

Last Sunday after The Epiphany, Year C
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger
on March 2, 2025

Exodus 34:29-35 / Psalm 99 / 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 / Luke 9:28-36

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in Your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer.*

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!

67 Days ago, we celebrated The Incarnation, God coming into the world as Jesus the Christ Child. And now we are at the end of the season during which we discover the ways in which God was manifested through Jesus in the Gospels. At the Carol Sing-a-Long that 67 days ago, we sang *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!* It's in the second verse that the dual nature of Jesus is spelled out, and it does so with:

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!

The flesh enables us to see the invisible God, as it is written in Colossians 1.15:

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God.

It's kind of like the 1975 TV Series *The Invisible Man*, in which Dr Maggio, a plastic surgeon friend of the Invisible Man, makes Dr Westin fake skin so he can be seen. And this – veiled in flesh to see – upends our understanding of the definition of *veiled*.

When you read today's OT and NT Lessons, the veil *covers* Moses' face. After he meets with God, his face shines so brightly that other people can't bear it. So, he covers his face to be with the people, and he removes the veil when he meets up with God, which is what makes his face shine. So, *to veil* is to cover. That's the standard definition. When you look up the etymology of the word *veil*, whether

verb or noun, it comes from the Latin *velum* which meant a *sail*, as on a boat, or cloth, curtain or covering. By the early 14C, it came to mean “*cloth used to cover or conceal*” anything from the eye.¹

But *Veiled in flesh the Godhead see*, or in normal English *See the Godhead who is now veiled in flesh*, actually *reveals* the God within Jesus rather than *conceals* God. Yes, I know that many of our Christmas carols have done real damage to 2,000 years of Christian theology. But *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!* is pretty sound, and this one phrase gives us the opportunity to look differently at the veil Moses wore and the cloud that overshadowed Jesus, Peter James and John at the Transfiguration. And through that different look, we can reorient our relationship with God, both through scripture and how we practice our faith.

If you fast-forward 480 years to the first Temple, you find the Ark of the Covenant or tabernacle, which was the resting place of God, placed in the Holy of Holies. The veil separated this inner room from the rest of the Temple, and the tabernacle was covered with the veil when it was moved. Only the Levitical priests, and eventually only the high priest could *pass through* the veil to enter the Holy of Holies, and only on the Day of Atonement. Again, a concealment. But I’m going to challenge that in a moment.

As Christians, we believe Jesus changed that. In Mark 15:

*Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed His last.
And the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*

Jesus passed through that veil, and we get the phrase that was in our first hymn today:

Thou within the veil hast entered.

¹ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/veil>

We finally get there in the 4th verse! Jesus tore the veil – removed the barrier between God and Humanity...and remember that Jesus in the Gospels Himself is a meeting of God and Humanity.

But, there's this idea of being shielded from God by the use of veils, whether it be Moses' face that shines after he meets God, the Ark of the Covenant and the Veil of the Temple, or in the cloud on the mountaintop. We need to be shielded from God or else what happened in one of the final scenes from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* will happen to us: when the Nazis opened the Ark of the Covenant and were evaporated by coming face-to-face with God. Because God says to Moses in the previous chapter in Exodus 33.20:

You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.

But Jesus' Death changed that: only in Christ is the veil set aside says Paul in our NT Lesson. The Veil of the Temple was torn, and Jesus with all of His Divinity and all of His Humanity transfigured the purpose of the veil.

So, consider this: What if the veil's *purpose* isn't to conceal? What if the veil is a tool of *enabling* rather than a tool of *disabling*? Carol Meyers suggests in her *Anchor Bible Dictionary* entry on the *Veil of the Temple*:

Hanging before the ark, which symbolized God's presence and served as the place of God's glory, the veil marked the place where the divine and the human met.

And indeed, a couple chapters earlier, God says to Moses in Exodus 30.6:

You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy-seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet you.

