

## **“A Humble House for our Great God”**

+ 4 Advent Year B +

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

December 21, 2014

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

The words of Mary “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” are, perhaps, the most powerful, faith-filled, beautiful and humble words spoken by any human being in all of Scriptures. One cannot help but stand in awe of her gracious reply to the angel who assured her “with God nothing is impossible.” Such a Humble House for our Great God as God Incarnate grew within the womb of this Jewish peasant girl living in a occupied nation under the thumb of the rule of the Roman Empire. Her child, the child of God, grew as all babies do under his mother’s heart knit together as tiny cells divided and grew, developing in human form. Ah, but this was no ordinary child, for to Him God would give the throne of his ancestor David and in Jesus the Kingdom of God would, at last, arrive among all of humanity.

Throughout the history of God’s people as they waited in hope, in frustration, in despair – as all of us are wont to do for God to act, there had been many ideas of what the Kingdom of God would look like when God’s Promised One arrived to reign – pretty much all of them centered on the *Return of the King* to rule in power and might as the eyes of all nations of the world turned to Israel and to their One “only wise God.” There was certainly a “We’ll-get-even! We’ll show them!” theme embraced by the battered remnant of the original 12 tribes who’d settled in the Promised Land. Those 12 tribes were down to 2 by the time Mary said, “be it unto me as you have spoken.” King David, her ancestor, was but a memory – a ruler from a long lost time of grandeur, but certainly the remnant reasoned when Messiah came the Kingdom of God would come with a power and might never before seen, and indeed it did, and still is seen in power and might and in quiet and strength but Messiah and God’s Kingdom did not arrive in any way they had expected.

What our Old Testament Lesson shows us is that even David – the great ancestor and ruler whose throne Jesus would inherit didn’t really understand the God he served – couldn’t grasp God’s inability to be boxed in or bound to the constraints of humanity. In our scene from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel we find David living in a fine palace with cedar walls, courtesy of King Hiram of Tyre. Israel has a King in a palace on Mount Zion. Israel, who for generations upon

generations wandered as a nomadic nation of runaway slaves settling but not ruling in a tiny crossroads country is finally a Kingdom with a King! King David looks like a king, lives like a king, rules like a king! No longer an outlaw, no longer just a contender David is king and looks and lives the part, and he wants people to notice. He announces to his private prophet, Nathan, that he has great plans for God's house too. "I live in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." This will be remedied!

The only thing wrong with David's plan is that God did not see things that way. David's agenda was too small; he wanted to build a grand and glorious house for God in the capital of the Kingdom of David on the highest pinnacle of Mount Zion in the city of Jerusalem – Glory to God, to be sure, and close to David's throne – ah, but the One True God would not be localized.

Nathan, speaking for God reports:

"Go and tell my **servant** David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling' " "Moreover, the Lord will make you a house...I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever...I will not take my steadfast love from him... your throne shall be established forever."

"Go and tell my **servant** David" – you see it takes a servant's heart, a humble heart to house our Great God. A humble heart in a humbling time – that is when God came to Mary. Now is a humbling time in the Christian church in the United States, I believe. Just as the great kingdoms and empires of the earth have come into being and fallen – Christian empires among them, with countless churches built to the glory and honor of God, dedicated to the service of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ Jesus only to fall into disrepair so we are seeing the erosion and almost certain collapse of the organized/institutional church in our nation and throughout former bastions of the faith in the world. That does not signal, however, the erosion or collapse of the Kingdom of God. NO! God's Kingdom continues to grow. The Mekane Yesus – our Ethiopian partners right here in this building, are part of the fastest growing Lutheran Christian church body in the world! Pastor Francis Stephanous said to me recently, "God gave the people of Jehovah Lutheran the courage to build this building. God has great things to do through His people in this place. We must be on our knees seeking how God can grow God's Kingdom in this place." He echoed our Epistle where we heard, *Our God is able to strengthen*

*us – to bring about the obedience of faith – to our God, the only wise God, through our Lord Jesus Christ be the glory forever! Amen.*

That is a paraphrase – not the end of the sermon – and a reminder that The Kingdom of our God who cannot be contained in the walls of any one place but who longs to dwell within the hearts of all humanity by the gift of faith through the Gospel shared and the work of the Holy Spirit – God’s Kingdom will not end because God’s Kingdom continues to be lived out among God’s people – through you and me, us together!

As we live out the Kingdom of God here in this place and beyond these walls we are called to be humble dwellings for our Great God - servants. As my wife often points out to me Jehovah is a church filled with servants – you are people who give of yourselves, truly give of yourselves in this place and beyond these walls in so many beautiful ways: ministering to those in need in prayer, with clothing, food, visits, encouragement – above and beyond what our number of members would be expected to do for God’s Kingdom.

Our great God who created the heavens and the earth sent us the Only Begotten, foreseen in Creation as the Word that is spoken and worlds – the cosmos came into being while the Spirit, the giver of faith hovered over the waters – this same Word became flesh to dwell among us full of grace and truth (the image John uses is the very image of pitching a tent – a dwelling that travels). And to think that we worship in a concrete version of that tent – that tabernacle. We, God’s servants, are the Kingdom alive and at work.

Our God established a kingdom through the offspring of David, Jesus, to enter and change human hearts in a kingdom that will extend to all eternity. Of this we can always be certain: God will do God’s agenda. Now we have waited for his coming. On Christmas we celebrate it, and we must realize that this living, unmanageable God will lead us safely home but here, in this time will always lead us into things unexpected and new. Let's be open to God’s agenda for us. Let's re-examine ourselves and see if perhaps God has an agenda for us greater than anything we can imagine. Today, as we make our promises to God for God’s work in this place may our hearts be open to God’s leading, to being a humble home for God’s Spirit to work in our hearts, and may the humble grace of Mary, the Mother of our Lord inspire us to say in response to God’s call, “May it be to me as you have spoken.” AMEN