

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 24, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: 2 Sam 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

When King David was settled in his palace, and the LORD had given him rest from his enemies on every side, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!" Nathan answered the king, "Go, do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you." But that night the LORD spoke to Nathan and said: "Go, tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Should you build me a house to dwell in?'"

It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth. I will fix a place for my people Israel; I will plant them so that they may dwell in their place without further disturbance. Neither shall the wicked continue to afflict them as they did of old, since the time I first appointed judges over my people Israel. I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also reveals to you that he will establish a house for you. And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever."

Psalm: Ps 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

R. (2a) Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

The promises of the LORD I will sing forever;
through all generations my mouth shall proclaim
your faithfulness.
For you have said, "My kindness is established
forever";
in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness.

R. (2a) Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant:
forever will I confirm your posterity
and establish your throne for all generations."

R. (2a) Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

"He shall say of me, 'You are my father,
my God, the Rock, my savior.'
Forever I will maintain my kindness toward him,
and my covenant with him stands firm."

R. (2a) Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Scripture Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Brothers and sisters: To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "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 called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

An angel appears with a startling announcement to an otherwise insignificant housewife. Mary responds, “Let it be done unto me according to your word.” Is there a way to understand her heart as she utters these words, so dramatically significant to the human race? Let us take an “inside approach” to the story in the Gospel. There is a contrast written into Luke’s gospel that will help us do that. In fact, the Angel Gabriel makes two Annunciations in Luke’s Gospel, not just one, and Luke presents them right after each other. Each one is about a child to be born, and, strangely, each birth is completely impossible. Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth, is barren so she cannot have a child. Mary has no husband and has never had conjugal relations. In other words, Gabriel announced two seeming absurdities. Mary’s and Zechariah’s responses to the angel are the same. Or almost the same. Zechariah: “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” Mary: “How can this be? I have no relations with a man.”

Stop. Ponder these responses for a moment. Did you spot the difference? Both are responding to God’s steadfast love as announced by Gabriel. We could paraphrase Mary’s response as: “How in the world is this going to happen? Tell me more so I can understand.” Zechariah answers with something quite different—and in fact, insulting, even though it sounds almost the same. He says, “How shall I know this?” Not Mary’s “I believe you, but how will it happen,” but “give me some reason to know the truth of your claim. Prove it.” This kind of question is understandable, but terribly inappropriate. God’s voice had already spoken love deeply into Zechariah’s heart throughout his whole life. By this time, trust in God’s promise should have been woven into the fabric of Zechariah’s life. His speech and his hearing were taken away when he challenged the Angel. But look, they were already gone anyway. He had not listened to what God has pledged to every human being—“I will be faithful to you no matter how impossible it may seem.” A human being has to let in the truth if he or she is to be able to speak it. Because Zechariah was deaf to God’s promise, he therefore had no voice to answer the angel in trust. Mary on the other hand, simply asked for clarification. She already believed that “nothing is impossible to God,” so she listened with faith. As a result she was given the ability to “speak” the Word of God promised from the beginning of time. Her speaking here is a metaphor for giving birth to him.

How much do you and I listen to the voice of God’s promise, written in our hearts? Do our words and actions tumble out with reference to that unwavering love deep within? Maybe we are tempted to be like Zechariah, deaf to the beauties and needs of those around us, speechless when a word of love would make its home in our hearts. Let us ask humbly on this last day of Advent for the grace to listen and to hear. The one who promised will not fail.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Compare and contrast what David wants to give God with what God did for David. Can you relate to “receiving much more than you give”? What happens to you when you open up just a little to God? Who/what was God’s gift that brought perfection to David’s house?
2. This reading says God’s saving plan is for “all nations.” If all people believed that message, what would happen to the conflict between nations, the selfishness that creates poverty and to the disparity of wealth? Is there anything you can do to brighten up some of this darkness?
3. Why would an infinite God wait for a human “yes” to enter the human race? Why didn’t he just come to us on his own? Can you relate to Mary’s unconditional “yes” to God, or is your yes conditional? If you do say yes, will God come take up residence in your life?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

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, for ever and ever. Amen