

Sunday, December 24, 2023 – 4th Sunday of Advent

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Introduction

God keeps the promise made to David to give him an everlasting throne. The angel tells Mary that God will give David's throne to her son Jesus. She is perplexed by Gabriel's greeting and by the news of her coming pregnancy, but she is able still to say, "Count me in." We who know that Jesus is called king only as he is executed still find it a mystery hard to fathom, but with Mary today we hear the news of what God is up to and say, "Count us in."

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

¹Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Psalm: Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b}My soul proclaims the greatness ^l of the Lord,
⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in ^l God my Savior,
⁴⁸**for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your ^l lowly servant.**
From this day all generations will ^l call me blessed:
⁴⁹you, the Almighty, have done great ^l things for me
and holy ^l is your name.
⁵⁰**You have mercy on ^l those who fear you,**
from generation to ^l generation.
⁵¹You have shown strength ^l with your arm
and scattered the proud in ^l their conceit,
⁵²**casting down the mighty ^l from their thrones**
and lifting ^l up the lowly.
⁵³You have filled the hungry ^l with good things
and sent the rich ^l away empty.
⁵⁴**You have come to the aid of your ^l servant Israel,**
to remember the prom- ^l ise of mercy,
⁵⁵the promise made ^l to our forebears,
to Abraham and his chil- ^l dren forever.

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

²⁵Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here

am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Prayers and introductions from
SundaysAndSeasons.com

Prayers of Intercession

With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who await God's day of restoration.

A brief silence.

You promise mercy to Abraham and Sarah and their descendants forever. Bring your church into thoughtful, caring, and collaborative relationship with those of other faiths. Strengthen our shared values, that we work together in caring for our world. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

As fields and crops lie dormant, bless them with holy rest. Prepare them to thrive, that they provide abundant food in due season. Protect animals who hibernate and provide for all who scavenge for food in the lean season. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You raise up the lowly and cast down the arrogant. Teach humility to all in positions of authority. Break down systems of oppression, especially systems that perpetuate inequity and exclusion. Do not allow wealth, power, or pride to become idols that obscure your call to justice. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Look with favor upon all who cry out to you. Accompany with tenderness all who are afraid or ill. Rescue all who experience abuse or who live under threat of violence, especially refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seekers in search of a safe and stable home. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You are pleased to make your home among us. Make our homecomings joyful as we gather with friends, families, and chosen families in celebration. Grant safety to all who travel. Sustain the work of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services and other ministries that assist in setting up new homes. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Blessed are you for Mary and all your servants in every generation who lived according to your promise of mercy. Strengthen us by their example until the revelation of your glory is made known. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Listen to these and all our prayers, O God of hosts, and restore us with your great and everlasting mercy.

Amen.

A reflection for this Fourth Sunday of Advent

Those Who Hear and Do

Who is God's family? Where is God's home? In the church we often speak of our home parish as a family. Many of us grew up thinking of the church building as God's house. But the readings for this day call us to anticipate that Emmanuel might understand kinship and home in different ways. As we approach Christmas, which in our culture is increasingly a celebration of hearth and home more than a public festival, the inclusiveness of God's promise rings out from these readings.

The temple often stood in the imagination of Israel as the "house of God," but in 1 Samuel God expresses reservations before the temple is even built. The promise made to David is not about the building. Instead of the expected places of wealth and power, God chooses to dwell in a *people* instead of a "house of cedar" (2 Sam. 7:2, 7).

So if God is dwelling in a people, who is included in *that* promise? Although no one disputes that Jesus is born of the "house of David," Luke's gospel stresses Mary's lowliness instead of her bloodlines, reminding us that Christ became flesh in the most unlikely circumstances. Later in Luke's gospel, when someone mentions his family to Jesus, he says his family includes all "who hear the word of God and do it" (8:21). In today's gospel we see Mary acting out that definition of family.



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