were to use the LORD’s name with respect; and they were to observe the Sabbath day as holy (20:3–11). The remaining six commandments prescribed their relationship with others: to honor parents and to refrain from murder, adultery, theft, lying, and coveting (20:12–17). Obedience to these commands was essential to their flourishing as God’s people.

Notice the underlying principle of grace. God did not command obedience as the means of earning relationship with God. God had already declared His love for them first. Obedience to His commandments was intended as the response to the love already shown.

### APPLY THE WORD

**Examine your own attitude about obedience in the Christian life. Has obedience become a means of avoiding punishment? Or perhaps you obey as a way of earning God’s favor and love? If so, ask the Holy Spirit to correct this attitude and to change your heart to see obedience as a response of love for a God who already loves you.**

### PRAY WITH US

**Express appreciation in prayer for Dawn Rae, Jonathan Garrison, Ise Kassebaum, and Scott Thunder at WFCM, Moody Radio station serving central Tennessee from its studios in the Nashville area. May the Holy Spirit minister to them as they serve their listeners.**

*They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy  
and shadow of what is in heaven.*

Hebrews 8:5

SUNDAY  
DECEMBER

10

## A Copy of Heavenly Worship

One delightful attraction at Windsor Castle is Queen Mary’s Doll House, the largest doll house in the world. Equipped with electricity, running water, functioning elevators, and flush toilets, the Royal Collection Trust describes it as a “perfect replica in miniature of an aristocratic home.”

The Israelite tabernacle was a replica in miniature of God’s heavenly dwelling. Although God could not be contained in space, the tabernacle symbolized God’s intentional dwelling with His people on earth. The furnishings of the sanctuary reflected heavenly realities that God showed Moses on the mountain (v. 8; see Heb. 8:5).

First, notice God’s concern for beauty. The Ark of the Covenant (like the atonement cover and cherubim) was made “with pure gold, both inside and out” (v. 11). Later chapters reveal additional attention to beauty for the

curtains, lampstand, and altars. The place of God’s dwelling reflected the worship of God in “the *beauty* of holiness” (Ps. 96:9, KJV). Second, the tabernacle reflected the cosmic reality of God’s heavenly dwelling. Just as God is surrounded in heaven by angelic beings (see Isa. 6:1–3), so too the ark was overshadowed by two massive cherubim (vv. 18–20). Third, the tabernacle underscored the centrality of God’s word for His people. Twice, Scripture repeats the instruction to “put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law” (vv. 16, 21). There, above the Ark of the Covenant, God would “meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites” (v. 22).

The tabernacle symbolized God’s dwelling with His people; but it required the acceptance and obedience of God’s word. God’s presence is most clearly manifested when His Word is established among His people.

### APPLY THE WORD

**When you join others in worship today, you participate in the beauty of worship, the cosmic dimension of worship, and the centrality of God’s Word in worship. As we look forward to celebrating the birth of Christ, give thanks that God has both revealed Himself to us and invited us into relational worship of Him.**

### PRAY WITH US

Dr. Larry Davidhizar, vice president and dean of the faculty, welcomes the prayers of the Moody family for the team he oversees. It’s always a busy week right before Christmas break, and he’ll have a lot to do as faculty prepares for exams.

MONDAY  
DECEMBER

11

*Christ Jesus . . . is at the right hand  
of God and is also interceding for us.*

Romans 8:34

## The Need for Intercession

A popular Christian adage says that God is never late and rarely early, but He is always on time. The Israelites in today's reading would have done well to remember this truth. Their words to Aaron reveal their impatience with God because Moses was "so long in coming down from the mountain" (v. 1).

The subsequent incident with the golden calf revealed more than just impatience and distrust in God's timing. Notice that the Israelites were not creating a brand new god; rather, they were attempting to combine their worship of Yahweh with other pagan practices. The calf idol was intended to represent the God "who brought you up out of Egypt" (v. 4), and the celebration was to be "a festival to the LORD" (v. 5). Yet, their direct violation of the second commandment (Ex. 20:4–5) clearly drew upon the surrounding pagan practices of using bull images and indulging in "revelry" for worship (v. 6).

The consequences were drastic. God's anger was immediately aroused and the people's very existence was threatened with destruction. As God told Moses, "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them" (v. 10). Lest we think our disobedience against God is of no consequence, Scripture reminds us of the seriousness of sin.

Today's reading also underscores the essential need for intercession and atonement in the face of sin. Moses appealed to God's covenant, character, and honor, and then told the people he would try to "make atonement for your sin" (v. 30). God did not immediately destroy the Israelites, though they did suffer the punishment of a plague (vv. 33–35). Moses' intercession on their behalf was important, but he couldn't fully or permanently align their hearts with the Lord. A greater atonement and Intercessor was still needed.

### APPLY THE WORD

Practices and beliefs from the culture that dishonor God continue to be melded with what we call Christian worship. Praise God that we have an effective mediator in Christ, who is "interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34). Confess your sins today and give thanks that Jesus' intercession on our behalf is always effective before the Father.

### PRAY WITH US

Keep the Bible department faculty in prayer this week as today is the first day of exams on Moody's Chicago campus. May Andrew Schmutzer, Benjamin Wilson, Eric Redmond, and Ernest Gray see the fruit of their labor in their students' knowledge of Scripture.



*We have confidence to enter the  
Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.*

Hebrews 10:19

TUESDAY  
DECEMBER

12

## Approaching the Lord

The great cathedrals of Europe used architecture and spatial layout to lift a worshiper's mind to God. The cruciform shape of the nave, soaring windows, and vaulted ceilings were intended to focus the worship on God.

The tabernacle, constructed thousands of years before medieval cathedrals, reflected the same principle. Its layout and design was intended to communicate truths about God and His people. The tabernacle was divided into three main areas. The outer court contained an altar for burnt offerings and grain offerings, as well as a laver for priestly washings (vv. 29–31). These cleansing rituals of sacrifice and washing were needed to approach the second area, the Holy Place. Only the priests could enter this space, which included a lampstand and a table with bread (vv. 22–25). The lampstand was constructed to resemble a light and

life-giving tree, a stunning work of art crafted from gold (see Ex. 25:32–34).

