

4th Sunday of Advent, December 24th, 2017

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

*AFTER the fall of Saul, the first king of the united kingdoms, and AFTER the defeat of the Jebusites who controlled the city of Jerusalem and AFTER the people who held onto the land promised to the 12 tribes were vanquished, David ruled as the King of Jerusalem and received REST from his enemies. He then saw himself as the heir of the ancient promised covenantal blessing made by God to Moses (Dt. 12:10-11) which said: "But after you have crossed the Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you as a heritage, when he has given you rest from all your enemies round about and you live there in security, then to the place which the Lord your God chooses as the dwelling place for His name you shall bring all the offerings I command you."*⁵

1When King David was settled in his palace, and the Lord had given him rest from his enemies on every side,

2he said to Nathan the prophet, Nathan is the prophet of David's court.² "Here I am living in a house of cedar, This means that he was living in splendor.⁴ while the ark of God This was regarded as the dwelling place of God.⁴ dwells in a tent!" David thought to fulfill the rest of the prophecy from Dt. because he thought that a permanent PLACE of sacrifice would require a permanent HOUSE of sacrifice.³

3Nathan answered the king, "Go, do whatever you have in mind, for the Lord is with you." At first the prophet approves of David's idea that the ark should be housed in a temple but then the Lord speaks to Nathan and tells him that the king should not build a house for God. In fact, the temple was not built until the reign of David's son, Solomon.⁴

4But that night the Lord spoke to Nathan and said: The rest of the reading is the Lord's word to Nathan telling him what to say to David. The emphasis is on God's power for He made David king, He defeated his enemies, He established David in Jerusalem and He will establish the house of David forever.⁴

5"Go, tell my servant David, Thus says the Lord: This is a classic formula that identifies Nathan as God's spokesman.² Should you build me a house to dwell in? Verses 5 and 11 are a play on the word "house." God says that David does not need to build him a "house" meaning "temple" but that God will build David a "house" meaning a "family." It's as though God is saying, "If there's any house-building going on here. I'll be the architect and builder—and I'll show you what "house" really means."¹

8bIt was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel.

9I have been with you wherever you went, Here God is demonstrating by his PRESENCE his covenant faithfulness to David.³ and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth.

10I 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,

11since 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. For pagan peoples, the temple was the center of their world and the focus of their religious spirit for it was there that they kept their gods. It is different in Israel for the true God has no need of a house in which to dwell. When he allows sanctuaries, shrines, the tent in the desert and later the temple of Jerusalem, these are only signs of his presence among the people, not a habitation that he in any sense needs. It is

NOT so much the TEMPLE as the DAVIDIC DYNASTY that is the sign of divine presence and protection that God has set up from the start.²

12And 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. This promise to David is a personal one —the continuation of his line in an everlasting dynasty.⁵ David's earthly dynasty ended four centuries later, but Jesus Christ, a direct descendant of David, was the ultimate fulfillment of this promise.¹⁴

14aI will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. This is an assurance of divine favor which will be extended to the dynasty.⁵

16Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever." The end of the historical Davidic monarchy led Israel to see this promise as being fulfilled in the coming of a messiah in the line of David. On this Sunday before Christmas, this promise sets the stage for Gabriel's appearance to Mary to tell her that she is going to be the mother of the one to whom God will give "the throne of David his father whose reign will be without end."⁴ 2Sam 7:18-29 is a beautiful prayer of David which ends, "For you, Lord God, have promised, and by your blessing the house of your servant shall be blessed forever."

Romans 16:25-27

In these closing verses from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, we have the perfect bridge between the first reading and the Gospel where it says: "I preach Jesus Christ, the gospel which reveals the mystery hidden for many ages but now manifested through the writing of the prophets."⁵

Brothers and sisters:

25To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel Paul blesses God who assures men of the Gospel of Christ and the constancy of deeds in the Christian way of life.⁵ **and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages** This refers to the manifestation of the divine plan of salvation that embraces all men, Jew and Greek alike.⁵

26but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles and consequently he made the mystery of the divine plan available to all nations.⁵ **to bring about the obedience of faith**, He conceives of faith as a process that begins with "hearing" the word that is preached and ends with a personal commitment and submission or obedience.⁵

27to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This final sentence of the book of Romans is a bridge between the covenantal promises of God made ages ago and the manifestation of them in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament and the New Testament are really one story with Jesus as its subject--in symbol and prophecy in the Old and in Person in the New.³ The Catechism quotes High of St. Victor: "The whole of divine Scripture is but one book, and that one book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ."⁶ (CCC 134)

Luke 1:26-38

So many of the intimate details of the Annunciation could only have been known to the Blessed Mother herself that there is a very ancient tradition that Luke did in fact obtain this information directly from her.⁹

26The angel Gabriel was sent from God The angel Gabriel is not called an archangel in the Bible but is probably one of the seven who stand before God. He is an interpreting angel who explains the vision of the ram and the he-goat in Daniel and the meaning of the 70 years of captivity in Jeremiah. He announces the birth of John the Baptist to Zachary and the conception, birth, and mission of Jesus to Mary⁷ In the book of Daniel he appears as a man but with angelic glory showing through: “His body was clear as topaz, his face shone like lightning, his eyes were like burning lamps; his arms and legs had the gleam of bronze; and when he spoke it was like the voice of a multitude.” (10:5-6) We don’t know if Mary saw the angel but she would not have needed these outward showings of Gabriel’s spiritual splendor for her own was greater.¹² **to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,** Nazareth was a small, insignificant village of Galilee in northern Palestine.⁵

