

# Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 18, 2011

## READING 1 2 SM 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16

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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."

## RESPONSORIAL PSALM PS 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

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R. (2a) **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. **For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

"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. **For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

"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. **For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

## **READING 2 ROM 16:25-27**

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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 LK 1:26-38**

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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.

## **Reflection prepared by Fr Ben Hawley, SJ**

The first reading – from the Second Book of the Prophet Samuel – comes from the Hebrew Scriptures. The term “Hebrew Scriptures” must not be misunderstood as the latest manifestation of political correctness. The term corrects the misunderstanding that the “Old” in “Old Testament” means “Outdated,” “Superseded,” or “Obsolete.” In fact the word means “Original” or “Foundational” or “First.” The former meanings have dominated Christianity for centuries with great detriment to the

Jewish people. The more recent understanding, arising in the Second Vatican Council and asserted with conviction by the late John Paul II, is that God's Old Covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17) remains valid, since God is constant and faithful to his word (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 839 and 840). The New Covenant – "...the new and everlasting covenant..." of which we hear in the Eucharist – fulfills and makes manifest the fullness of God's promise to Abraham, in particular in the advent of Jesus whose birth we await in this season of the year.

In reading the prophet Samuel then it is important to read the text forward – God speaking of the one who is to come but who remains unknown until he comes. We must avoid the temptation to read it backwards: God is speaking to King David about Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin, and so on. In other words we must read the Hebrew Scriptures as God's revelation with its own integrity in and of itself.

The text, narrating events late in King David's life, reminds us – and reminds King David – that God has been faithful to his promises from the time of the judges who governed Israel in its first years in the Promised Land (v. 11) up to David's own reign. Remember that David's history was both that of a great king of Israel who united the northern and southern kingdoms and brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, as well as the philanderer (with Bathsheba) and murderer (of Uriah, her husband). God brings good out of human weakness and sin.

God then repeats the promise made to Abraham, but with the further specification that the promised one – "your heir after you sprung from your loins" (v. 12). Not surprisingly, the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary identifies Joseph, her betrothed husband, as coming from the house of David.

Notice the emphasis in the Gospel text of the action of the Holy Spirit in these events: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Only Luke and Matthew include stories about Jesus' birth, and only Luke is so emphatic that the Holy Spirit is the initiator and author of all these events. This emphasis connects God's past actions and current promises recited to King David with God's concrete action in the Gospel as the fulfillment of those promises. This fulfillment, of course, continues to this day, because God's promise is not simply to send a great teacher to the then Jewish people, but rather to send a king like David to all peoples and of whose kingdom there will be no end.

So what do these readings have to say to us all? First, that God's promises of help, of care and concern are irrevocable and trustworthy. Second, that God's promises of help, care and concern are concrete, discovered and lived out in the daily life of those who believe. Third, that the power behind these promises says to us, "Do not be afraid" of anything in this created order, because the Son has dominion over all of creation. Fourth, that God's action in fulfilling these promises can take very surprising forms. So we must remain attentive and ready to discover God's action. In this season of Advent, God really coming yet again into our world and our lives to full the promises made long ago.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. You might reread the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17) and then read in Isaiah 2 that this covenant is not for the Jewish people alone. Rather through the Jewish people, including the Christian people, all nations will come to know the one true God. Then read paragraphs 839 and 840 of the Catechism cited above. What has been your sense of our relationship to Judaism in your life as a Catholic? How do these readings help you to a new understanding and appreciation?

From Catechism of the Catholic Church [www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P29.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P29.HTM)

### The Church and non-Christians

**839** "Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways."<sup>325</sup> The relationship of the Church with the Jewish People. When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish People,<sup>326</sup> "the first to hear the Word of God."<sup>327</sup> The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ",<sup>328</sup> "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."<sup>329</sup>

**840** and when one considers the future, God's People of the Old Covenant and the new People of God tend towards similar goals: expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah. But one awaits the return of the Messiah who died and rose from the dead and is recognized as Lord and Son of God; the other awaits the coming of a Messiah, whose features remain hidden till the end of time; and the latter waiting is accompanied by the drama of not knowing or of misunderstanding Christ Jesus.

2. The season of Advent as a season in which we come to feel our own needs and longings for relief and release in a deeper way, notably in a longing for God and for God's concrete action in our lives. How does the dynamic of this season help you deepen your personal and communal prayer?

3. Where are you in your life of faith? Are you ready to ask God to work concretely in your life for you? Do you have at least a mustard seed of faith that God will respond, or are you still fearful or dubious? How much you invite yourself, challenge yourself to new faith in this season?

**We would love to hear your comments or questions about today's reflection. Feel free to direct them to SCC coordinator Kelly Dunlop (kldunlop) or Fr. Ben (pastorstmarys).**