

“Miraculous Birth”

May 24, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Acts 2: 1-8,12-15,23-24,37-38,41-42

Where do you go to see God? When you want to meet God, encounter God’s power, be in the presence of the divine; where do you go?

In the most ancient parts of our Bible, they did not have a place to go. They just happened upon God, and when they did, they marked the place it happened. You might remember the mountain where Abraham went to sacrifice his son Isaac, but when Abraham lifted his knife, God spoke to him and provided a ram to be sacrificed in Isaac’s place. Genesis 22:14 says, “So Abraham called that place ‘The Lord will provide.’” A nameless, no place became a holy place, which some scholars believe later became the site of the Jerusalem temple, near mount Calvary. When Jacob stole his brother’s birthright and had to leave home, he spent the night in the middle of nowhere, using a rock for a pillow. That night he had a vision of angels going up and down a stairway from heaven to earth, and he met God. In the morning he anointed the rock he used for a pillow by pouring oil on it, and called the place “Bethel” which means “house of God”. Later, he returned and established it as a place of worship. Moses was tending his father-in-law’s sheep when he saw a bush on fire but not burn up. When he went to investigate, he heard God speak to him. After Moses brought the freed slaves out of Egypt, he lead them back to the place where he first encountered the presence of God in the burning bush. God met all the people there with fire, smoke, thunder and the call to be God’s people. That is where God shared the stone tablets containing the 10 Commandments as well as the rest of the law which would define the people of God for almost 1 ½ thousand years. That mountain became so ingrained as the mountain of God, that 600 some years later, when Elijah was running for his life, he sought shelter and an audience with God on that same mountain. That is where he found God in the sheer silence after the violent wind, earthquake and fire. Anytime someone had an encounter with God, they marked the place so they or another could return to the place and hopefully meet God again.

But after receiving the tablets with the 10 commandments and the rest of the law from God on Mt. Sinia, they built an elegant chest called the ark of the Covenant to house the stone tablets as well as housing Aaron’s staff and some of the manna from the wilderness. That ark became the place you went to encounter God. God was no longer a stationary God, limited to one place, but a God who moved with God’s people. They also built an elaborate tent called the tabernacle to house the ark. No matter where they wandered, when Moses went into the tabernacle where the ark was, the smoke of God’s presence met him there. When David moved the ark into the Jerusalem temple, the smoke of God’s presence engulfed the temple and it

became the place to go when you wanted to find God, to experience the power of God, to be in God's presence.

People found God's presence in a glorious new way in a moment we celebrate at Christmas, God came to us in Jesus. Repeatedly in the Gospels, especially John, Jesus is God come to earth. Jesus and God are the same being. If you wanted to see God, meet God, encounter God's power, or simply be in the presence of the divine; you found Jesus. Jesus is far and away the best picture of God we will ever find on earth. Colossians 2:9 says, "In Jesus the whole fullness of God dwells bodily." But then after His death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven, and the place they looked for God was gone.

Where would they go then? Where do we look now? When you want to meet God, encounter God's power, be in the presence of the divine; where do you go to find that? The answer is "The Church". The same God who showed up at "The Lord Shall Supply" mountain, Bethel and Mt. Sinai; the same God people sought in the ark of the covenant; the same God who put on flesh and dwelt with us in Jesus; that same God now chooses to dwell in the Church. So much so that we call the Church the Body of Christ. Pentecost is the moment that became so. The Holy Spirit, the continuing presence of God, established itself in the Church. Not the building, but the people. Don't get me wrong, there are some amazing church buildings whose stained glass, architecture, and art tell the story of God and point to God; but that is not where God chooses to dwell. God chooses to be in the people, empowering the people, making Godself known through the people.

Our Scripture passage contains two miracles that point to this reality. With the exceptions of creation itself and the resurrection of Jesus, these two miracles might be the greatest miracles in the Bible. After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the disciples followed Jesus' directions and stayed together. There were 120 of them and they spent their time in the upper room and in the temple, recounting their memories and experiences with Jesus. Acts 1 tells us they called new leadership as they carefully and prayerfully chose a twelfth disciple to take Judas' place. They were organized, prayerful and kept their group together. Then the wind started to blow. A violent windstorm blew in and suddenly there were tongues of fire on the heads of each disciple, and they began speaking in languages they did not know how to speak, and the people around them heard the word of God in their heart language. But the fiery tongues and the ability to speak different languages are not the two miracles I am talking about. The two greatest miracles of Pentecost are the fact that 1) the church began to testify about Jesus out in the world and 2) the world responded with repentance and faith. The wind of God blew open the church's mouth and the world's heart. Just like us, Jesus' disciples didn't need to take some class to gain more knowledge or special techniques on how to share the gospel. What they needed was the power to speak. Then the wind blew and they opened their mouths among people who didn't already agree with them. It was a miracle. And the other miracle was the

people listened. Some of these people's hearts were completely hardened to Jesus. Peter says they saw Jesus' miracles and wonders firsthand, but chose wickedness and put Jesus on the cross. But then the wind blew, and verse 37 says "they were cut to the heart." The wind blew Peter's mouth open and it didn't stop blowing until it blew their hearts open. "What shall we do?" they asked. "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And 3,000 people were baptized and "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." The wind blew and their hearts were softened. It was a miracle.

I call these two of the greatest miracles in the Bible because I have no doubt that God can manipulate creation. God can whip up or calm down a storm. God can bring water from a rock or even heal a damaged body. I do not doubt that. God can simply speak and creation must obey. But humans have freewill. God speaks and humans decide if we want to do it God's way or our own way. And we generally choose our way: the way that builds and defends our egos, our point of view, our bank account, our clout, and makes us feel superior to those around us. But at Pentecost, the wind blew and the disciples left the relatively safe ego-haven where everyone already believed like they did, and went out into the world around them and started talking about Jesus. At Pentecost, the people who heard them speak didn't get defensive and try to justify their actions and their point of view, but were cut to the heart and wanted to change. Miracles where the human ego is overcome are way more impressive than miracles in nature. God, make the wind blow again.

Here is your homework. In a world where Christianity is diminishing in numbers and influence, in a world where people are encouraged to find their own path and discover what feeds their ego enough to make them feel happy, in a world defined by competition and greed; pray for the wind to blow. Pray for a fresh breath from God to sweep over our churches, our nation, our world. Pray for miracles of open mouths and open hearts. Pray Church, I am asking you to pray. Today we celebrate the birthday of the Church. And before we blow out the candles on the cake, make a wish, no pray, for the wind to blow. To blow hard enough to open our mouths and open our neighbor's hearts.

Mike Van Heyningen