Think about it like your front door. Maybe your front door's purpose isn't to keep people out, but it's the place where you meet people when they come. The doors of the church aren't to keep people out; they are the place of meeting, greeting and welcoming in.

You have to remember that, *from the beginning*, God has only wanted to be in relationship with Humanity.

- *From the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3: They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze ... The Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'*
- *At the Institution of the Lord's Supper in Luke 22: When the hour came, Jesus took His place at the table, and the apostles with Him. He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.'*
- *In Genesis 9: God says to Noah: When the bow is in the clouds, I will see and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth ... This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.*

God continually seeks opportunities to spend time with Humanity. The Transfigurations of Moses and Jesus illustrate that the veil and the cloud are points at which humans and God meet. The veil, then, is not a barrier; it is a meeting place. *And that's precisely what the Eucharist is:* our meeting place with Jesus. In our participation in the Sacrament, we are assured an interaction with Jesus. It, too, is a veil, a meeting place.

In 7 weeks, on Maundy Thursday, we will look back on the Institution of Last Supper or the Institution of the Holy Eucharist. Though the Gospel reading is of Jesus washing the feet of His Disciples, the Maundy Thursday Service evokes the intimacy that we associate with the Upper Room and the Last Supper at which Jesus offered broken bread as His Body and wine outpoured as His Blood. And then He instructs: *Do this in remembrance of me.* What the Disciples did not know

until later was that this moment was when Jesus gave them *and us* a perpetual meeting place with Him.

We believe that Jesus becomes present in the bread and wine, but how and what remain a mystery. The word *Sacrament* comes from the Latin translation of the Greek word *mysterion* which means *mystery*. Christ's presence in the Sacrament remains real, but also a mystery. This is referred to as *Real Presence* because we believe the real presence of Christ is in the bread and wine.

And our sacramental theology does inform our practice. If you have ever wondered why the priest's hands are washed right before the Eucharistic Prayer, and sometimes right after Communion, it's because the priest wants to be as physically and ritually clean before making the Sacrament, in which Jesus will be present. We quietly say a little prayer as the water is poured over our fingers.

The Real Presence of Christ is why any leftover blessed Sacrament is placed in a locked safe. Ours is called an aumbry, the type that is recessed into a wall. A tabernacle is one that is free-standing. If you go to Mission San Juan Bautista, they have a tabernacle that has a little Jesus statue sitting on a chair inside the tabernacle, which has a window on its door. The Sacrament is inside the tabernacle, presumably concealed by the Jesus statue. And somewhere near an aumbry or tabernacle will be a candle. When the candle is lit, the Reserved Sacrament is inside.

And whatever blessed Sacrament is not distributed during Communion or reserved either gets consumed – as you see us do after everyone has received – or it's disposed of reverently into or onto the holy ground of the church.

Some parishes always have Reserved Sacrament in the aumbry or tabernacle. It's there in case someone needs the Sacrament in home or hospital. But it's also there as the presence of Christ in the church building. We have Reserved Sacrament only when I know that we will need to take Communion out to

someone. I take the traditional Anglican theological approach that Jesus took – blessed – broke – gave, not stored.

And it was in the taking, blessing, breaking and giving that Jesus established a meeting point between God and Humanity. And we must not forget that Jesus Himself is a meeting point between God and Humanity. Both fully Divine and fully Human, Jesus was the ultimate opportunity for God to spend time with us. And now that Jesus is at God's right hand, He gave us the Sacrament as the opportunity to meet Him and spend time with Him.

Like the veil that Moses removed in order to speak with God, like the cloud from which came a voice that said, "*This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!*", like the Veil of the Tabernacle that Jesus' Death tore in two to allow God and Humanity to encounter one another in the Temple, the Sacrament is our meeting place with Jesus.

And it is with the deepest faith and sincerity that I invite you to have an *encounter* with:

*The Gifts of God for the People of God.
Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you,
and feed on Him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.*