The third, most sacred area, was the Most Holy Place. Once a year, the high priest alone could enter into the very presence of God. Outside the entrance was an altar of incense, representing the prayers of God's people ascending to heaven (vv. 26–27; Ps. 141:2). The Most Holy Place contained the Ark of the Covenant, which held the Ten Commandments (v. 20).

The tabernacle design was intended as a visible reminder of God's relationship with His people, their need for cleansing, His desire for fellowship, and the reality of God's awe-inspiring glory. Indeed, "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (v. 34). Notice, too, that God's presence was not hidden from view, but remained "in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels" (v. 38).

### APPLY THE WORD

Consider how you can use your own physical space to reflect your spiritual priorities. Even if you aren't an architect or designer, you can choose certain works or art that direct your focus to the Lord, play praise music throughout your home, or arrange your home in a way that extends hospitality for others.

### PRAY WITH US

As exams continue, please continue to lift up the professors in the Bible department. Ask that Gerald Peterman, John Goodrich, Michael Wechsler, and Ronald Sauer would have grace and wisdom as they wrap up the semester.

WEDNESDAY  
DECEMBER

13

*On this day atonement will be made for you . . .  
You will be clean from all your sins.*

Leviticus 16:30

## The Need for Atonement

The word *atone* is a theological term that has its origins in the English language. Translating the Bible in the sixteenth century, William Tyndale conveyed the Hebrew word *kippur* as “atone,” meaning to be united, in accord with, or “at one” with God. It conveys the idea of reconciliation between God and His creation.

That theme of reconciliation, or “at-one-ment,” between God and His people is central to the prescriptions for the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16.

Once a year the high priest needed to enter the Most Holy Place with animal sacrifices for atonement. The entire ritual addressed the problems of sin and death. The priest washed with water before and after the ceremony, symbolizing the need for cleansing. Likewise, sin offerings and burnt offerings were made in place of the death of sinners, both the Israelites and the priest alike.

Central to the Day of Atonement, however, was the ritual of the scapegoat. Taking two goats, the high priest cast lots. One goat was offered as a sin offering to the Lord; the other was chosen as the scapegoat for the people. Taking that second goat, the priest was to “confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head” (v. 21). Then, in a gesture full of symbolic meaning, the goat was sent into the wilderness, carrying on itself “all their sins to a remote place” (v. 22).

The Day of Atonement was an annual ceremony. It was a continual reminder that sin and death separated people from God. Yet by God’s grace, “on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins” (v. 30).

### APPLY THE WORD

In our Lord Jesus Christ, we have effective and perfect atonement for our sins. As John the Baptist declared: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Write that verse on a notecard and place it somewhere visible as a reminder that, because of Christ, we can now be “at one” with God.

### PRAY WITH US

Join us in thanking God for our skilled and gifted professors, including Steven Sanchez, Timothy Sigler, and Michael Vanlaningham. Pray God’s blessing upon their Christmas break as it begins at the end of this week.

*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.*

Isaiah 6:3

THURSDAY  
DECEMBER

14

## God's Infinite yet Intimate Presence

Before the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, the tabernacle was a movable sanctuary, traveling with the people as they journeyed. After subduing their enemies and establishing the nation, however, King Solomon built a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem.

That temple was meant as a permanent dwelling place for God, and the dedication of this space was a significant moment in Israelite history: “All the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families” (v. 1) were present to witness the occasion. The priests processed into the sanctuary with the ark and “all the sacred furnishings” (v. 4). So many sacrifices were offered that “they could not be recorded or counted” (v. 5). Most importantly, the solemn occasion was ratified by God. “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” (vv. 10–11).

God now had a permanent dwelling place on Earth with His people. But Solomon’s prayer indicates that the temple still wasn’t fully adequate. “Even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!” (v. 27). Indeed, elsewhere Scripture proclaims: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool” (Isa. 66:1); the hosts of heaven proclaim: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3).

Then why have a temple? Solomon’s prayer hints at the answer: because of God’s mercy. For a time, the Israelite temple was God’s chosen space to reveal His presence and provide fellowship. The temple was God’s way of offering His presence and forgiveness to His people (v. 30).

### APPLY THE WORD

As we approach Christmas, consider how you can arrange your home to celebrate our ability to meet with God. Perhaps you can place a “prayer chair” near your Christmas tree or manger scene, or you can create space for friends and family to gather to sing carols or praise the Lord. God’s infinite presence is willing to be in intimate relationship with you.

### PRAY WITH US

Steve Mogck, executive vice president and chief operating officer, oversees the operations team at Moody, including the Custodial department. He seeks to wisely steward the resources God has given Moody. Would you pray for him?

# QUESTION AND ANSWER

From Our Archives

*This month's devotional topic "God Dwells with Us" deals with many aspects of life in the church. We decided to look into the Q&A archives to see what questions interested you about church life. We hope these answers given by the legendary former Moody Radio Pastor, Donald Cole, will complement your devotional Bible study in Today in the Word this month.*

**Q I received Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, and He has transformed my life. In light of these great realities in my experience, is being a part of a local church that important?**

**A** Yes, being a part of a local church is important. Of course, we are grateful to God for saving you and transforming your life. However, God has not called us to live the Christian life in isolation; He has called us to fellowship with other believers in the local church (Heb. 10:23–25).

In America we place such a great emphasis on our individuality that we may not appreciate the value that God places on local churches. Local churches were the first recipients of most of the letters of the New Testament. When we read these letters, our tendency is to apply their imperatives and exhortations to our

individual experience when in fact the writers themselves gave these imperatives and exhortations to the community as a whole.

