

Sermon - 21 December 2025

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Date: 21 December 2025

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Lord God, Heavenly Father, we thank you for bringing us even to this day, this fourth Sunday of Advent.

We pray now as we look into your word, as we reflect on the incarnation of our Lord, he's taken up a body to save us, and even as we reflect on this gospel account of St. Thomas, that you, Lord, will draw our hearts to you, Lord Jesus, that we may believe, that we may, in the words of St. Thomas, say, my Lord and my God.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. I do invite you to open your Bibles to John 20, verse 24 to 29. It seems odd that we should be looking at a passage of the resurrection of our Lord, really, as we are in Advent.

It seems odd that the church has actually appointed a feast of St. Thomas, should be commemorated in the midst of Advent, around Advent and Christmastide.

[1:22] But I think there is a logic there that is wonderful, and I ask you to press in with me this morning as we try to see that logic in display before us.

We, of course, are at the threshold on this fourth Sunday of Advent. As we wait for Emmanuel, the church stands at the threshold, at the very edge of Christmastide.

The waiting has almost reached its fulfillment. Christmas is almost here. And yet, the scriptures are pointed, as I said earlier, for today, to do something unexpected. Instead of taking us directly to Bethlehem, they draw us forward, even further, to the upper room, to the wounds of the risen Christ, and to the church being built as God's dwelling place, as we see in our epistle reading.

And I don't think this is a mistake of the calendar. It's a deep study, really, an invitation, a looking forward about this child, born of the Blessed Virgin, promised long ago as Savior and hope of mankind, how this child accomplished this great salvation.

Advent waiting. We've been talking about that. Advent waiting is a hopeful waiting, and it's not merely about anticipating a birth long ago.

[2:51] That's not all it's about. It's about learning what kind of Savior is coming, and what kind of people this Savior is forming.

The Incarnation is never an isolated event. God takes a body. We know that. We celebrate that at the Incarnation. God takes a body not only to redeem us, but to create a body.

He takes a body in order to create a body. To form a people in whom He will dwell by His Spirit. And so today, Advent, St. Thomas, the Resurrection, the Church, and the unity of Christ's people are all held together, in a way.

And so let's begin with the Gospel reading. We see there in John 20, Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared after the Resurrection.

This is the second appearing to them in this account that we read. The first appearing, Thomas wasn't there. We don't know why Thomas was in there. We just thought he wasn't there with them. And when they told Thomas what they had seen, when the other ten disciples told Thomas what they had seen, he responded with words that have echoed through the centuries.

[4:13] He said to them, What does he say?

I will not believe. It is here that Thomas earned this unfortunate nickname. Doubting Thomas. But John does not give us the story to shame Thomas.

He doesn't even call them Doubting Thomas. And I think it's a bit unfair to call Thomas Doubting Thomas. Thomas is not the villain of the Resurrection story. In fact, I think in a way, Thomas is us. In a really important way, I think this is why John, as the only Gospel writer, included this story. He wants us to see Thomas as the theologian of the Resurrection story.

Thomas reminds us that Christian faith is not fantasy. Not a denial of reality. As we speak of the great, marvelous mystery that God, the God of the universe, the infinite God, assumed humanity. [5:25] It takes a body. That's a mystery that we cannot really wrap our finite minds around. And as we speak of the great mystery of his death and resurrection, we're not meant and we're not called just to believe, to deny reality or to believe in a fantasy.

The Christian faith is not a blind leap into the dark. The God of the Bible does not ask us to believe without evidence. And he does not ask us to believe against evidence.

Christian faith is a reasonable faith. Grounded in God's self-revelation in history. Which we're beckoned to acknowledge and to believe.

And which we approach this very faith as we celebrate the birth of our Lord. And so the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, At the beginning of his earthly ministry, his life and atoning death, All of it culminates in his bodily resurrection.

Perhaps you're here this morning, And you've come to enjoy the beauty of this holiday season. Perhaps you've even appreciated the depth of the Christian story. The deepest and truest law.

[6:43] The truest story that's ever been told in which everything's sad. Everything broken is coming untrue. That's the Christian story. And perhaps this Christmas season is no better.

I would actually surmise. I would say to you this morning, If you're here and you haven't fully grasped the depth and the truth behind all of this, That you see.

There's beauty. There's law. There's celebration. If you haven't grasped the truth behind it all, I would say to you, This Christmas season is no better time to come. To come to a personal encounter with this God who came for you.

Who came to save you. It isn't a mere story. It isn't just a distant story. It's meant to be a personal story.

It is your story. If you would only but believe in Jesus Christ. So St. Thomas can teach us something of belief this morning.

