

## Christmas 2, Year A

- There is a concept that originates in Celtic Christianity that I find extremely helpful, and I think a lot of other people find extremely helpful – and it’s the idea of thin places
- Thin places are places where the boundary between earth and heaven is particularly thin, where the veil between here and there seems sheer
- This speaks to the reality that I think most of us have encountered, at some point or another: some places just seem holy, some locations appear to offer a glimpse of heaven on earth
- 
- If you spend any amount of time at all with the Book of Common Prayer, you soon realize that nearly a quarter of it is spent on reprinting the Psalter, the Book of Psalms, in its entirety
- It’s done in a different translation than the Bibles that we use, but it also has some extra headings that you won’t find when you read the Psalms in Scripture
- And those headings say things like “First Day: Morning Prayer” and “First Day: Evening Prayer” and so on, all the way to “Thirtieth Day: Evening Prayer”
- The reason for this is that in the Daily Office, as originally designed, the entire Psalter, every last one of the 150 Psalms, would be prayed every single month by the faithful
- That’s how important these texts were, and are, to Anglican spirituality, and to the history of Christian devotion
- Psalm 84, our Psalm for today, gives us an excellent glimpse into why
- If we aren’t paying attention, it can sound like the sort of generic praise I used to expect of the Psalms before I spent any real amount of time studying them
- But just listen to it, really listen to it:
- “How dear to me is your dwelling, O Lord of hosts! \*My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.”
- This isn’t just generic – it is a love letter to the dwelling place of God – a note of yearning for the courts of the Lord
- An acknowledgment that God is so holy that even to be in the presence of God is to be desired – even to be in the place God calls home is worthwhile
- It’s a Psalm that might have once been used by pilgrims who were coming to the Temple in Jerusalem, having journeyed far from home to finally draw close to where their Lord dwells – not unlike a few Magi whose journey to find a young child finally comes to

fruition tomorrow evening

- It is entirely possible that this is one of the Psalms the pilgrims would sing on their way up the Temple Mount, a song not only praising God, but expressing admiration, perhaps even envy, for the priests who labored there for God's purposes: "Happy are they who dwell in your house! \* they will always be praising you."
- This is how worthy God is, in this Psalm, that even those simply associated with God are to be revered
- That is the praise that pilgrims might have been singing as they ascended toward the place where God dwelled, the home which contained the sanctum sanctorum, the holy of holies, the holiest place because it was where the presence of God was said to dwell on earth – the thinnest place of all
- 
- But that's not the only way this Psalm might have been used
- It's possible that it was written long after the Temple was destroyed, expressing a yearning for the dwelling of God that was no longer, and even an acknowledgment that God's house was never in a single place, anyway
- As the Psalm says, "The sparrow has found her a house and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; \* by the side of your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God."
- That's another one of those phrases that seems lovely and pastoral and doesn't seem to mean much until you stop to think: how many altars of God have you seen where birds have been allowed to build nests right next to them?
- There are perhaps a few, now – but mostly just in chapels and churches that have taken this Psalm to heart and carved or placed a decorative birds' nest near their altar – but otherwise most altars are in places much too well-taken care of for that to happen
- So this is either an acknowledgment that the altars of God have somehow fallen into disrepair, such as with the destruction of the Temple
- Or, and perhaps my favorite idea – an acknowledgment that many of the altars of God are not ones that we would immediately recognize as such
- That the places of worship and sacrifice to God are just as often out in the world – among the birds and wildlife and creation – as they are in the more formal houses of worship
- It's as though there is here an acknowledgment that the house of God is everywhere, anywhere that we could go, anywhere even the birds could go
- Even those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of springs

- Because even there we can find the altars, the dwelling, the courts of the Lord
- In this season of Incarnation, we see that God is with us always, no matter where we may go
- Every speck of this earth is God's dwelling place, God's courts encompass all creation...  
Every place can be a thin place
- Happy are the people whose strength is in God because there is nowhere they can go that God is not with them, there is nowhere that God does not already call home