

How is someone present when he or she is not present?

No, I'm not trying to be funny, or obtuse, or philosophical –

We usually think of presence as physical presence.

We learn in grade school that when we are seated at our desk and our name is called, we reply “present”.

Classmates who are not seated in their chairs,

who do not answer to their name,

and are nowhere to be seen are marked “absent”.

They are not “present”.

But isn't there also a certain presence that is deeper than the physical?

- If we were at home when the house catches fire, how many of us would grab something that has photos?
- Why? Isn't it because there is a presence connected to those photographed memories?
- Many people who have lost a spouse or a child will hold onto their beloved's shirt or pajamas
 - – because the scent of the person on the clothing conveys presence beyond the physical.
- There are songs that come on to the radio that bring to mind the presence of someone I associate with it. It was “our song”.

This presence is **relational presence**

– our relationship with someone is made real by the photos, scent, or songs, **even when the person is not physically there.**

In the Old Testament, God's presence with his people was largely relational presence

– conveyed through signs such as the pillar of cloud and fire, and items of remembrance.

The items of remembrance, like our photos, were kept in a special place called the Ark of the Covenant.

Everything the Lord God told Moses on Mt. Sinai was written down and placed inside the large golden box.

The lid to the box was the mercy-seat

– where God promised to be present to his people,

- to guide and to judge,
- to rebuke and to forgive, according to his word.

You can read all the details of this in Exodus 25-40.

For today, remember this:

Wherever the Ark of the Covenant is, there the Lord God is present.

And since the people are wandering in the wilderness, the Ark of the Covenant has handles for it to be carried.

The ark is like a mobile app for the relational presence of God.

But once they crossed the Jordan river into the Promised Land,

things changed for God's people.

- **They were no longer mobile, but settled.**
- A monarchy had been established and a capital city built.

- David the King had a splendid palace built.

So it is logical that if the king has a permanent residence,

so the Lord God also needed a permanent residence.

The relational presence of God associated with the ark of the covenant now needed to be **fixed, immobile,**

so that people would **come to it** to seek the Lord.

And it sounded like a good idea to Nathan, the man of God, too.

But neither David nor Nathan had sought God's direction.

And we discover here that even godly people close to the Lord can be wrong when they trust their own human judgment.

For God was not interested in a fixed dwelling – at least not to be built by David.

God had a different plan.

Now the Lord would establish his presence through the leadership of his people.

This presence is different from the association with “things”

-- **this presence is conveyed through human interaction.**

It is the kind of presence we recognize when we say of a son “he’s a chip off the old block” or of a granddaughter – “I can see your grandmother in you.”

This presence is a way of *being* – being as God is; doing as God does.

By the word of promise, the Lord establishes his presence in the kingship of David

- a relational presence marked by victory over enemies and peace and prosperity for the people.

By this same promise, The Lord would build a house for David

- not made of wood and stone, but a house of people
- generations of descendants who would carry on the kingship of David by **being as God is.**

The messianic hope of Israel is connected to this promise.

For not all of David's descendants on the throne reflect the nature of God.

Some were downright wicked.

The kingdom divided.

The royal line of David was marred,

broken, like a cracked mirror that could no longer reflect the glory of God.

Yet, the Lord does not make promises his doesn't keep

- even when the fulfillment is generations later.

So the hope for a messiah is the anticipation of God's fulfillment of the promise to restore the House of David as an everlasting kingdom.

What joy, then, are the words of Gabriel to Mary:

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Now, something new is in the works.

The **relational presence** of the Lord God Almighty,

- conveyed in words,
- in items of remembrance in the Ark of the Covenant,
- and through the kingship of David,

would become the *physical* presence of God.

The scent of the physically absent beloved now has a body – Jesus, Savior, God with us.

The image of the physically absent beloved now becomes flesh and blood in the womb of Mary.

The words of God carved on stone tablets and written on scrolls now becomes the living Word who is God as human being.

The promised anointed king – messiah king – of David's line

—whose reign would be the salvation of God for all people and for all time and eternity

-- **is the son of Mary, named Jesus.**

Of whom the heavenly hosts sing in exaltation:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” Rev. 11:15

...

Jesus is the physical and relational presence of God in us and among us,

to give us peace

and to draw the whole world into the love of God.

The physical presence of Jesus is with and in us **by his desire**

through water and oil,

the laying on of hands,

bread and wine.

And as a result,

we –the people of God, the Body of Christ

– become the physical presence of Jesus **to the world**

– ***being as God for those who are still in darkness.***

...

So now we come full circle – **the presence of God is again mobile, going with us wherever we go.**

Together, we are the house of God

– not bricks and mortar, but **living stones**,

making the kingship of God in Jesus Christ real in our world.

As we prepare for the final glorious coming of our Lord Jesus, we take the angel's words to heart: "Do not be afraid."

Whatever God has given us

Wherever the Lord leads us

Whatever God demands of us as his holy people,

The Holy Spirit gives us the power and courage to respond in faith.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen