

A Tour Through King Solomon's Temple

God's Great Adventure - Week 5
Sunday, April 10, 2011
Church of the Advent
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We re-create today, to the best of our ability the Jerusalem Temple in the time of King Solomon who lived over 2,000 years ago in Israel. He was the son of King David (who killed Goliath) and the third king of Israel. In addition to his great wisdom, he is best known for building very large and impressive buildings.

The Jerusalem temple was the place where Israelites came to worship their God. It succeeded the tent of the tabernacle which accompanied the Israelites on their desert journey. Now established in the city of Jerusalem in the promised land, a more permanent structure was called for.

It took over seven years to build which in ancient times wasn't that long. The temple was built of stone and had at least three chambers inside it. The furnishings were of wood, and gold, lots of gold. Gold gave visual expression to the phrase "precious Lord." The building had statues of angels throughout it. It was a very inspiring and probably slightly scary place to be inside.

The temple that King Solomon built for the LORD was sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. We are not sure how big a cubit is but we know the temple itself was big, very, very big. It was a suitably sized vessel to express a suitably large and capable God.

Solomon lined the walls of the house on the inside with boards of cedar; from the floor of the house to the rafters of the ceiling, And everything, and again, I do mean EVERYTHING, was covered with Gold, a very valuable and precious metal, then and now.

Descriptions of the temple abound with detail, though funnily enough, not sufficient detail to give an exact understanding of how the building functioned. And beware, there are several temples described in scripture, the first built by Solomon, another built after the return of the exiles from Babylon and another by King Herod which Jesus would have walked and worshipped in.

The inner sanctuary contained the "holy of holies" a special place where only the high priest went and then only once a year to offer special sacrifices. In the holy of holies rested the ark of the covenant of the LORD. The ark was a large box where the Ten Commandments were stored for safe keeping. This ark is what the fictional scientist Indiana Jones chases after in his movies. It disappeared from sight later in Israel's history so it remains to this day a source of great curiosity.

A key feature of temple activity was the killing and sacrifice of animals, animals like chickens, doves, sheep and other farm animals. Fortunately we don't do this any more but the Israelites did in King Solomon's time. They thought that these sacrifices improved their relationship with God.

In the bible, there is a lot of talk about angels, and certain kinds of angels. In the inner sanctuary Solomon made two angels, called cherubim, of olivewood, each ten cubits high. He put the cherubim in the innermost part of the house; the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of one was touching the one wall, and a wing of the other cherub was touching the other wall. It is these angels which inspired the prophet Isaiah to write:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered

their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’

Isaiah is gripped by an ecstatic experience and responds faithfully. His response begs the question, at least for me, what is of value in our exploration of this ancient building for us today? While most of the cultic practices in the temple are more at home with freemasonry than the contemporary church, what do we learn? I think several things:

1) Where the temple was cultic, we are a communal church. We are a people gathered together, to encourage and strengthen one another as god speaks through us. We need each other to hear the full Gospel story and to develop strategies for outreach and witness. Gone are the days when participation in a ritual meets our spiritual needs, though, once, a long time ago, in a different culture, such worship was practical and relevant.

2) Much of the temple worship was cloaked in darkness, yet we are people of the light, a divine light which penetrates the darkness and cannot be overcome by it. For me “let your light so shine before others” sure beats Isaiah’s fire and smoke experience. Admittedly, he and I got to a similar place, but to totally different ways.

3) Thankfully, today we bless animals, we don’t sacrifice them. I can see it now, students at seminary, who study biblical theology, pastoral care, and “how to skin a chicken” according to Julia Child. The language of sacrifice is still present in our rites; for instance:

Gracious God,
(Christ’s) perfect sacrifice
destroys the power of sin and death;
by raising him to life you give us life for evermore.

So the sacrifice is done and over with, because of Jesus’ amazing fidelity to God whom he called Father. His offering effects and affects our present experience instead of the other way around.

Our temple tour today will have us glimpse our past, but our future as a church is quite different, thankfully. The fundamental roles of today’s Christian communities, including Anglicans, are well summed up in our baptismal promises. Candidates, along with the congregation are asked:

Celebrant Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

In other words, will you learn God’s story, in Christ, as told by the gospels and the early church, will you share in thanksgiving through the Eucharist and will you be prayerful?

We respond, hopefully, **\I will, with God's help.**

And again Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?

We respond, hopefully, **I will, with God's help.**

May this always be the case.