

III Sunday of Advent – The Covenant

In the name of the Father ...

Last time I spoke of the Church's liturgical year starting as if in exile after the Fall of Adam and Eve, but expecting redemption, expecting the promised woman and her seed at enmity with the serpent according to God's covenant. The seed of the woman was promised obscurely both to Abraham – *so shall my covenant be in your flesh* – and king David – *I shall be his father, and he shall be my son*.

After the Fall, depravity increasing, God repented having made men and by a great flood washed them from the face of the earth.¹ Together with his family, however, he saved one man – Noah. His original covenant discarded by Adam, God established a new – second – covenant with Noah. Indeed, like Abraham after him, Noah was a fitting new origin, worthy to receive God's covenant, for ... *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God*.² Further, Noah ... *found favour in the eyes of the Lord*,³ words which the Angel Gabriel would echo many generations later at Nazareth announcing the Incarnation. The Lord said to Noah: *I will establish my covenant with you*.⁴

The recipient of a third covenant, Abraham's seed laboured in exile in Egypt for four hundred years before being liberated under Moses. God made no promise to Moses of progeny, but he did make a new – fourth – covenant with him, further revealing his providential designs. On Mount Sinai, God instructed Moses: *let them make for me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst*.⁵

The tabernacle which Moses constructed was not just a “gathering space”; beyond its liturgical function, it was a microcosm of creation, revelatory of God's designs.⁶ God instructed Moses: *They shall make an ark of acacia wood ... and you shall overlay it with pure gold, within and without*.⁷ Particularly durable, acacia wood signified incorruption; the lining of gold signifying not only royalty – as in Matthew's genealogy – but also – because gold does not readily tarnish – being without stain, i.e., immaculate.

God further instructed Moses to make poles of acacia wood covered with gold to carry the ark: the ark was to be touched by no man.⁸

Finally, God instructed Moses: *you shall put into the ark the covenant which I shall give to you ... there I will meet with you*.⁹ The ark was the first and most important of the things made by Moses, i.e., in the order of creation: incorrupt, unstained, un-touched by any man, it was worthy to receive God's covenant. That

¹ [Gen 6:5-7](#)

² [Gen 6:9](#)

³ [Gen 6:8](#)

⁴ [Gen 6:18](#)

⁵ [Ex 25:8](#), c.f., [Gen 3:8](#)

⁶ [ST Ia IIae 102, 4, ad 6um](#)

⁷ [Ex 25:10-11](#)

⁸ [Ex 25:13-15](#)

⁹ [Ex 25:16, 21-22](#)

covenant, however, would come from the hand of God. Indeed, when God had finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave to him ... *[the] two tablets of [the] covenant ... written with the finger of God,*¹⁰ alluding to the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost announced by Gabriel, whence God's covenant which was to unite God and man, the divine and the human, would subsist perfectly in both divine and human nature, foreshadowed by the two tablets.¹¹

After the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land, David sought to bring the Ark to his new capital city, Jerusalem. The attempt was abandoned when Uzzah rashly laid a hand upon the Ark for which God smote him, causing David to lament: *How shall the Ark of the Lord come to me*, the Ark subsequently remaining in the house of Obededom for three months.¹² This episode is recalled at the Visitation, Elizabeth exclaiming: *How is it that the Mother of my Lord should come to me*, the Blessed Virgin remaining with her cousin for three months.¹³

God subsequently made a further – fifth – covenant with David: *I will raise up your seed after you... I will be his father, and he shall be my son.*¹⁴ God's promise found an immediate but imperfect fulfilment in David's son Solomon, who built the temple, declaring ... *I have provided a place for the Ark in which is the covenant of the Lord.*¹⁵

And it is the long-awaited advent of the Messiah – the sixth and final, the new and eternal covenant – which begins the completion of God's plan of re-creation, paralleling his initial six-day creation. This is the appearance in history of the woman and her seed: the woman who – foreshadowed in Moses' Ark by acacia wood and gold – was incorrupt and without stain, untouched by any man, carrying within her God's covenant; she who, so much more than Noah and Abraham, was supremely *righteous, blameless in her generation; [who] walked with God*; she who – so much more than Noah - *found favour in the eyes of the Lord*, worthy to receive the promise made to Noah: *I will establish my covenant with you*; she to whom through Abraham God promised *so shall my covenant be in your flesh*, for whom God's promise was incomparably more true than for David: *I will be his father, and he shall be my son*, the woman whose seed was God's covenant with us, God with us, the Word made flesh.

Indeed, in that first covenant, when on the sixth day God said: *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,*¹⁶ Adam was to mature spiritually, progress in the image of God. God necessarily, therefore - before any envisaged need or even notion of redemption - already had conceived the perfect man, who, in St Paul's

¹⁰ [Ex 31:18](#)

¹¹ The two tablets also show forth the two great commandments, love of God and subsequently love of neighbor.

¹² [2 Sam 6:5 & 15, 9, 11](#)

¹³ [Lk 1:43, 41 & 44, 56](#)

¹⁴ [2 Sam 7:12-14](#)

¹⁵ [1 Kgs 8:21](#)

¹⁶ [Gen 1:26](#)

words ... *is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.*¹⁷ So also, God had conceived the perfect woman, so that the drama of sin and especially the Fall serve ultimately as a backdrop to highlight the incomparable event of the Incarnation, the first and central figures of God's creation, the Ark bearing the Covenant, the woman and her seed at enmity with the serpent, the immaculate virgin mother of Emmanuel – God's Covenant with us, God with us, God's Son, and hers.

In the name of the Father ...

¹⁷ [Col 1:15](#)