

4th Sunday of Advent

Year B

2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16

God's Covenant with David

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 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.' Nathan said to the king, '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: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 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. 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?' 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; 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. 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, 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. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

What's going on?

This passage and the reading which follows both deal with King David and his importance to Israel as a religious community. God made King David a promise not only that he should be ruler of Israel, but that he should establish ('plant') the rule of Israel in a particular place. The Israelites would wander in the desert no longer, but take possession of their own land. In this passage from Samuel, much is made of the word 'house' which can mean David's palace, or the holy place of God's presence or a dynasty (the house of Israel). So this passage establishes a context for the coming of Jesus. He was born a Jew into the House of Israel, of David's own dynasty. He was born into a religious community

which believed God had taken them from wandering in the desert to an established kingdom which was to flourish and grow as the holy, chosen people of the Lord.

Psalm 89

God's Covenant with David

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.
I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:
"I will establish your descendants for ever,
and build your throne for all generations."'
Selah

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.
I have found my servant David;
with my holy oil I have anointed him;
my hand shall always remain with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.
The enemy shall not outwit him,
the wicked shall not humble him.
I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.
My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;
and in my name his horn shall be exalted.
I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.
He shall cry to me, "You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!"

What's going on?

As in the first reading, this psalm tells us of God's promise to King David and how David was chosen by God to establish the rule of Israel. The psalmist reminds us that God is faithful and steadfast in his promises to human beings. We can see that in the covenant with King David. So we can expect the promises Jesus made us to have the same faithfulness and truth.

Romans 16.25-27

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 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— to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

What's going on?

This passage is the end of the letter to the Romans and takes the form of a blessing. While the first two readings tell us of the faithful promises God made to the people of Israel, these words remind us that Jesus' promises are made to everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike. The passage also makes the point that the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament) hinted at things which could not be understood fully until Jesus was born, but now because of what Jesus did and said it is possible to understand more clearly the full extent of God's promises of salvation to human beings.

Luke 1.26-38

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, '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 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 for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' 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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God.' 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.

What's going on?

In this passage we hear about the Annunciation, the announcement from the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she will be the mother of Jesus. The angel tells her that he will have the 'throne of his ancestor David' and so what we have seen about God's faithfulness to David in the Old Testament reading and in the psalm is brought to its fulfilment in the birth of Jesus. Jesus is set firmly within the tradition of Israel, he will be born as part of the people of Israel and will be the Holy One of God the Israelites have looked for through the prophetic tradition. But Jesus will be more than this, not a human king ruling over a nation as David was, but God's own Son establishing God's own kingdom which will exist forever. Jesus is bringing a new order into the world, a new way of living, which has nothing to do with earthly dominions or potentates.

In this passage too we hear of the choice God makes in choosing Mary to be Jesus' mother. The angel tells her what will happen if she permits it. Mary, a young Israelite woman who has never been pregnant, will become pregnant, give birth and nurture a child who has an extraordinary destiny. The angel tells her that God has found her worthy and able of being such a mother to such a child. But Mary has to agree, to be obedient to God's will. She has a choice, to accept what God asks of her, or to turn away from it. She hears the angel's good news and responds to the call to be God's servant and to do God's will. She makes Christmas possible.

