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## **“I WANT TO STAY WITH YOU!”**

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Family- and parish-based catechetics helps us discover the terrific house God has prepared for us, when He gave us the earth. He filled us with wonderful talents. And this was not enough for Him: He wants to come and stay with us!

### **GOD’S GARDEN**

In the first pages of the Bible we are told in a poetic way about God’s intimacy with man and woman, whom He had created. He set them in a garden, and in the cool of the day He would come and walk with them. This land of Eden could have been the best place to live. However, since man wanted to be like God, this beautiful familiarity was broken, man was chased from the garden and condemned to till the earth whence he had been drawn. At the garden gate God placed the cherubim with their flaming swords to watch over the path leading to the tree of life. This is a summary of the Genesis story about the creation of humankind. In the long centuries following, humans will witness God’s many initiatives to re-establish contact with them: God enters into covenant with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. We witness all of God’s efforts to come and stay with humankind.

### **HISTORY OF A PEOPLE**

God chose a people for Himself: He discovered it in distress, enslaved in the land of Egypt. He heard its cries and resolved to set it free. On the evening of Passover He led the people out and across the Red Sea. At Mount Sinai, He entered into a covenant with them. All of these divine initiatives cannot be explained other than by God’s incomprehensible love for His People. Nevertheless, that love was not reciprocated, and the covenant was broken over and over again.. However, God continued to abide under a tent in the midst of this nomadic people. This “tent of the reunion”, a kind of “tabernacle” in the middle of the community, became the residence of God. After the people of God conquer the Promised Land and establish themselves in Israel, then we shall hear talk of a solid and lasting house for God, a Temple to be a sign of God’s presence and unity. However, as Saint Stephen says: “The Most High does not have his abode in man-made dwellings.” His wish is to live in the human heart.

### **EMMANUEL**

Throughout the history of the Chosen People, the divine initiatives will be recalled, and His exploits will be highly praised: no other nation has a God who is as close to his people as ours is. Then the people would recall all the marvels worked through the ages: “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His love is everlasting. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His love is everlasting. He has made the great lights, for His love is everlasting.” And the people would recapitulate all of past history. Besides, there would be talk of a Messiah who would come renew the bonds with the Chosen People, in a new covenant. “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son who shall be called Emmanuel, which means ‘God-with-Us’.” This is the great mystery we celebrate in a special way at Christmas. The account which Saint Luke gives us of the Annunciation tells us how Mary accepted to become the Mother of Jesus, how she conceived him, and how she and Joseph welcomed him at his birth at Bethlehem, and later at Nazareth. Saint John the Evangelist writes: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” God makes His abode with humans: this is the great mystery of the Nativity.

### **SPECIAL MISSION**

Jesus grew. Around the age of thirty, he was baptised in the Jordan River. He then came to the synagogue at Nazareth, and there he declared the mission which had been given to him: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon

me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord.” He would work at carrying out this difficult mission throughout the three years of his public ministry. He chooses twelve apostles to whom he gives power and authority over demons, with the power to heal the sick. He sends them forth to proclaim the Reign of God and to heal. The apostles go from village to village, proclaiming the Good News and healing people everywhere, Saint Luke tells us.

## **Two Wishes**

One day a great crowd assembled at Jericho. Prophet Jesus was coming into the city! This would not be an easy task, for short Zacchaeus to see him because of the crowd. Zacchaeus therefore decided to climb a tree. Hardly up the tree, he heard someone call to him: “Zacchaeus, hurry down, because today I must live at your house!” Zacchaeus quickly scampered down the tree, and welcomed him with joy. Seeing this, the people murmured among themselves: “He has gone to live with a sinner!” But Zacchaeus told the Lord: “Lord, I give half of my belongings to the poor, and if I have caused harm to anyone, I shall repay him four times over.” Jesus responded: “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. The Son of Man has come to save what was lost.” Jesus’ wish, and that of Zacchaeus, had met! And like Zacchaeus, we, too, want to see Jesus, and Jesus wants to come and live with us!

## **ABIDE IN MY LOVE**

God’s wanting to live among us is a long story. Not only does God want to inhabit our planet, which is already a wonderful gift, not only does He fill us with gifts and outstanding talents, not only does He want to abide among us, but He desires to inhabit our heart of hearts, the deepest part of our beings. Jesus fulfills the great promise of the prophets: ‘I shall take you from among the nations and I shall gather you from all the nations. I shall pour on you pure water and you shall be purified. I shall give you a new heart and put in you a new spirit; I shall take out your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I shall place my spirit in you, and I shall ensure that you follow my laws and customs.’ Such wonderful things!

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