27to a virgin betrothed Betrothal in ancient Judaism was unlike modern-day engagements. It was a temporary period (up to one year) between the covenant of marriage itself and the time when spouses lived together. Because couples were legally married during this intervening phase, a betrothal could be terminated only by death or divorce.⁹ **to a man named Joseph, of the house of David,** Through Joseph’s legal fatherhood he transmitted to Jesus in the eyes of the law, the lineage of David. This was sufficient in Jewish law and custom to establish the descent of Jesus from David which the prophets had foretold of the Messiah.⁹ **and the virgin’s name was Mary.**

28And coming to her, he said, “Hail, full of grace! The expression, “Hail, full of grace” used by Gabriel, is a past participle, which indicates that Mary “has been” as well as “is now” filled with grace or divine life. From the first instant of her conception, Mary was free from Original Sin. Within the first three centuries, the early Church Fathers refer to Mary under such titles as “all holy,” “all pure,” “most innocent,” “a miracle of grace,” “purer than the angels,” and “altogether without sin.”⁸ This is the ONLY biblical instance where an angel addresses someone by a TITLE instead of a personal name.¹⁵ **The Lord is with you.”** In the Old Testament this phrase was often used when someone was being called for a special mission. For example: when Moses was called to lead the people out of Egypt, God told him, “I will be with you.” When Joshua was called to lead Israel into the Promised Land, God said the same thing to him. When Gideon was called to defend the people against the Philistines, when David was called to lead the kingdom, and when Jeremiah the prophet was called to challenge the rulers in Jerusalem, they were all told that the Lord would be with them. Here Mary is called to play a crucial role in God’s plan of salvation and she has the one thing she needs: The Lord is with her.¹¹

29But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

30Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

31Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. In Hebrew, the name “Jesus” means “God saves.” It expresses both his identity and his mission.⁶ (CCC 430)

32He 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, Gabriel’s message recalls the covenant promises God made to King David in 2 Samuel 7 when God told him that he would make his name “great” and establish “the throne of this kingdom for ever.” David’s royal descendants would be like God’s son, and his “house” and “kingdom” “shall be made sure for ever.” For centuries this Davidic dynasty had stood in ruins. From the 6th century B.C. to Mary’s time, no Davidic king ruled on the throne. However, through the prophets God promised to send them a new king who would free them from their enemies and fulfill the promises he made to David. (Jesus Christ was the only founder of a religion who was pre-announced!) He would be called the

Messiah or “anointed one.” Note that when Jesus fulfills this promise as the Messiah King in the line of David, Mary becomes the Queen Mother for in the Davidic kingdom, it was the mother of the king who ruled as queen.¹¹

33and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary’s future son is described with language ordinarily reserved for God’s redeeming presence among his people: he will be “great”, “Son of the Most High”, and “everlasting King of all the earth” which are all titles taken from the Old Testament.⁵

34But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” Mary is not questioning God’s ability to give her a son, but she is inquiring as to how such a plan will unfold.¹⁵ This is the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah 7:14: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”

35And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, In the taking on of human flesh, the Father prepared it, the Spirit formed it, and the Son assumed it.¹³ **and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.** The overshadowing of Mary recalls the cloud that covered with glory the Meeting Tent (Ex 40:34) and the temple of the Lord (1Kings 8:10-11)¹⁰ **Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.** Gabriel mentions the HOLY SPIRIT, the MOST HIGH, and the SON OF GOD, offering Mary a glimpse of the Trinity.¹⁵

36And 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; The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the designation of her child as Son of God are signs of God’s favor. As a divine pledge of this, Mary is informed of the approaching maternity of her aged and hitherto sterile cousin Elizabeth.¹⁰

37for nothing will be impossible for God.” Gabriel’s reassurance that “nothing is impossible for God” means that God can surmount every obstacle to motherhood, including the infertility of Elizabeth and the virginity of Mary.¹⁵

38Mary said, According to St. Bernard of Clairvaux and others, all the angels and saints of the OT would have been holding their breaths at this moment, wondering how the virgin would respond!¹¹ **“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”** Mary freely and actively embraces God’s invitation to bear the Messiah. Unlike Zechariah, she welcomes the angel’s words and indicates that she desires to fulfill God’s will in her life. As St. Irenaeus says: “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.” Comparing her with Eve, they call Mary “the Mother of the living” and frequently claim: “death through Eve, life through Mary.”⁶ (CCC 494) **Then the angel departed from her.** In the first reading from 2 Samuel we saw that the Son of David, Jesus, was promised a house or dynasty, but before even one church building was erected, God built a house of flesh in which to dwell. That first house, that first church, was the womb of Mary.³

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Aelred R. Rosser, (2) “The Navarre Bible: Joshua — Kings” (3) Commentary Notes of Tim Gray, (4) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (5) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (6) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (7) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (8) “Introduction to Mary” by Mark Miravalle, S.T.D., (9) “The Founding of Christendom” by Warren H. Carroll, (10) “Saint Joseph Edition The New American Bible,” (11) “The New Rosary In Scripture” by Edward Sri, (12) “To Know Christ Jesus” by Frank Sheed, (13) “Life Of Christ” by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, (14) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, and (15) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Habn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.