

**Weekend of Sunday, December 20, 2020**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent/Lectionary XX/Proper XX/Year B**  
**First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16**  
**Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27**  
**Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26-38**  
**Sermon Title: “Mercy is Due”**

**Theme**

*In this annunciation, Luke makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people from little known places. This king will not be born to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall. Here Luke highlights the role of the Spirit, a special emphasis in this gospel.*

**Text**

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

## Sermon

There are a few details that might make the readings for today more interesting.

In the First Reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, it would good for you to know that the reign of David, also known as King David, was really the beginning of the nation of Israel. Yes, Saul was the first king of Israel but he was unsuccessful at unifying the people or making them into a proud nation – that was what David did.

Before David, the Israelites were twelve independent tribes of people who sought what was good for themselves. Under David, Jerusalem was made the capital city of Israel, and David built a palace of sorts for his official residence.

And as you heard at the beginning of the reading, it was his idea to build God a fitting and proper Temple. Now for the forty years of wandering and since the Israelites crossed the Jordan to possess the Promised Land, God's presence among the Israelites was made visible by the Ark of the Covenant that was kept in the Tabernacle, a big ornate tent. God, through the prophet Nathan, said no to David's plan. But I think the sentiment touched God's heart, and remembering that God God's self called David 'a man after his own heart,' God told David through the prophet Nathan,

<sup>11b</sup>The LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Though David was a sinner to be sure, he pursued the heart of God, and for that, he was rewarded with a throne that God said would be established forever, a perpetual kingdom, an everlasting dynasty, meaning that God was going to make sure that there would always be a son of David presiding over Israel.

Now some might say that this was an unkept promise of God, because eventually, in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, the evil Babylonians sacked Judah, destroyed the capital city of Jerusalem, flattened the Temple, and killed the remaining royal descendants of David. Hmm, seems like some *mercy is due*.

"Well, Pastor, thanks for the history lesson, but what does that have to do with anything?" I am so glad you asked. Let's move on to the Gospel Reading from Luke.

The "sixth month" referred to in verse 26 was six months since the same angel Gabriel visited Zechariah the priest and told him that even though he and his wife, Elizabeth, were very old, they were going to have a baby who would be important as the forerunner to the Lord, as Gabriel described him. Zechariah questioned Gabriel stating the obvious – "But we're old!"

He shouldn't have done that. Make a note of that to yourselves, don't question angels. Zechariah did, and the result of his questioning was that he was made mute until the baby was born. "But pastor, they *were* old," you say. I agree with you, seems like a little *mercy is due*.

So to the passage that is our Gospel Reading, "in the sixth month" the angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her she was going to have a baby. She too questioned Gabriel but I guess because she was a young virgin, she got a pass. The angel Gabriel said about the child Mary would deliver,

<sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Now just in case you are not aware of the significance of this proclamation, I will unpack it, because it quite literally makes all the difference in the world.

"Son of the Most High" means that God God's self will be the baby's father, so then since Mary was a virgin, that cleared up the issue of the baby's father. The father is the Lord God, God's self.

And that Gabriel told her that her baby would be given "the throne of his ancestor David" means that through Mary's baby, God will make good on God's promise to David.

What happened next, after where our Gospel Reading stopped, is that Mary spontaneously burst into song. And her song has been put to music in many and various ways, as the Magnificat of Mary.

"My soul proclaims your greatness O God,  
and my spirit rejoices in you,  
you have looked with love on your servant here,  
and blessed me all my life through."

Can't you just see it? Can't you just hear it? Mary, who was obviously a good and faithful Jew, had, along with all Israel, been looking forward to the day when God makes good on God's promise and sends Messiah. She has just learned that she will be a pivotal part of God's mighty act to save not only her people, the Jews, but all the people of the world. She will be the mother of God's Son. And he shall be called Jesus, and name which means "he rescues." Praise God, *Mercy is due!*