

**Homily for the 4th Sunday of Advent - Year B**  
**St. Peter's 5:00 Sat/9:30 Sun Masses - December 24, 2023**

**2 Sam 7:1-16** "The Lord will make you a house and establish his kingdom forever."

**Psalms 89:1-4,26,28** "He shall cry to me: You are my Father, my God, the rock of my salvation.."

**Romans 16:25-27** "The revelation that was kept secret for long ages is now disclosed."

**Luke 1:26-38** "The Holy Spirit will come upon you. Therefore the child born will be holy."

**Not A House But A Home**

**Introduction**

So, are you ready for Christmas? That seems to be the question we hear, right from Halloween. We make plans to be ready. We always want to be more prepared next time. You have heard the expression perhaps: "We make plans. God laughs." I don't know if God laughs at our plans, but Christians always need to be aware that God loves us and has a plan for our lives. That doesn't mean we shouldn't make plans. It does mean we must make way for God's plan, even when it doesn't seem to jive with our own.

We have things to do: Gifts, groceries, Christmas cards, cooking, invitations, decorations. We know that getting ready for Christmas has a LOT of things to do. Most of those aren't what we would call spiritual things but they do need to be done. Sometimes we need to stop and sit with the Lord, to take some time to appreciate this time of year. In this very short 4th week of Advent that becomes even more important. Suddenly, the anticipation of the gift of the birth of Christ is upon us.

We lighted four candles today to be a reminder that the light was promised by God. The promise of that light was foretold to David, announced by Gabriel, prophesied by John the Baptist, carried out through Mary, and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. That true light is now just waiting to come again into our darkness.

Through Advent, we have been encouraged to reflect quietly on our lives and to make room in our hearts again for the coming of Jesus, the saviour. Whether we have done these things or not, it is now the right time to look forward to the coming of the light. Today, blessed are you if you believe in the promise of the Lord. He is waiting to be born again in you and me if we will only believe what has been spoken to us by the Lord himself.

## **David**

What does King David have to do with this plan? Well, let's consider. He had finally taken control of Jerusalem, defeated aggressive neighbour kings, build a royal castle, and set up worship of God. He had established peace in Israel. That was some challenge. It took everything he had, along with the anointing he had received. What next, he wondered. That's the subject of today's really important Old Testament passage. Well, he now had a fine castle, so what about the Ark of the Covenant, God's presence. Why not build a temple, a house, for the Ark of the Covenant, for God's presence. The pagan nations all did that for their gods. Should the one true God of the universe not have at least the same?

Nathan was David's royal prophet. His job was to listen to God's voice, even while dreaming, let people know when their worship had become false, and make sure to give the king good and holy advice from God. That's what he thought he was doing when he told David that his 'house for God' idea sounded really good.

But the king and the prophet were both wrong. That happens a lot in salvation history because it is hard for people to think like God. Without godly wisdom, you and I are always going to be wrong. That's just the way it is. Without God's direct input, our own wisdom about the right thing to do at any given time is going to be influenced by the ideas around us. It's very hard to distinguish. With a lot of practice, we can get closer and closer to knowing God's plan for our lives. And he has one for each of us. But it has

to fit into his greater plan of salvation. For peace and harmony in our lives, our plans must be harmonized with what God has in mind.

God is the one who created the cosmos from nothing, create life from nothing, sustains all creation in existence, reveals himself to people over the centuries, slowly enough so they can get it, not so fast that they feel overwhelmed, letting them know in many ways that he created them to share his blessed life with them.

But the God of the whole cosmos makes an astounding promise to the one he has made king over his people. He tells him: Stop your foolishness. You are not going to build a house for me, for I cannot be contained in a building. No, but I am going to build you a house - a dynasty - that will last forever. Your descendent will be my Son, and his throne, his house, will last forever.

The gods of history never make covenants. They act primarily in their own self interest. They don't promise anything. They meddle, often with violence. Most of all, gods invented by humans never prophecy great things that will happen in the future.

## **Mary**

If there ever there was someone who would feel overwhelmed by what was going on for her, it would be Mary. Very dramatically, God's holiest angel presents her with the most important list any human being, except the God-man, Jesus, has ever been given: You are going to conceive. You are going to bear a son. You are going to name him Jesus and, by the way, you and Joseph are going to raise the saviour of the world, the king who will sit on the throne that God promised to David, and that many prophets have foretold since then.

Mary had only the most natural question: How will that work with Joseph? But when she recovers her breath, as it were, her childlike trust in God

takes over. All she needs to hear is the truth from the great Good News messenger, Gabriel: Nothing is impossible with God.