God intends for us to grow in the context of a local body of believers. He intends for us to in some measure reflect the mutual interpersonal relations of the Trinity in the context of local church life (John 17:20–23). Local churches are the primary context where we are to put the "one another" passages into practice (Gal. 5:13; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:3; 1 John 4:7–12). Living life in community with other followers of Christ is a part of our commitment to the Lord. I encourage you to become a part of a Christ-centered, Bible-believing and practicing local church. This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

**Q Ever since I found a Moody radio station, going to church has been difficult for me. The pastor can't preach like the radio preachers. He is alternately boring and irritating. Is it OK for me to stay home and listen to the radio?**

**A** No, it is not OK. Hearing preaching on the radio can be very beneficial and we can learn a great deal, but radio programs that are broadcast during church hours on Sunday are for the benefit of shut-ins and others who cannot go to church.

*God has called us to fellowship with other believers in the local church.*

For the rest of us, church attendance is critically important. Acts 2:46 reports that the members of the first church in Jerusalem “continued to meet together.” Some time later, believers were exhorted, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

We go to church for several reasons, one of which is to encourage each other. We need each other. We ought to go to church with the prayer that we might be used by God to encourage a disconsolate brother or sister. As for boring preachers, I suppose I myself am one on occasion. But I make myself boredom-proof when someone else is preaching by resolving to listen. You’d be surprised how interesting ordinary preachers can be if you really *listen* to what they have to say.

**Q** **Why are there so many church denominations? Unsaved friends complain about the multiplicity of church denominations. Are some better than others?**

**A** You ask two questions. In some, perhaps most, cases, the answer to the first question lies in sinful human nature, expressing itself in contrary ways. On one side of an argument that will lead to a church

split are carnal leaders who are careless about the “faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Opposing them are believers who refuse to accept sloppy doctrine. Sooner or later irreconcilable disagreements about the meaning of Scripture lead to a church split and church splits have in the past led to the formation of new denominations.

Some divisions become virtually unavoidable and may be said to be good. Conscientious, well-instructed members desire to contend for the apostolic faith, and some new denominations have developed in order to emphasize a doctrine or practice that was marginalized or ignored in the church from which they seceded. Baptist churches emerged from churches that baptized infants; Pentecostal churches from groups that did not pay enough attention to the Holy Spirit, etc. Of course, for the purposes of space, this is a very simplified description.

If your friend is a serious person, as he explores different churches or denominations he will not be offended by differences; instead, he will be amazed by the similarities, especially the almost universal adherence to the great, historic creeds. Sooner rather than later, your friend will find a company of brothers and sisters with whom he shares a common life in Christ, and a common creed.

FRIDAY  
DECEMBER

15

*My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.*

Ezekiel 37:27

## Relational Tough Love

In his book *Rebel with a Cause*, Franklin Graham describes the tough love meted out by his parents during his rebellious youth. “‘If you don’t stop right now,’ Mama said, ‘I’m going to pull over and lock you up in the trunk.’ . . . Before I knew what was happening, she opened the back door, grabbed me with both hands, jerked me around back, opened the trunk, put me inside, and slammed the lid shut. I wasn’t expecting Mama to drive all the way to Asheville before letting me out, but she drove on and on.”

God had to enact tough love toward the Israelites after generations of disobedience. He sent the Babylonians who invaded the land, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and carried the people into exile. God’s discipline did not mean He had abandoned His people. His intention was to restore and renew His relationship with them. First, God promised to gather His people and “bring them back into their own

land” (v. 21). Because the land was one of God’s original promises to Abraham, a return to the land was a sign of God’s care and blessing over His people. God also addressed the problem of sin that would accompany the return from exile, promising salvation for His backsliding people (v. 23).

Second, God promised new leadership. Unlike the previously wicked rulers, God promised a new king, and under this new leadership, Israel would “follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees” (v. 24).

Finally, God declared a restoration of His dwelling place. “I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them” (vv. 26–27). His dwelling includes the promises of a restored relationship, a “covenant of peace” that will bind God to His people.

### APPLY THE WORD

God’s love for us is described in H. W. Baker’s hymn, “The King of Love My Shepherd Is.” Consider singing or reading this hymn today as a reminder of God’s unfailing relationship with us: “Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed, but yet in love he sought me / And on his shoulder gently laid, and home, rejoicing, brought me.”

### PRAY WITH US

Pray for the Custodial Services team and the students who help them keep Moody’s buildings beautiful and clean. Thank God for them with us and pray for Cathy Sywulka, Danielle Hooper, Danny Hutcherson, David Boskovic, and Dean Gentry.

*Many nations will be joined with the LORD  
in that day and will become my people.*

Zechariah 2:11

SATURDAY  
DECEMBER

16

## God's Intentions for the World

A GPS navigational system can be a useful tool when driving in unfamiliar territory. Sometimes after taking a wrong turn, however, the best navigational advice is simply, “Turn around.”

Our reading today offers the spiritual equivalent to this GPS command: repentance. Although God was “very angry” (1:2) over Israel’s disobedience, His command through Zechariah was intended to get them back on track. “Return to me . . . and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty” (1:3). The path toward that reconciliation was quite simple: “Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices” (1:4). Repentance is the shortest and most effective means of restoring our relationship with God.

Like many drivers who refuse to follow the GPS advice, previous generations of Israelites failed to heed God’s prophets. Despite God’s warnings, “they would

not listen or pay attention to me” (1:4). But now this generation was different; they repented and recognized that “the LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve” (1:6). It was the first step on a path toward a better relationship with God.

The result of their repentance was a beautiful, joyous promise of reconciliation. God urged His people to “Shout and be glad” because “I am coming, and I will live among you” (2:10). The people would once again be restored to the land. But do not miss the bigger picture here. God intended a relationship with more than just Israel. “Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people” (2:11). His call was for “all mankind” to “be still before the LORD” (2:13). God’s intention is to have relationship with *all* of His creation, not just one particular people group.

### APPLY THE WORD

God desires for all people to know Him, but many millions of people still need the message of God’s reconciling love. Ask your pastor or local church leaders about opportunities to support missionary efforts, Bible translation, or disaster relief services in Christ’s name. You can be part of spreading the gospel through your gifts and prayers.