[7:49] Thomas does not refuse belief in this story. He doesn't refuse to believe. He desires encounter. He didn't say, I wouldn't believe. He just says, Unless I see proof.

I want an encounter as you've had. He wants others. He wants what the other disciples already had. He wants to see the Lord.

To know for himself that death indeed has been defeated. His demand is deeply personal. Because faith itself is deeply personal.

And Christ meets him. That's the beauty of, And the wondrous good news of this. Christ meets him as he desires to meet you. Eight days later we're told.

On the next Lord's Day, Jesus comes again among them. They're still hiding in the upper room. And Jesus comes. He stands in their midst. And he says to them, Peace be with you.

[8:51] Peace be with you. And this isn't a mere greeting. It's not a mere greeting. From the crucified and risen Lord, This is a declaration.

What is it saying? What is being declared in that sentence? Peace be with you. Jesus is saying to them, The work is finished. Which work? The work of salvation.

The work of your redemption. The atoning sacrifice has been completed. The work is finished. Peace has been made through the cross. And that's the peace now that I offer you.

Jesus turns directly then to Thomas. And look what Jesus does. This is the gentle Savior. This is the gracious Lord. As he turns to Thomas, He doesn't rebuke him.

He doesn't shame him. In fact, he invites him. He invites Thomas. He says to Thomas, Put your finger here.

[9:54] And see my hands. And put out your hand. And place it in my side. And here's the words of comfort. The words of invitation. Gospel words itself.

He says, Jesus says to him, Do not disbelieve, But believe. The risen Christ Still bears the wounds of the cross.

What a gracious, And marvelous mystery. The risen Christ Still bears the wounds of the cross. Resurrection does not erase Suffering. It transforms it.

The same body laid in the tomb Now stands glorified. The incarnation reaches Its fulfillment Not by abandoning the flesh, But by redeeming the flesh.

And that recalls What St. Athanasius says Concerning our Lord's incarnation. Athanasius says this, Christ was made man That we might be made God.

[10 : 54] Of course, Athanasius doesn't Negate the distinction Between creator and creation. But the great mystery That is being communicated That the incarnation of our Lord, The fact that God, The son, The eternal son, Took on humanity, Became man, Was for the purpose That he may raise us up, Raise us up, Into divine fellowship.

With God the father, God the son, And God the holy spirit. And we see this, In this sort of, Snapshot, Of the incarnation, All the way to the resurrection, As we see this morning. And what does Thomas respond, As he sees this, Great, Beautiful, Marvelous miracle, Of the resurrection, Before him. As he has an encounter, With the risen Lord.

What is Thomas' response? Thomas responded, With the clearest confession, In the gospel of John. Perhaps one of the clearest confession, In the whole Bible.

He fell to his knees, And he says, My Lord, And my God. And, Brothers and sisters, This is not merely, Intellectual assent.

[12 : 12] He's not just saying, Oh, I get it. Intellectually. He does get it. But it's more than that. It's worship.

Thomas worships the Lord. The God of the universe. The King of kings, And the Lord of lords. It is worship. It's surrender. Thomas surrenders.

His will, And his heart, He surrenders it all, To this Lord, Who has ransomed him. And in this display, And in this confession, Thomas shows us, The heart of Christianity, Spoken aloud. My Lord, And my God. And then Jesus, Speaks a word, Meant for us. Jesus responded, To this declaration of faith. And Jesus' words, Are meant for you and me.

Jesus says, Blessed are those, Who have not seen, And yet have believed. This is not, A dismissal of Thomas. That's not what Jesus is doing here. Rather, It's a beatitude.

[13 : 21] It's a blessing, For the church, That will come. For those who live, By the apostolic witness, Of Thomas. The apostolic witness, Of James, And John, And Peter.

That's us. That's us. We live by their apostolic witness. Jesus now gives this blessing, To those who will come. Those who will wait, Who will come later, Waiting in faith, For what we do not yet see. Now, Why does this gospel, Belong in Advent, We might ask. I think it's because, Advent teaches us, To wait rightly.

Advent teaches us, How to wait. We do not approach, Christmas as though, The main joke, Could be separated, From the cross. You know, Oftentimes, Many people, Actually not oftentimes, Many people, Celebrate Christmas, Because it's cultural, Because it's beautiful, Because it's the holiday season, And you get presents.

All of those things, Are worth celebrating. It's family time, All of those things, Are great. But even as Christians, When we, Even us, Who know the deeper truth, Behind the law, We often celebrate, As if Christmas, Just stays there.

[14 : 37] As if the baby, Remains in the manger, All cute and cuddly, Swallowed, Wrapped in swaddling clothes, Wrapped in swaddling clothes, We forget that, The manger, Cannot be separated, From the cross.

