

**4th Sunday in Advent
December 18, 2011
5:30 PM Liturgy**

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Today's liturgy provokes a rather strange question: where does God live? You probably have not asked that question since you were a kid. And then the answer was probably rather simple: "up there!"

But we now know—at least most of us know—that won't work anymore. At this point in human history we've been "up there" in spaceships and there's no one home. We've been out there with extraordinary telescopes and there's nothing to see except a dazzling array of galaxies reaching farther than our imaginations will soar.

And perhaps you saw just yesterday a photograph from the Hubble telescope showing the birth of a new star at the remote edge of the Milky Way, our own galaxy. The NASA report—this from an official agency of the Federal government—said: the new star formation looked just like a "snow angel." Where does God live?

People continue to ask the question and still want an answer. Where *does* God live? It only *seems* like a childish question. It may have serious implications still—even in our sometimes jaded adulthood. And there are cognate questions that arise: what is God’s name? Does God have a season? Does God shift and change like everything else in our universe? *Everything else does!* Does God?

King David and Nathan, his prophet, asked the same question centuries ago. David is upset at the unseemly reality that for a moment in history God seemed to dwell in a tent. God was carried from camp to camp in a canvas bag. Meanwhile, David himself lived in a lovely cedar house.

Fortunately God sets the story straight with Nathan. God is gracious enough to suggest that while they have an interesting question (where should God really dwell), they are both miles from the right answer. They are not even in the right ballpark! (Or should I say galaxy?) And it may be too early in human history for them to be able to even imagine the real answer. But at least we do know that it doesn’t matter whether it’s a canvas or cedar home.

Jump forward several centuries. This time the scene is set between another unlikely couple confronting the same questions. Where does God live? Where should God live? This time it's a simple, young girl named Mary and an angel called Gabriel. This time God's answer seems even more incredulous. "The Most High will overshadow you (the same word used in the Old Testament to describe God's hovering over the Ark of the Covenant) and the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God." That's where God lives. That's *my* choice, says the Almighty.

Let's face it. It's really not much more bizarre than canvas or cedar! Emmanuel! "God is with us," sings the season. God is in us. God dwells here! Right here! By choice! Strange choice, it seems to me, but God's choice nonetheless.

And how about the cognate questions? Does God have a name here? Yes, in this season God has a Winter Name (James Carroll): it is silence. As St Augustine mused: a speechless baby is ironically *the* Word of God. A Word spoken into the darkness of our universe—or perhaps into our multi-verse. This is a Word that is more than a "God particle," in the news again much of late. It is a Word that is more than just a Higgs boson. This Word is God and

has a human name, the name at which every knee should bend and every tongue confess. It is the Word, St. Paul tells the Romans, “kept secret for long ages now made manifest” (Romans).

The poets always say it best: this is “a silence into which another voice may speak” (Mary Oliver “Praying”). And in the dark, we are invited to listen carefully, and to watch closely. Watch for Emmanuel! For God dwells right here. By choice!

Watch closely! Listen carefully! There is only a week left. God, it seems, does have a name—and a place—and a season. It is now and forever more here. Look around at each other and name God.