### PRAY WITH US

The Custodial Services team welcomes the prayers of the Moody family. Their faithful service is a testimony to Moody students, staff, and visitors. Lift up in prayer Do Tran, Ernest Brown, John Pettett, and John Williams.

SUNDAY  
DECEMBER

17

*I will remove from you your heart of stone  
and give you a heart of flesh.*

Ezekiel 36:26

## An Internal Fix

Imagine a major automobile accident that not only shatters the windshield and dents the hood but also damages the motor and transmission. Taking the car to an auto-body repair shop would make no difference if the engine remains damaged. Having a shiny, dent-free car with no working engine does the owner no good! Only by repairing the vehicle inside and out will it be properly restored to working condition.

The same is required of God’s restoration of humanity. We have already seen God’s intentions to return the people to the land, forgive their sins, and dwell with them again. Those messages are echoed afresh in Ezekiel. God would “gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land,” and “cleanse you from all your impurities” (Ezek. 36:24–25). We might describe these actions as God’s auto-body repair shop; by His mercy,

God’s people are clean again and restored to their home.

But more is needed than just a return to the land and forgiveness of sins. An internal fix is also required, a repair of the heart itself. As Ezekiel says, “I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees” (Ezek. 36:26–27). Likewise, Jeremiah describes the “new covenant” in the same terms: “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Jer. 31:33).

The barriers to our relationship with God include more than the need to deal with our external sinful actions. Our entire inward being is inclined toward sin and rebellion against God. Only by addressing matters of the heart can we be restored to full relationship with God.

### APPLY THE WORD

The promises of the new covenant are fulfilled in Christ. At the Last Supper, Jesus called the cup “the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). And in Christ, a love of God “has been poured out into our hearts” (Rom. 5:5). As you look forward to Christmas, give thanks that Jesus transforms our hearts and makes possible a relationship with God.

### PRAY WITH US

Support Nicole Lee, Oakley Smith, Paul Henle, and Thomas Pizano as they work on the Custodial Services team. May their work and the blessing they are to everybody at Moody be an encouragement to them this Christmas season.



*Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.*

Luke 3:4

MONDAY  
DECEMBER

18

## Prepare the Way of the Lord

Blair House is the official guest residence in Washington, D.C., for visiting heads of state and foreign dignitaries. A 15-member staff work within the U.S. State Department Office of the Chief of Protocol to ensure that Blair House is always ready to welcome guests and host diplomatic events.

When God sent His Son into the world, He ensured that people were prepared for the arrival. God had promised to send a messenger ahead of Christ to prepare the way. God's arrival would involve a dramatic reversal of the current status quo: "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low" (Isa. 40:5). If God's people were to be ready for His appearance, they needed to be prepared.

What did that preparation look like? In fulfillment of God's prophetic word, the ministry of John the Baptist shows us that preparation meant repentance.

John came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (v. 3). Of course, true repentance is more than lip service about one's sin. As John declared, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (v. 8).

A life of true repentance means a life reoriented in a new direction. When the crowds asked what they were supposed to do, John gave examples. Rather than hoard for yourself, share with others in need. Rather than engage in sinful business practices, conduct yourself with honesty. These life practices are not means of earning righteousness or meriting God's favor, rather, they reflect repentance in preparation for receiving God.

If we want to embrace God's arrival with joy, our lives must be oriented toward Him. Unfortunately, many in Jesus' day would be unprepared for the coming of Christ.

### APPLY THE WORD

This season is the perfect time to prepare for the coming of Christ. After a time of prayer, choose one spiritual habit to begin practicing in your life. Whether giving to those in need, serving more in the church, or just spending more time in prayer and Scripture, offer this new practice as a fruit of repentance in preparation for the coming King.

### PRAY WITH US

Bring Dr. Junias Venugopal before God in prayer today. He serves as the provost and dean of education over Moody's Chicago, Plymouth, Mich., and Spokane, Wash., campuses. He strives to honor God and bring Him glory in his role. Thank you for praying!

TUESDAY  
DECEMBER

19

*You are to give him the name Jesus  
because he will save his people from their sins.*

Matthew 1:21

## What's in a Name?

Celebrities often bestow unusual names on their children, and actress Gwyneth Paltrow raised eyebrows around the world when she chose the name *Apple* for her newborn daughter. She later explained the choice this way: “It sounded so sweet and it conjured such a lovely picture for me—you know, apples are so sweet and they’re wholesome and it’s biblical—and I just thought it sounded so lovely and clean!”

In today’s reading, we see that the names given to Jesus reveal something about His identity and work. First, we see the title *Messiah* (v. 18), the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word translated *Christ*, which means “anointed one.” In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were all anointed as the way to consecrate them for service. By their anointing, they were set aside for a specific purpose. In the same way, Christ, or the Messiah, was The

Anointed One, set apart for God’s special purpose of redemption.

Second, He was given the personal name *Jesus*. That name is the Greek version of the name *Joshua*, which means “the LORD saves.” The name Mary and Joseph were told to give to their son was not random but full of meaning. He was to be called Jesus “because he will save his people from their sins” (v. 21). Jesus’ name conveys something about His identity and purpose: He would be the promised Savior!

The third name given in our reading is *Immanuel*. In fulfillment of God’s promise of a virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14, Jesus was to be known as Immanuel, “which means ‘God with us’” (v. 23). In other words, the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, was not just a servant like the prophets of old. This was Immanuel; this was God with us!

### APPLY THE WORD

Scripture provides us with a multitude of names and titles for God and Christ. Consider buying a colorful poster depicting these names, or even creating your own. Display it as a reminder of the identity and saving power of our God. Spend time this week reflecting on what the names *Christ*, *Jesus*, and *Immanuel* mean for your relationship with God.

