PRESENCE OF GOD God's initiative in encountering people. Biblical words for the presence of God usually relate to the "face" of God.

Old Testament Usage During the patriarchal period, God used a variety of means of revelation to communicate with the people (Gen. 15:1; 32:24-30). These are often described as theophanies, appearances of God to humanity. Moses had a close relationship with God. He encountered God in the burning bush and knew God "face to face" (Deut. 34:10). The presence of God was also closely related to the tabernacle, the place for ancient Israel to encounter God in worship. The tabernacle was the place of the Lord's name or glory, a manifestation of God's presence and activity in the world (Ex. 40:34,38). The cloud and fire symbolized the presence of God leading on the journey to Canaan.

Perhaps the primary tangible symbol of God's presence with the people was the ark of the covenant, the container for the tablet of the law and the seat of God's throne. It led the people in the journey to Canaan and into battle (Josh. 3:1-6). The ark was associated with the sanctuary and eventually came to rest in the Temple, the place of the presence of God. Here Isaiah had a powerful vision of the holy God (Isa. 6).

God also manifested Himself in other ways: in fire (1 Kings 18) and in a still small voice (1 Kings 19), both to Elijah. The Psalms speak of God's presence with the worshiping community (Ps. 139) and of the apparent absence of this present God (Ps. 13). In either case, God is still addressed. Ezekiel spoke of the Exile in terms of the glory (presence) of God leaving ancient Israel but then returning at the end of the Exile in Babylon (Ezek. 43:1-5). Much of the Old Testament discussion of the presence of God centers on the fact that God is utterly free to be where God wills but constantly chooses to be with His people to give them life.

New Testament Usage The primary New Testament manifestation of the presence of God is in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23; John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-3). This presence did not end with the death of Christ. The risen Christ appeared to the disciples (John 21:1-14) and to Paul. Through the apostles, Paul and the disciples, Christ's work continued (Acts 1:8; 26:12-18). The Holy Spirit is an important manifestation of the presence of God and continues the redemptive work of God. The return of Christ will bring permanence to the presence of God with His people.

The church is called to be a manifestation of God's presence. That community is fed by the presence of God found in communion between worshiper and God.

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