The child, Born of Mary, Already bears in his body, The destiny, Of the world's salvation. The wood, Of the crib, Gestures towards the, Wood of Calvary.

The swaddling clothes, Anticipate, The burial shroud. And so, To know this, Does not diminish, The joy of Christmas.

Not at all. In fact, I think it deepens, The joy of Christmas. God does not redeem, From a distance. That's what this tells us. He redeems, From within.

God, The God of the universe, Comes within our flesh, Takes our body, Enters into our suffering, Enters into our death.

[15 : 45] His death, On the cross, Was our death. It's the death, That we should have had. He enters into all of that. The incarnation, Is God's, Unmovable commitment to us.

To humanity. The son, Takes a body, In order to offer, That same body, As an atoning sacrifice, For our sin. To raise that body, In glory, As proof, That that once for all, Sacrifice, Has been accomplished.

Our redemption, Has been accomplished. And ultimately, In doing all of that, To form a body. The church.

And that brings us, To the personal reading, That we have this morning. As St. Paul writes, To the Ephesians. So then, He writes, You are no longer, Strangers, And aliens, But you are what?

Your fellow citizens, With the saints, And members of the household of God. This, Here is covenant language. This is household language.

[16:55] This is temple language. Paul is speaking, Primarily, To a Gentile church. Those who were once far off. He said that earlier in Ephesians. You were a people without, God.

Those who were far off, Who were excluded, Strangers to the promises of God. And he says to them now, And at best, They had partial access. But now, Paul writes to them, That through Christ, These very same people, For them, Everything has changed, Through Christ.

They are no longer outsiders. They are now members, Of the household of God. And how is this household built? It's built, It's built on the foundation, We're told, Of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself, Being the cornerstone. Here is the reformational clarity, We must never lose. The church, The church, That's us here, Gathered together, Is not built on sentiment.

I know, We are sentimental, About one another, And I love that. We love one another, We're fond of one another, That's actually, That is, How it should be. But that's not enough, To keep us united.

[18:16] The church isn't built, On mere sentiment. It's not built, On mere preference. In fact, I think some of us, If we're honest with each other, If it's just, On the basis of preference, We probably wouldn't be, Constituted as we are, Constituted right now, This morning.

You might prefer, To be among other people, Don't raise your hand, Just acknowledge it, In your heart. That may be true, But that's because, The church isn't based, On mere preference.

If it is, We'll be more uniform, In the way we look. Maybe a church of, You know, 20 and 30 somethings, Or a church of, You know, Of 60 and 70s. But no, We are intergenerational, Multi-ethnic, Come from every, Different walks of life, Because that is not, The basis of our unity. It's not sentiment, Mere, It's not mere preference, The church isn't based, On power, Even. What is the church built on? It's built on Christ.

It's built on Jesus Christ, As he is made known, Through the apostles, And the prophets. That is, It is built, Through the word of God.

[19:30] That's the basis, Of the church's unity. That's the basis, By which we are constituted, This morning. And that basis, Goes further, Than any preference, Or sentiment can go.

Paul says, Christ himself, Christ himself, Is the cornerstone. I'm not a builder, Or the son of one, But I know enough to know, That the cornerstone, Is a really important thing, In building.

Christ himself, Is the cornerstone. Without the cornerstones, Everything falls apart. Nothing is straight, Nothing is right, And eventually, It would all collapse.

And so, What do you want to be, The cornerstone of the church? What deserves, And what can only, What alone can sustain the church? It is Christ, In the cornerstone.

He's the one, Who aligns us. He's the one, Who supports us. He's the one, Who holds together, The entire structure. And Paul says this, In whom the whole structure, Being joined together, Grows, Into a holy temple, In the Lord.

[20:45] And I want you to notice, The movement so far, From the incarnation, All the way to where we are now. Christ's body, Christ, The son of God, The eternal son, The word, Eternal word, Assumes a body, Takes on a human body, To what end?

So that he may save a people, Redeem a people, Through that very body, By his atoning sacrifice, On the cross. And then, Two Christ's people, Jesus Christ's people, Constituted, Of a new body. And that's why, We're referred to as, The body of Christ. And what does Christ do? He came, At the incarnation, God dwelt with man, Emmanuel.

That his very body, That he assumes, Becomes the temple of God. But at his resurrection, The temple of God, Is now not localized, Into one, Just one body.

But has been dispersed, Into the church, So that we, Are now, God's dwelling place. That's the beauty, Of the incarnation.

[21:57] That's the mystery of it. The temple of his body, Leads to the temple, That is the church. The incarnation, Sets the stage.

God dwelt among us, In Christ, So that he might dwell, Within us, By his spirit. And thereby, Establish, And empower, A new temple, Set apart unto the Lord, Which is his church.

