

50th Anniversary of the Dedication of our Sanctuary

Text: 1 Kings 8:27-30 (NIV)

²⁷“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! ²⁸Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. ²⁹May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. ³⁰Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.



Theme: Will God Really Dwell on Earth

God has blessed this congregation in so many ways. In recent years, we have become brothers and sisters in Christ with many of our Hmong and African Immigrant neighbors. I would have never guessed that I would have baptized as many whole families as I have done in the past few years. Today we are so blessed that this congregation is a very busy place.

It was also that way in the very beginning. The congregation began with just 72 members and quickly built the chapel/parsonage, which was dedicated in 1960. Eighty-six people attended the dedication service of that chapel; however, we quickly outgrew it. By the end of 1961 we had 405 members. A new church had to be built. The construction of this church started in May 1963, and it was dedicated on Feb 9, 1964. 1001 people attend the two services in the morning and the afternoon.

The design that the congregation chose was unique. The article in the *Milwaukee Journal*, which announced the service was titled, “Unusual Church to Be Dedicated.” I get the impression that this congregation enjoyed being a little different. Like every house of worship, the design of this church also has meaning. It answers the question, “Will God Really Dwell on Earth?”

I. The design of our churches reminds us that God comes to be with us with His grace.

Solomon’s temple did exactly that. It was the exact same design as the tabernacle, which was the tent that Moses constructed. The only difference was that the temple was constructed of wood and stone. The word tabernacle literally means “dwelling place.” It was where God promised to meet with His people. (Ex 25:8). The place where God dwelt in the temple was called the Holy of Holies. A thick curtain divided it from the Holy Place. It contained the ark of the covenant, which was God’s throne. There were angels on each side, and the box contained manna, Aaron’s staff, and the 10 Commandments. Ex 33:11 says, “*The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with His friend.*” God’s glory would often fill the tabernacle, and it filled Solomon’s temple with so much smoke that no one could enter it. At the temple, God had come to dwell with His people. He accepted their sacrifices and heard their prayers to forgive their sins. He came among them with His grace.

God promises to come to us with His grace in this place also.

Jesus once said, *“Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I among them.”* God has come to be with us in the person of His Son. Paul writes that in Christ all the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form. The prophet Isaiah wrote that his name shall be called Immanuel, which means “God with us,” Christ comes to dwell with us in this place. His Word points us to the cross where He bore all of our sins. His sacrament of baptism washes away our sins. His meal in Holy Communion reminds us that He gave His body and shed His blood for the forgiveness of my sins. In this place God comes with grace and fills our hearts with His peace and hope.



We can see that in many ways as we look around. A lot of people like to call this the “teepee church.” It looks like a huge tent. It reminds us of the tabernacle where God came to dwell with His people. In Christ, God is with us. In John 1:14 John writes, *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* The word for “dwelt” is literally “tented.” The very structure of this church reminds us that in Christ God has come to be with us. God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is in this place. That is shown by all of the triangles.

I especially like the church at night. When the altar is lit, you see the Scriptures on the altar and the cross coming out of them, just as in our symbol. It is a beautiful image that the Scriptures point us to the cross of Christ. When you come into the church, your focus is on the cross that hangs above our chancel. We are reminded of the sacrifice that Christ made for the forgiveness of all of our sins. When I look out toward you, I also see something interesting. The balcony is shaped like a ship. We are not all in a bunch of little boats, trying to make our own way to heaven. We are in the same boat with Jesus as our captain. He has come to this place to hear our prayers, forgive our sins, and feed us with His body and blood. When we come together in this place as brothers and sisters in Christ, God is among us.

II. Churches also remind us of God’s glory on high.

Again that was shown at the temple. When the people offered sacrifices, the smoke rose to heaven and was a pleasing aroma to the Lord. The mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant was an exact representation of God’s throne in heaven, where He is surrounded by angels in all of His glory.

Our church also remind us of heaven. The old gothic churches had steeples that pointed to heaven. Our church also has a steeple, but was also designed with a ray of light that would shine to heaven. Sadly, the bulbs never lasted long, but I also hope that with some of the newer technologies, we will soon be able to light up the sky with that beam of light again. Think about that ship imagery again. We are not in a ship that is floating aimlessly in the sea. We are going somewhere. Our hearts are not on the things of this world, but on the eternal treasures that our Lord has prepared for us in His glory. To remind us that we are in the world, but no longer of the world, a lot of the things in this church look at though they are floating. We look forward to that glorious day when Christ will return to take us to be with His for all of eternity. In Ephesians 1 Paul writes that He prays that our hearts will be enlightened that we may know the hope to which God has called us, the riches of His glorious

inheritance in heaven.

But he goes on to write that he prays that we may know God's incomparably great power for those who believe. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is ruling all things for the good of His people. He works all things for the good of those who know Him as Savior. Our churches remind us that Christ is in charge. All glory, honor, and power are His. We will share in His glory. We give Him praise for our salvation. The same power of God that raised Christ from the dead will raise us to be with Him on that last glorious day.

There is a little secret going around that something else also happened on Feb. 9, 1964. Some of you who are a little older than me might remember seeing the Beatles on the *Ed Sullivan Show* this evening 50 years ago. It was the first time that they had come to perform on American soil.

The whole country was abuzz when they came to this country. But here we have something even greater. Our Savior came 50 years ago with His blessing and grace to this place. While the Beatles broke up within 10 years, God still comes with His grace today as we hear His Word, pray, and receive His sacraments. He comes to us, that we may go to Him and share in His glory.

Thanks be to God for all the blessings that He has given to us in this place. May this place remain a place of His presence and grace, that His power and glory will be with us now and for all eternity.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
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Our Guests Pastor Oswald and Mr. and Mrs. Wirth