

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 24, 2017 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture Reading: 2 SM 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16

When King David was settled in his palace, and the LORD had given him rest from his enemies on every side, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!" Nathan answered the king, "Go, do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you." But that night the LORD spoke to Nathan and said: "Go, tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Should you build me a house to dwell in?'

"It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth. I 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, since 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. And 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. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever."

Psalm: PS 89 2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

The promises of the LORD I will sing forever; through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your faithfulness. For you have said, "My kindness is established forever"; in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness. (R)

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: Forever will I confirm your posterity and establish your throne for all generations." (R)

"He shall say of me, 'You are my father, my God, the Rock, my savior.' Forever I will maintain my kindness toward him, and my covenant with him stands firm." (R)

Scripture Reading: Rom 16:25-27

Brothers and sisters: To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel: LUKE 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He 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, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "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 called holy, the Son of God. And 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; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The first reading surprises us by telling of God's promise to David that he would have a long line of royal descendants culminating with a final king, Jesus Christ. In the Responsorial Psalm, the Psalmist recalls all of God's promises and surprises us by describing God's promise to David and his descendants in terms of a Covenant. Today's Gospel surprises us by telling us that this King would be born to an ordinary virgin, not by means of sexual relationship, but through the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus would become a descendant of David. This would occur through Joseph, Mary's betrothed husband and the legal father of her son, as Joseph was "of the house of David." The Gospel narrative surprises us also by reminding us that God's promise is best fulfilled not in buildings, or even great kings like Solomon, but rather in humble souls like Mary who trusted in God's promise. The second reading also surprises us with Paul's explanation of the unveiling of God's plan for human salvation through Jesus. Thus, the unfolding of God's plan of salvation though history has contained many surprises.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. When have you said "yes" to a surprise God brought into your life? How did this experience change you?
2. Are you always open to God's surprises? Why or why not? How can you be more open to God's work in and through your life?
3. What new life is God calling you to? How can this new life transform you, those around you, and the world?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

1. Spend some time this week reading and reflecting upon one of the biblical stories mentioned in today's reflections. Journal or pray about how this story can speak to your current reality. In what ways, in this week ahead, can you live out what you have reflected upon?
2. Think of someone who is in need of a kind word or deed. Surprise that person this week with something that will brighten his or her (act of charity), and perhaps make life a little more easier.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

ALL: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now all ages call me blessed. The Mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." Luke 1:46-55