### PRAY WITH US

Today our prayers go to God for Moody Aviation’s Shop crew. Pray for safety for Joel Powell and Neal Bachman as they perform mechanical work and maintenance on planes and train the next generation of missionary aviators.

*The Word became flesh  
and made his dwelling among us.*

John 1:14

WEDNESDAY  
DECEMBER

20

## God Tabernacles Among Us

All four Gospels provide an account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, but they each start the narrative in a different place. Matthew and Luke begin with Christ's birth, and Mark launches into the adult ministry of John the Baptist and then introduces Jesus. The Gospel of John, however, begins at the very beginning, with the creation of the world.

Echoing the first line of Genesis and the theme of creation, today's reading opens with, "In the beginning was the Word" (v. 1). The Word that was there at the beginning, we are told, was not only "with God," but also "was God." Just as Genesis 1 tells us that God spoke things into existence, so now John tells us that it was by this powerful, creative Word of God that "all things were made" (v. 3). In other words, the Gospel of John introduces the main subject of all of Scripture: the Word of God, who created the world, who is God Himself.

Astonishingly, that same creative, eternal Word "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (v. 14). The Creator God took on a human body and walked among us. The phrase translated as "made his dwelling among us" uses the same Greek word that means "tabernacled among us." Just as the old tabernacle was the place of God's dwelling with His people Israel, so now God has a new tabernacle, a new dwelling place, to be with His people on earth. That dwelling place is none other than the person of Jesus.

Because of the Incarnation, the God whom "no one has ever seen" is now "made known" (v. 18). This is, indeed, a "grace in place of grace" (v. 16). Whereas previously God had made Himself known in shadows and symbols, now in Jesus, we see the full glory of God.

### APPLY THE WORD

Christian songwriter Stuart Townsend captures the power and beauty of the Incarnation: "When Love came down to earth, / And made His home with men, / The hopeless found a hope, / The sinner found a friend." God has shown His love by choosing to tabernacle with us in the flesh! How will you respond with praise in your own life?

### PRAY WITH US

Support in prayer Greg Thornton, senior vice president of media. Ask that God would guide his steps and decisions as he directs our media ministries, Moody Radio and Moody Publishers, that bless the lives of so many people.

THURSDAY  
DECEMBER

21

*The temple he had spoken of was his body.*

John 2:21

## Christ the New Temple

For many Jews traveling long distances, the ability to purchase the required sacrificial animals in Jerusalem was a necessary convenience. Yet when Jesus entered the temple in today's passage, He was clearly not happy with the marketplace scene. One reason is the specific location of the market stalls—they were in the “temple courts” (v. 14), that is, in the outer court of the Gentiles.

Gentiles were not allowed to proceed beyond this area of the temple, and their worship would have been disrupted by the chaos of haggling voices, bleating sheep, and lowing cattle. The merchants had indeed made “my Father's house into a market!” (v. 16). In a parallel account, Jesus specifically identifies His concern for the Gentiles: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17, citing Isa. 56:7). Jesus' actions in the temple demonstrate a judgment

promised earlier by God in Malachi. “The Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. . . . He will be like a refiner's fire” (Mal. 3:1–2).

This is more than just God's necessary cleansing of worship practices gone wrong. Jesus' words and actions hint at the coming end of the animal sacrificial system. When the religious authorities demanded a sign from Jesus, He responded that He could restore a destroyed temple in three days (v. 19). His audience misunderstood His words to refer to the physical temple, not realizing that He was the full embodiment of the temple (v. 21). He was the presence of God in their midst. Only after the resurrection did the disciples understand.

John 2 is a continuation of the theme of John 1:14. With the coming of Jesus, God now tabernacles with humanity, and Jesus Himself is the new temple.

### APPLY THE WORD

In Jesus, worship of God is open to all. What friends, coworkers, neighbors, or family members need an invitation to come into relationship with the God who dwells with us? Pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit, then look for opportunities this Christmas to share the gospel. Pray that hearts would be open to receiving Christ.

### PRAY WITH US

Would you pray for Frank Leber today? As vice president of Information Technology Services, he oversees Moody's internet and technological services on the Chicago campus. Ask for God's presence with him and his family this Christmas.

*For in Christ all the fullness  
of the Deity lives in bodily form.*

Colossians 2:9

FRIDAY  
DECEMBER

22

## A Spiritual Bridge

The Guinness World Record for the longest bridge in the world is the Danyang-Kushan Grand Bridge in China. Opened in 2011, it extends 102 miles over rice paddies and rivers. One section runs 5.6 miles over a lake! Sections of land once divided by water are now joined together.

Humanity needs a spiritual bridge to span the gap between us and God. Because of sin, our relationship with our Creator is broken. No amount of human wisdom or secular self-help can fix that problem (v. 8). Only the bridge of Jesus Christ can effectively restore our relationship with God. Through Him, “God made you alive” and “forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us” (vv. 13–14).

Jesus alone is able to bring such forgiveness and life because “in

Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (v. 9). Because Jesus is both God and man, He is the connecting bridge between God and humanity. In Him, what had been separated by sin is joined together.

We are not required to undergo the physical act of circumcision in order to be God’s children. Instead, we have the circumcision of the heart that allows us to desire the Lord rather than be inclined only toward sin. Instead of circumcision, the practice of baptism publicly identifies us as Christ’s own: “Buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith” (v. 12).

Through our identity with the God-man Jesus, we have been “brought to fullness” (v. 9). Because of that reality, we are called to “continue to live your lives in Him” (v. 6).

### APPLY THE WORD

Some people strive toward God by their own efforts, and others refuse to believe He is ever accessible. This Christmas, share the joyful news of freedom in Christ. He makes it possible for us to know God, and He frees us from the bondage of sin and guilt. Give thanks that He has bridged the gap between humanity and God!

### PRAY WITH US

We invite the Moody family to join us as we thank God for the Technology Services team: Andrew Thisse, Deborah Ellis, Josue Reyes, Michael Janchenko, and Robert Rutherford. They bless students, faculty, and guests with their diligent work.

