

Advent 4

[Home](#)

[Up](#)

December 22, 2002

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the hindrance of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

{1} Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, {2} the 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." {3} Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." {4} But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: {5} Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? {6} I 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. {7} Wherever 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?" {8} Now 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; {9} and 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. {10} And 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, {11} from 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.... {16} Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

2. *the ark of God stays in a tent*: For seven years after the ark was captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:11; 6:1) it remained in the land of the Philistines. The Philistines feared it so they put it on a cart and it went to Beth Shemesh and from there to Kiriath-Jearim where it remained for seven more years (1 Samuel 7:1), except for a time when Saul brought it into the army camp (1 Samuel 14:8). David brought the ark to the city of David and placed it in a tent (2 Samuel 6:10).

3: David consulted with Nathan concerning providing a house of cedar for the ark, and Nathan advises him to go ahead.

4: Yahweh has other ideas. First, Yahweh does not live in a house; he moves about in a tent (verse 6), second, Yahweh has never asked any of the leaders of Israel to build a house (verse 7), third, Yahweh will "make David a house," a metaphor for an eternal dynasty (verses 11 and 16). This was a new thing because no dynasty of royalty had existed in Judah before.

11. *Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house*: "It is... surprising that...there is a passage in which Yahweh is *spoken of* in the third person, whereas he has previously been *speaking* in the first. The small sentence looks like a stereotyped formula which was handed down and has now been left, as it were, in quotation marks as being the most important part, which gives the main contents: the Lord will make a house for David, i.e. will make him the founder of a dynasty." ¹

Luke 1:47-55

{47} My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, {48} for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; {49} for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. {50} His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. {51} He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. {52} He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; {53} he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. {54} He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, {55} according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

The Magnificat abandons the usual role of the Psalm which is to respond to the acts of Yahweh in the first lesson, and anticipates, liturgically, the annunciation in the Gospel.

The elevation of the lowly and the deliberate enfeebling of the powerful is the message of the song. The choosing of the humble over the privileged or favored is a theme throughout the Bible. God's criteria for choosing are different from those we use. God's choice carries with it favor, protection and preferment, at the expense of those who had acquired power, prestige and wealth through human achievement.

Or

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

{1} I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. {2} I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. {3} You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: {4} 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Selah.... {19} Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said: "I have set the crown on one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people. {20} I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him; {21} my hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him. {22} The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him. {23} I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. {24} My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted. {25} I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. {26} He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'

Psalm 89, with its reference to Yahweh's covenant with David to "build your throne for all generations," would seem to be the best choice as a response to the first lesson.

26. *He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father:* In the Gospel we are told: "the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God," which makes a connection with the Gospel.

Romans 16:25-27

{25} Now 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 {26} but 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-- {27} to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

There are Pauline doxologies in Romans 11:36; Galatians 1:4-5; Philippians 4:20; Ephesians 3:20-21; 1 Timothy 1:17. Scholars doubt that this doxology is Pauline. However, "Even if not authentically Pauline or originally part of Romans, it forms a fitting conclusion to the letter, for it catches the spirit of the Pauline message of the letter: from of old God in his wisdom has bound up salvation with Christ Jesus, and the mystery of this wise decision has now been disclosed." ²

Now God has determined that the mystery which once belonged exclusively to Israel shall also include the Gentiles, another case of the exaltation of the lowly.

Luke 1:26-38

{26} In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, {27} to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. {28} And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." {29} But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. {30} The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. {31} And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. {32} He 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. {33} He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." {34} Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" {35} The 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. {36} And 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. {37} For nothing will be impossible with God." {38} Then 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.

26. *the sixth month:* The sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (1:24, 36).

Gabriel: "God is my hero/warrior." ³ Gabriel together with Michael (Daniel 9:21) and Raphael (Tobit 3:17) are the three angels specifically named in the Old Testament and Apocrypha.

30. *you have found favor with God:* Mary is a woman, Joseph's descent from the house of David is noted but Mary's lineage is not; she is a virgin, so an empty vessel; but God has favored her, and "nothing will be impossible for God."

32-33. *He 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end:* Gabriel's words renew the eternal promise to David and bestows it exclusively on Mary's son, Jesus. See Daniel

7:14. "House of Jacob" is a traditional term for Israel, as, for example, in Exodus 19:3.

34. *I am a virgin*: Literally, "I do not know a man," a euphemism for sexual relations. "Mary's words explain the description of her in 1:27. But they should not be translated... 'I am a virgin.'" ⁴

35. *The Holy Spirit will come upon you/the power of the Most High will overshadow you*: The two phrases are in synonymous parallelism; the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High are equated. See Acts 1:8; 8:16 for the expression of the "coming upon" of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament there are many places where Yahweh "puts" or "sends" his spirit on someone, or his spirit "comes" or "rushes" upon them or "fills" them or "takes possession" of them (Numbers 11:17; 29; 24:2; Judges 14:6; 2 Chronicles 24:20). All these expressions indicate the granting of special power and special responsibility placed on the recipient by God. "The use of it here in connection with the conception of Jesus is unique and is not to be understood of any sexual union." ⁵ See also Matthew 1: 18, 20 for the indication that the Mary's child is "from the Holy Spirit." Elsewhere in Luke the Holy Spirit "comes," "rests" and "descends," on Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, and Jesus (Luke 1:41; 67; 2:25; 3:22).