And so, Paul continues, In him, That is in Christ, You, Are also being, Built together, Into a dwelling place, For God, By the spirit.

And here, The implication, Becomes unavoidable. If Christ has made us, One household, One building, One body, Then the things, That divide us, No longer have, Ultimate authority.

That's the implication. What are the things, That divide us? It's the same thing, That divides people in the world. Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Income, Education.

[23 : 01] But what is Paul saying? If Christ has made you, One body, All of those walls, Of division, No longer have, Any hold, Or bearings, Upon you.

As we gather, On this basis, We are reminded, That in Christ Jesus, The things, That separate us, Have been destroyed. Jesus has killed, The hostility between us, At the cross.

That's what we confess, Every time we come together, Under his banner, Under the, At the foot of the cross, We're saying, Ask the people of God, Jesus Christ, Has killed, Every walls of division, That exists, Prior, Before us, Between us.

So ethnicity, Gender, Economic, Or social background, Political allegiance, All of those things, Means nothing. These, Are the dividing worlds, The world builds, But in the church, They've been leveled, By the cross of Christ.

Even sins committed, Against one another, Even the sins, Committed against one another, Are not sufficient, To break communion. Because in Christ, We who have been forgiven, Are invited, To lay our sins, And wounds, At the foot of the cross.

[24 : 22] Where forgiveness flows, And peace is given. That is why we pray, Forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those, Who trespass against us. Because in Christ, We find forgiveness.

And in Christ, We also find the power, To forgive. Paul is equally clear, About this. The unity, Has a foundation.

We cannot let, Anything, Other than Jesus Christ, And his finished work, Be the basis, For our unity. If anyone, Paul says, Even an angel, Should preach, Another gospel, Offering something, Other than Christ, Crucified and risen, What are we to do?

To reject, Such a, Testimony, To consider it, Anathema, Cursed. Because faithfulness, To the word of God, Given through the apostles, And prophets, Is what keeps us, In the family of God.

And here's the warning for us, Brothers and sisters, Collectively, And individually, If we step away, From the foundation, From Jesus, The cornerstone, If we step away from that, To something else, We will cease, To be the church of Christ.

[25 : 45] Jesus Christ, Is the cornerstone, Is the one holding, And keeping everything together, And the question then, For us this morning, Is do you have the connection, That matters? Are you united, In the way, That truly matters?

Are you abiding in Christ, Through his word? May we never cease, To be the church, By departing from the truth, Of his word. When we see, That this Christ, Who comes, To take a human body, And die the death, Atoning death on the cross, As ransomed us, And constituted us, As his body, The church.

And here, As good Anglicans, We remember that, God not only speaks his word, He also gives us, Visible words, What do I mean by visible words? Where the sacraments, Are not alternative, To the gospels, They're not alternatives, To the gospels, In fact, They proclaim the gospel, The same gospel, That we read, In the pages of scripture, Baptism, Is a public declaration, Of the inward work of Christ, Marking us, As his covenant people, Grafted into his body, That's what it does, That's, Every time, A new soul, Is baptized, And welcomed into the visible body of Christ, Into the covenant body of Christ, We're declaring the gospel, And when we come every Sunday, To the Lord's Supper, What are we saying?

We're saying that, This is the place where, By faith, We feed on Christ himself, His body, Is given for us, His blood, Is shed for us, Which has been shed for us, Is given to us, The sacraments, Testify to Jesus, And they impart grace to us, It's not magic, It's not magic, And it's not mere sentiment either, It's a real grace, Given by God, To sustain his people, And mark them, As his dwelling place, I want to repeat that, Every time we come, And we participate, At the Lord's Supper, At the Lord's table, And take his body, And drink his blood, What are we saying?

In fact, Not we saying, What is God saying, About us, And what he has accomplished, Because it's not, We're not doing anything, It's being done to us, Christ is reminding us, An important grace to us, And he's saying, That this real grace, That is imparted to us, Is what sustains us, As his people, And it marks us out, As different from the world, Around us, That we, Are God's, Dwelling place, So as we wait for Christmas, We wait not as isolated individuals, We wait as members, Of the body of Christ, We wait together, We wait, Awake this Christ, We took on flesh, Who has not, Bind us together in himself, The Christ whose wounds, Thomas touched, Now builds us, Into his own living temple, The Christ who came in humility, We wait for him,

[29:01] To come again, In glory, And until that day, We confess with Thomas, We confess with the church, And we confess with the saints, Of every age, We say, My Lord, And my God, May we in faith, May we walk in unity, May we wait in faith, May we remain built upon Christ alone, Until faith gives way to sight, And God is all in all, In the name of the Father, And of the Son, And of the Holy Spirit, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,