SATURDAY  
DECEMBER

23

*He came to that which was his own,  
but his own did not receive him.*

John 1:11

## Rejecting the God-in-Flesh

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis notes that the same person might both be a fool and have a graduate degree. Being highly educated does not guarantee wisdom and spiritual insight. We see this combination of foolishness and education in the way that the religious leaders interacted with Jesus in today's reading.

The identity of Jesus was abundantly clear. He had “come here from God” (v. 42), sent by the Father to teach His truth. More than that, Jesus had His life-giving power (v. 51). Jesus intensifies His bold claim about His true identity at the end of the passage when He declared: “Before Abraham was born, I am!” (v. 58). Using the very name of God given to Moses in Exodus 3:14, Jesus identified Himself as the God of Israel now standing before them.

The well-educated religious leaders displayed only foolishness and spiritual

blindness in their response. Instead of receiving Christ's teaching, they were trying to kill Him. Instead of loving and following Christ, they insulted Him and accused Him of being demon possessed. Ultimately Jesus identified the underlying cause of their rejection of His teaching: “The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God” (v. 47).

These stinging words should have brought humility and repentance. Instead, when Jesus revealed His full identity as the great “I AM,” their response deepened from hostility to attempted execution (v. 59). God had come in the flesh to bring light and life to His creation, and He was met with rejection. That rejection would ultimately lead to the cross, confirming the opening words of John's Gospel: “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:11).

### APPLY THE WORD

Many people “celebrate” Christmas while rejecting its true meaning. They are content to have a babe in the manger without recognizing Him as the coming of God in the flesh. Spend time in prayer today for your loved ones who need to accept Jesus as the Son of God, and ask the Holy Spirit to open their hearts to God's love this Christmas.

### PRAY WITH US

You can encourage Samuel Choy with your prayers. As chief marketing officer, he leads teams that use digital and print media to spread the mission and vision of Moody to people around the globe. Pray for him and his family this Christmas season.

*The Spirit of truth . . . will guide you  
into all the truth.*

John 16:13

SUNDAY  
DECEMBER

24

## Promised Presence

In today's technological age, family members can now easily stay in touch with each other even when they are separated by thousands of miles. Through WhatsApp, Skype, iMessage, and more, distance no longer needs to keep people from talking and seeing one another.

When Jesus announced to His disciples that He would be departing from Earth, He offered something far better than a video chat to stay in touch. His bodily presence would be replaced with the coming of “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit” (14:26). The name itself, *Advocate*, means “one who comes alongside.” With Christ's departure, we now have one who remains with us. Our hearts should not be troubled, for Jesus has left us His peace (14:27).

The Holy Spirit brings us more than merely a sense of comfort and security.

Jesus promised that He would “teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (14:26). The Spirit's presence in the world opens our eyes to the truth of sin, the reality of Christ's identity, and the assurance of a coming judgment in the world. In short, the Spirit makes it possible for us to know the truth (16:13). Far from God being absent, the Spirit is continually at work, making the gospel known in our own hearts and around the world.

As Jesus prepared to depart, He promised His presence in a new way. The Holy Spirit does not bring a different truth but the very same truth that belongs to the Father and the Son. As Christ said, “It is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine” (16:14–15). Thanks be to God, we are not left as orphans in the world.

### APPLY THE WORD

During the holidays, many people struggle with depression and loneliness. Are there those in your church or neighborhood who might be alone—perhaps international students or the elderly? Invite them to share in your holiday celebrations. Sharing the gift of presence with them reflects God's promise of presence with us through the Holy Spirit.

### PRAY WITH US

This Christmas Eve you can encourage vice president Debbie Zelinski and her team in Human Resources with your prayers. Pray that they will experience God's joy in their Christmas as they celebrate the birth of the Savior.

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses.*

Acts 1:8

## God's Gift for Mission

The Christmas season is celebrated with gifts. Millions of families across the globe will gather to open packages big and small. Children love to peek into their stockings or rip the wrapping paper to discover what new toy or treasure or candy might lie inside.

The greatest gift any of us has been given is God-in-flesh, Jesus, who came to reconcile us to Himself. Christians celebrate that today. And Jesus also told His disciples to wait for another gift, the one “my Father promised” (1:4). Although previously they had been baptized with water, “in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (1:5).

This would be the fulfillment of Christ's promise given in yesterday's reading. Notice that Jesus said they would receive this gift in order to bless others: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all

Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). The coming of the Spirit would not only bring Christ's comfort and presence; the Spirit was also meant to empower the disciples for witness and mission in the world.

As the disciples gathered together, the Spirit descended on them in a miraculous way, with the result that “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (2:4). This was no private spiritual experience, but the ability to communicate the gospel to people who had gathered in Jerusalem from across the globe. Just look at the list of people groups in verses 9 through 11!

God's gift to the world was Christ. After Christ's ascension, He enabled His people, through the presence of His Spirit, to take the gospel to the world. The gift of God should lead to mission.

### APPLY THE WORD

Take time today to take stock of the gifts you have been given—not just those you unwrapped this Christmas but also the many gifts and blessings you have received from the Lord. Be sure to praise the One who gives the greatest gifts (see James 1:17). Ask the Lord to help you use His gifts to you in a way that serves others and brings Him glory.

### PRAY WITH US

Today is a good day to review what we've learned in *Today in the Word* this month. Praise God for the birth of His Son and thank Him for dwelling with us as our Savior. May the Messiah fill you with His presence in the coming year. Merry Christmas!



*You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.*

1 Peter 2:5

TUESDAY  
DECEMBER

26

## The Church as Spiritual House

In architecture, the cornerstone is key to the integrity of the foundation. The rest of the construction relies on accurate placement and structural soundness of the cornerstone.

That metaphor is used in today's reading for Christ, described as the living cornerstone, "rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him" (v. 4). And the building constructed on that cornerstone is the church itself: "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house" (v. 5).