Just as the ark carried the manna, so Mary carries in her womb the child who will be known as the true bread from heaven, the bread of life. Just as the Ark contained the Ten Commandments, so Mary bears the one who is the fulfillment of the law. And just as the ark carried the staff of the high priest Aaron, so does Mary carry in her womb the true high priest who will offer his life on the cross for our sins.

### **Recapitulation of the Promise**

When they wandered in the desert, the people encountered God in a tent. It was called the 'Tent of Meeting.' It wasn't a house where they could keep God. It was a place where they fell on their faces in awe of the God who had rescued them and had come down to their level, in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Much later, in the land which had been promised to Abraham, King David decided to build a physical house for God. It seemed right because that's what the other nations did for their gods, which they could contain.

God said (paraphrasing), "Don't be ridiculous. I took you from fields where you took care of sheep. It was I who made you king over my people. You didn't do that yourself, and you aren't going to build a house as if you could contain and control me like some manufactured god. You don't build me a house. I will build you a house. That house will not be a building, but a line of descendents, from which will come my own Son, who will be Lord over a kingdom which will never end. In that way, I will save the people from their sins and from the evil one.

Well, until the fulfillment of the covenant God made with the king that day, the first of David's descendents, Solomon, was the one to build the temple. But later that temple was destroyed. After a time of exile, it was rebuilt, but without the Ark of the Covenant, which went missing during the exile. That was hard to accept, but worship took place in that temple with the

understanding that God was somehow present there, with the people in a special way when they made sacrifices according to the old sacrificial laws.

But then, to make come true what God had promised to David, there would be a descendent of that king who would be the greatest king of all, because he would rule over the most terrible of enemies, sin itself. For that purpose, God chose a new house, not built with hammers and stone and adorned with jewels and gold, but a human temple, Mary, who for nine months would be the house of the king of kings. She would bear the true and real presence of God the most high, within the temple of her body. That was the incarnation, the entering into a human body, by the body of the eternal Son of God.

Now, that was a pivotal moment, of course because God was going to enter into human history and reveal himself in a new and complete way, but it was a pivotal moment also because God didn't just snap his fingers and bring about that thing. God made that greatest of moments in all of human history, his incarnation, contingent/dependent, on the agreement of a young woman, probably a teenager, in an out of the way town. The working out of coming together of human history with salvation history could not happen without a profound 'yes' from that young woman.

Brothers and sisters, great saints have written how all of heaven, all the angels and Old Testament saints, held its breath awaiting her response to how Gabriel answered her question, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" Gabriel looked at her and declared, "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." There it is. There are the words of the covenant God made with King David. The answer so breathlessly waited for by all of heaven and earth: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word." There is that yes that we honour so profoundly in our Catholic faith. I am God's humble servant, she said. I will do what you ask, she said. I will be your house. I will be your temple.

In the time of Jesus, Herod massively renovated that second temple and made it beautiful. But Jesus told them it would be torn down and built back up again in three days. What does that mean? It means that the house for God was no longer a building. It was now a person, the person of Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, with more historical evidence to support that resurrection than any person from ancient history. That human and divine temple gave his body, blood, soul and divinity for all of humankind, for those who would believe in him.

After his resurrection and ascension, then Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to dwell with people. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the new house for God is in the bodies and in the hearts of those who believe and are called disciples.

How will I make room for him this Christmas. Well today's Gospel should tell us everything we need to know. Let it be done to me at the beginning of his life in the womb. Treasuring these things in our hearts at his birth. We don't have to think right now about carrying our crosses, or standing under his cross, or what to give to Caesar. Now all we must do to conform ourselves to God's saving plan is to say with Mary, "Let it be done to me according to your will, according to your plan to make your home in me."

## **Key Verses Today**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Drop down dew from above, you heavens, and let the clouds rain down the Just One. Let the earth be opened and bring forth a saviour.*

**Collect:** *Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross, be brought to the glory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.*

**2 Samuel:** *David, the king, was settled in his house. The Lord had given him rest from his enemies. The king said to the prophet Nathan: I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent. Nathan said: Go, do all that you have in mind, for the Lord is with you. But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Tell my servant David: Are you the one to build me a house? I took you from following sheep to be prince over my people Israel. I have been with you everywhere and have cut off all your enemies. The Lord will make you a house and will raise up your offspring and establish his kingdom. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom (throne) shall be made sure forever.*

**Psalm:** *I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever. You said: I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to my servant David, I will establish your descendants forever and build your throne for all generations. He shall cry to me: You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.*

**Romans:** *The Gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles.*

**Luke:** *The Angel Gabriel was sent by God, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. He came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." She was much perplexed and pondered this greeting. The angel said: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. Of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The Angel said: "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. Your relative Elizabeth, who was said to be barren, has conceived a son in her old age. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*