38. *Then Mary said, "Here I am...."* Abraham (Genesis 22:1, 11), Isaac (Genesis 22:7), Jacob (Genesis 31:11; 42:10), Moses (Exodus 3:4), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:4), a psalmist (Psalm 40:7) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8), respond in the same way to a divine summons.

let it be with me according to your word: Mary's submission to God's will is complete. She has no doubt in the power of God to accomplish what had been announced. Any misgivings she may have had about the personal consequences of such a pregnancy are ignored.

Reflection

We make plans and work to accomplish them. We strive to develop our highest potentials and seek to impress others, especially those who can reward us, with our accomplishments and potential. We do this though we know that God's criteria differ from ours, and that he regularly chooses those who have little or nothing to recommend them. It was not the size or the quality of the people of Israel that attracted God's favor. First, he loved them, and then he chose them. It was not Mary's beauty or wisdom, not her family or accomplishments, not her virtue or her piety. It is inexplicable on any human standard. And Jesus, son of an unmarried girl, descendent of an impotent dynasty of an impotent nation; he will be great, he will be called the Son of the Most High. How improbable, and yet how typical of God, the God we worship.

What should we learn from the typical and improbable? We should learn not to anticipate them, but to celebrate them and rejoice in their unexpectability. Our efforts to impress and find favor work well enough in this world, but we have been chosen in spite of them. Our piety and virtue are a proper exercise of who we are and what we are called to be, but God's will will be done in spite of them. We have been given the Gospel of Christ and the promise of forgiveness and eternal life, and God will accomplish the redemption of his creation in spite of our possessing them.

Whatever else we may learn in Advent, we might only learn this: grace is gracious, it cannot be calculated or predicted, measured or controlled. It can only be expected, and then celebrated when it comes in ways that never occurred to us. "The way must be made ready for heaven, and then it will come by some other; the sacrifice must be made ready, and the fire will strike on another altar." ⁶ Then, because God has chosen well (all his choices are good), we will say, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Hymns ⁷

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), Hymnal Supplement 1991 (e.g. 725s) and LBW (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, II=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

721s --E--Awake, Awake
(633v)756s --D/P--Sing of Mary,
(634v)28 --D--Saviour of the
87 --I--Hail to the
16 --P--I Will Sing

730v --P--My Soul Proclaims
692v --G--For All the Faithful
632v --G--The Angel Gabriel
34, 42, 57, 323, 733s

Prayers of the People ⁸

A: Mary offered herself for the fulfillment of God's promise. We also lift up our hearts to say, "God of all faithfulness," and respond, C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For the church, that it may not turn aside from the gospel but more urgently proclaim its truth, as it awaits the Messiah. God of all faithfulness. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For the nations, that they may not make armaments the greater good over the needs of food, shelter, and health of their citizens. God of all faithfulness. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For artists of all kinds, that the expression of each may edify and strengthen that which is truly human among us. God of all faithfulness. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For the business community, that the worth of people may be valued and profits be kept in fair proportion. God of all faithfulness. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For all Sunday schools, that the sense of privilege in teaching and learning of the Christ may be kept fully alive. God of all faithfulness. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For families, that they may offer rest, comfort, and hope. God of all faithfulness. C: Hear us, we pray.

P: Tarry not, O Christ, that we may know your full glory. C: Amen.

OR ⁹

Presider or deacon

As we wait with pregnant expectation for the coming of Jesus, let us offer prayers to God who sends his Son in the womb of a virgin.

Deacon or other leader

For the coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory. For the coming of Wisdom to teach and guide us. For the coming of Emmanuel, the hope of all the peoples. For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ. For *N* our bishop and all bishops, for the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God. For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place. For the leaders of the nations and all in authority. For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth. For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for those in prison. For the dying and the dead. For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need. Joining our voices with the blessed Virgin Mary and with all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

O Wisdom, breath from the mouth of God most high, who reigns from one end of the earth to the other, and governs all creation with strong and tender care, come and teach us the way of wisdom. Glory to you for ever.

Notes

¹ Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1964, p. 286.

² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 753.

³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Company, Inc., 1981, p. 328.

⁴ *Ibid* *Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

⁶ Charles Williams, *He Came Down From Heaven*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1984, p. 25.

"Cain could not guess 'that the very purpose of his offering was to make his brother's acceptable,' p. 26. C.S. Lewis comments, "And this is what nearly always happens. The thing we thought principally intended (but how can Omnipotence intend any one thing more than any other?) comes to naught; what seems to us a mere by-product (but what could be a by-product to Omniscience?) bursts into flower" (*Arthurian Torso containing The Posthumous Fragment of The Figure of Arthur by Charles Williams and A Commentary on the Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams*. Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 135).

⁷ <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

⁸ http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_b1.txt

⁹ <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>