Notice, however, that the church is built up as the house of God for a purpose. The church is not merely an ornamental or decorative structure with no functional purpose. Rather, we are "to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (v. 5; see v. 9; Ex. 19:6). The Israelites had to offer physical sacrifices of bulls and goats in order to

worship God, but now through Jesus we offer the spiritual sacrifice of lives in service to the Lord.

The church was never designed to be a place to hide away from the world. Being God's priestly people—the spiritual house built on Christ—is intended to bless us so that we can bless others and lead them to the saving knowledge of Jesus. Having encountered the reconciling mercy of God, we are called to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (v. 9).

An awareness of our identity as "the people of God" who "have received mercy" (v. 10) should compel us to be a missional church. Rather than seeing our identity as a matter of exclusivity or pride, we should embrace our call to proclaim God's love and mercy to a world in desperate need.

### APPLY THE WORD

On the day after Christmas some countries celebrate **Boxing Day**, traditionally a time to extend gifts of charity and mercy to those in need. As you clear away the wrapping paper and the leftovers from your Christmas feast, prayerfully consider how you can serve someone in a homeless shelter or rescue mission in the name of Jesus today.

### PRAY WITH US

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer at Moody, will be grateful for the prayers of the Moody family as he works with his teams to glorify God by managing Moody's finances. Thank you for your support of Moody Global Ministries!

WEDNESDAY  
DECEMBER

27

*In him you too are being built together to become  
a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:22

## The Church as Unified Temple

St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kiev, Ukraine, was originally a medieval cathedral. In the 18th century, gates and a bell tower were added; the architecture of the exterior was Ukrainian Baroque, but the interior retained its original Byzantine architecture. In the 1930s, the church was completely destroyed and was restored only after Ukrainian independence in 1999. Today this striking church blends centuries of history and different architectural styles.

In today's reading, Paul reminds us that the living church is Christ's body, now made up of both Jews and Gentiles from different backgrounds throughout history. Gentiles were once "separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (v. 12). Yet in Christ, that all changed. Those who were once far away "have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (v. 13).

With the coming of Christ, peace and reconciliation with God also brought reconciliation between these two different groups. Jews and Gentiles, once opposed, have now been made one. Christ has "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14). Now, there is "one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace" (v. 15). Both "have access to the Father by one Spirit" (v. 18).

Indeed, Scripture uses the metaphor of a unified building. The church is described as being "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (v. 20). It is a "holy temple in the Lord" (v. 21). Although made up of a variety of ethnicities, backgrounds, and personalities, the church is unified as "a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (v. 22).

### APPLY THE WORD

God calls us to be a unified temple where His peace dwells. How can you work toward reconciliation in your church? In this Christmas season, ask God for the spirit of peace to prevail, whatever tensions, hostilities, or animosities exist. Be willing to confess your own bitterness or prejudice that prevents fellowship, and be part of Christ's body on earth.

### PRAY WITH US

Bring the office of the treasurer before the throne of God today: Abigail Vega, Brian Nagel, Edgar Santiago, Holly Motta, and Julie Vinlasaca. May they handle Moody's resources with grace and insight.

*Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.*

2 Corinthians 7:1

THURSDAY  
DECEMBER

28

## The Church as Purified Temple

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, pagan worship practices were part of everyday life. Visiting temples, offering sacrifices, and worshipping the “spirit” of the emperor were all aspects of being a good citizen in the first-century Mediterranean world.

Apparently some in Corinth were drawn toward these common worship practices, despite their own Christian profession. The apostle Paul firmly corrected such activity. The warning against being “yoked with unbelievers” (6:14) evokes the idea of being joined together and united as one. Paul reminded them that the Christian has nothing “in common,” no “fellowship” or “harmony,” with pagan practices (6:14–16). Those pagan ways are described as lawless, dark, belonging to Belial (i.e., Satan), and idolatrous.

True Christian identity is described as righteousness, light, and belonging

to Christ as the temple of God. That last metaphor is the dominant one, underscored by Paul’s reference to a multitude of citations from the Old Testament law and prophets. As the temple of God, Christians are God’s people and He will “live with them and walk among them” (6:16). But also, as the temple of God, the church is called to “come out from them and be separate” (6:17). Just as the Israelite temple was purified and set apart as holy, so too “let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (7:1).

We are to share the gospel message with others. But the call to follow Christ is also a call to be separate and distinctive from the worship and lifestyle of the world. Because God dwells with us as His temple, we should have no intimate partnership or fellowship with a world opposed to God.

### APPLY THE WORD

Pagan worship may not tempt us, but our hearts and minds might still be drawn away from God. The world’s idols of celebrities, athletes, technology, materialism, and the constant need to be entertained are modern forms of secular worship. In prayer, ask God to help us “purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit” (7:1).

### PRAY WITH US

Barry Cole, James Chadwick, and Jeffery Knapp are Moody’s Investments team. Your prayers are important for them as they seek to serve Moody’s donors well. We appreciate your prayers for them today.

FRIDAY  
DECEMBER

29

*You are God’s field, God’s building . . .  
But each one should build with care.*

1 Corinthians 3:9–10

## A Temple Built with Care

We have all heard the expression, “They don’t make them like they used to.” It is usually a commentary upon the poor craftsmanship of some product such as a washing machine, refrigerator, or even an entire house. If built with care using quality supplies, they might last a lifetime. If constructed in haste using cheap materials, they may look attractive but in due time their deficiencies will become obvious.

The same is true with the church. Scripture describes us as “God’s building” (v. 9) and “God’s temple” (v. 16). The Spirit of God dwells with us, and we have been constructed on the foundation of Jesus Christ. How we build upon that foundation, however, matters. If we build with quality materials such as “gold, silver, [and] costly stones,” the church as God’s temple will remain beautiful and strong. If, however, the church is built up with

cheap materials such as “wood, hay, or straw, their work will be shown for what it is” (vv. 12–13).

As Paul reminded the Corinthian church, “each one should build with care” (v. 10). A day of judgment is coming when all that we have invested and built into the life of the church will be tested and the quality revealed (v. 13). A life built rightly on the foundation of Christ will survive the fire of judgment, but a life’s work burned up in the fire of judgment will survive “only as one escaping through the flames” (v. 15).

Paul ended his exhortation about careful building by reminding us of our underlying identity: “God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple” (v. 17)! How we build should reflect the significance of who we are as God’s temple.

### APPLY THE WORD

**Rather than following the world’s pleas to build your identity with the material things of post-Christmas sales, build with the gold and silver of God’s Word (see Ps. 119:72). Whether it is daily Scripture reading and memorization or a group Bible study, find a way in the coming new year to build up “God’s temple.”**

### PRAY WITH US

**Ask that the Holy Spirit provide encouragement for Bruce Everhart, vice president of Donor Development and Channel Strategy. Pray for insight and wisdom in increasing Moody’s outreach to our friends and partners in ministry.**

*Do you not know that your bodies are temples  
of the Holy Spirit, who is in you?*

1 Corinthians 6:19

## Our Bodies as Temples

In one of the strips of the popular comic “Calvin and Hobbes,” Calvin’s father attempts to correct Calvin’s faulty math homework. “You can’t *add* things and come out with *less* than what you started with!” he explains. A frustrated Calvin responds: “I can do that! It’s a free country! I’ve got my rights!”

The claims of individual rights that trump all other considerations are nothing new. Even Christians in the apostle Paul’s day used similar arguments, saying, “I have the right to do anything” (v. 12). The underlying logic these Corinthian Christians were using stemmed from a wrong view about the body. They seemed to believe that the body did not really matter. Because God would destroy it in the end, you could do whatever you wanted.

Paul emphatically corrects this erroneous thinking by pointing out the importance of the body, and he bases

his argument on two key truths. First, Jesus also had a body and it matters that His body was resurrected (vv. 14–15). Our own eternal salvation and bodily resurrection depend on Jesus’ body having been raised and glorified, and now we are part of Christ’s body on earth.

Second, our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and so our bodies do matter as instruments of service for the Lord (v. 19). Our bodies are not worthless receptacles that we can treat any way we like, filling them with the rubbish of sexual immorality or shallow gratification.

The call to “honor God with your bodies” (v. 20) extends to all bodily activities. Our bodies are not our own; they belong to God as a temple for His Spirit. Our bodies are gifts from the Lord to be used for His glory, not our own pleasure or selfishness.

### APPLY THE WORD

Many resolutions are physical goals such as losing weight, exercising more, or giving up unhealthy habits. Instead of making resolutions just to improve your physical health, how can you use your body as God’s temple? If you’re making healthy meals, make extra to share with others. If you are walking more, visit the shut-in to encourage them.

### PRAY WITH US

The Campus Post Office serves Moody’s employees and students, delivering and sending mail in a timely manner. We invite you to pray with us for the team: Anthony Harper, Brenda McLemore, and Christy Ay.

SUNDAY  
DECEMBER

31

*Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.*

Revelation 21:3

## Original Intentions Fulfilled

The last chapters of the Bible describe the ultimate end of history and God's triumph over everything that has separated Him from His beloved creation, humanity. The story of His desire to dwell with men and women in unhindered fellowship that began in Genesis now finds its glorious conclusion in Revelation.

The "new heaven and a new earth" (21:1) describe a restoration of God's creation. The scene depicts a return to the garden, with a "river of the water of life" (22:1) and "the tree of life" with leaves "for the healing of the nations" (22:2). The brokenness of our fallen world will be removed: "No longer will there be any curse" (22:3); and "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (21:4). Every sinful and unclean thing will be removed, and all that remains will be security and peace (21:8, 25–27).

God's intention for intimacy and relationship will be realized. The wedding of the Lamb is here, with His bride arrayed in beautiful garments of righteousness (19:7–9; 21:2). In the end, "God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them" (21:3). No longer will God need to use a physical structure to mediate His presence, "because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (21:22).

God's original intentions for creation will one day be realized. He has continually shown His love and grace through His presence in Eden, in the tabernacle and temple of Israel, and then by His church. Now He will be manifest finally and fully to the whole world. God's servants from all nations will "reign for ever and ever" (22:5) in the relationship of peace and light with our God.

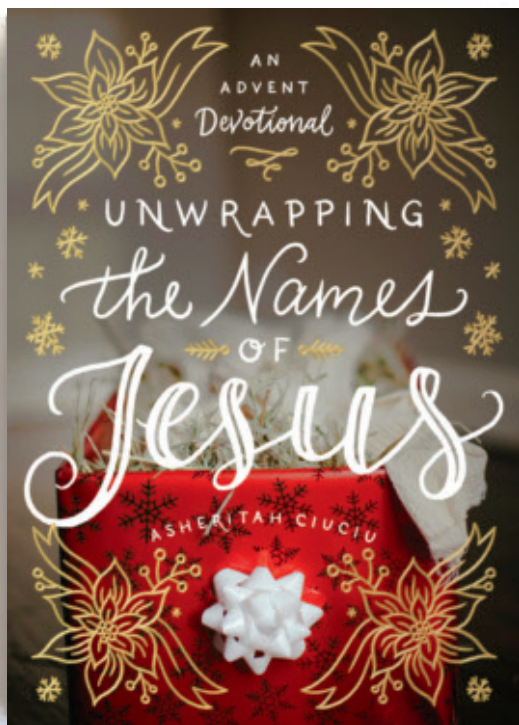
### APPLY THE WORD

Christ came to earth in obedience to the Father in order to make it possible for Him to dwell within us. As you reflect over this month's study and the true meaning of Christmas, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you can follow the example of Jesus and obey God's leading in a way that invites others to know Him.

### PRAY WITH US

Our prayers for the Campus Post Office team continue today. Lift up Nga Tran, Richard Tatina, Samuel Ramos, and Victor Perez. We are thankful for the ministry they provide and their positive attitudes. Thank you for your prayer partnership!

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