

4 Advent Year B Readings and Commentary

Commentary By Dale J. Sieverding: With the Scripture selections for this Sunday, the Gospel focuses our attention on the events immediately preceding the birth of Jesus. Because Mark does not have any infancy narrative, we are presented with the annunciation of the angel Gabriel from Luke's Gospel. This well known story, and subject of much art work in the major periods of art history, plays out like a beautiful tableau. The scene has three steps: the angel's greeting and Mary's confusion; the annunciation itself; and the explanation of how this would happen. Mary's response is to accept the message and assent to God's plan. The passage links Jesus to the promises made to King David which we hear in the first reading from II Samuel.

King David proposes to build a temple for the ark of God, however, through the prophet Nathan, the Lord promises David a house and kingdom that will endure forever, and a throne that shall stand firm forever. The fulfillment of that promise becomes definitive with the birth of Jesus who will be given the throne of David his father. The power in the words of the angel situate the birth of Jesus in the broad history of salvation and provide a setting for us to understand the future life and ministry of Jesus. The passage from Romans are the concluding verses of that epistle, and provide a doxology with which to honor Christ.

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First Reading 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 *The kingdom of David shall endure forever before the Lord.*

A reading from the second Book of Samuel

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."

The word of the Lord.

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 By Deacon Owen Cummings: This reading is part of the royal Davidic ideology in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is part of the classic passage in which God promises the house of David perpetuity as rulers over the people of Israel. But there is an interesting reversal in the passage. King David starts out thinking that he should establish a physical house for God, a temple such as the Canaanites have, since he himself now lives as king in a fine palatial home. A home is the place which one indwells, and obviously God can have no such home in any ordinary sense of the word. God says to David: "Should you build me a house to dwell in?" The reversal occurs when God then proceeds to tell the king that, far from God indwelling some house built by David, God shall build a house for David. In a way, God will indwell David's house, David's lineage, by having his family and line and throne endure for ever. Since we are in the holy season of Advent we can but think of God's unique indwelling with us as one of us, as Emmanuel the Word made flesh, and then of Emmanuel's indwelling of the church, as the sacrament of salvation. The passage looks forward in hope but indirectly to the Incarnation, and the church lives in hope from God's gift of his indwelling self. "We are truly planted so that we may dwell in our place without further disturbance."

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

℟ (2a) Forever 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.

℟ Forever 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."

℟ Forever 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."

✠ Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29 By John Paul Heil: Main Theme: We praise the promises of God to be faithful to us forever.

Today's responsorial from Psalm 89 closely correlates with the first reading from the second Book of Samuel in which God responds to King David's wish to build God a "house" to dwell in. After rehearsing all that God has already done for David and the people of Israel, God promises that God himself "will establish a house for you"--not just the physical building, the temple, that David has in mind, but a "household," a family, as God promises to give David an heir (Solomon), to whom God will be a father and he will be a son. God promises that this "house" and kingdom will endure forever.

The responsorial psalm elaborates upon the key word "forever" in the promises of God to David: "The promises of the Lord I will sing forever"; the promise of God is that "my kindness is established forever"; God promises David that "forever will I confirm your posterity"; and "forever I will maintain my kindness toward him."

In today's Gospel reading from Luke Jesus as the Son of David is the recipient of these promises: "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." During Advent we look forward to the fulfillment of these promises when Jesus comes again. © 2005, OCP. All rights reserved.

Second Reading Romans 16:25-27

The mystery kept secret for long ages has now been manifested.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

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.

The word of the Lord.

Romans 16:25-27 By Virginia Smith: These three short verses constitute the closing of Paul's magnificent Letter to the Romans, almost universally regarded as his greatest written legacy. Actually, this closing chapter may not be from Romans at all. Many scholars argue that Chapter 15 shows every sign of Paul's official sign-off. Additionally, if one reads the earlier verses of Chapter 16, it seems strange that Paul would know so many people in a community he has yet to visit. But even if collected from another source, most would agree that the material contained in this chapter is Pauline.

Whatever its origin, today's reading is the typical format for the closing of a letter in the First

Century Mediterranean world. For Paul, it is a form of doxology commending his readers “...to him who can strengthen you...” and offering praise “...to the only wise God through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Glory is a term with which we are sometimes uncomfortable because we associate it with ego, a kind of self-aggrandizement of a highly undesirable nature, and it certainly can be that. But in the biblical sense, it is seen as offering honor, praise, and adoration to God. Glory is one of the principle themes of the Gospel of John, and when read from this perspective, makes the entire Gospel an offering of love (another of his themes) to God.

On this last Sunday before we hear the word ‘glory’ ringing from the night sky at Christmas, it seems a fitting culmination of the Advent period of anticipation and the Yuletide joy of the incarnation. Advent, Christmas, or any other season, the offering of glory to God should be a constant component of prayer, both personal and communal

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Gospel Luke 1:26-38 *Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son.*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

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.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Luke 1:26-38 By Deacon Owen Cummings: We are so familiar with this story that perhaps we miss something of its depth and profundity and novelty. First, Mary's condition: she is in love; she is betrothed, that is she has consented to be Joseph's wife but has not yet been taken to live with him, "she does not know man." Second, the angel says to her, "The Lord is with you." Actually, the Greek says, "The Lord with you," that is, there is no verb. The fact that there is no verb suggests a powerful and certain presence of the Lord with Mary. This powerful and certain presence will become yet even more intense and intimate when she "concieves and bears a son," and God becomes Mary's baby. This happens through the power of the Holy Spirit "overshadowing" Mary. This word "overshadow", in Greek *episkiazein* trails with it images of God's presence in the sanctuary of the Temple, and at the Transfiguration. God is indeed very present to, with and in Mary. There is, however, no element of compulsion in God's presence. One commentator, Tina Beattie, says: "God waited while Mary deliberated. The history of the world hung in the balance as a young girl considered the options before her." God's gracious presence is invitational and persuasive, never coercive. Finally, we notice that no man is present in the narrative. The angel Gabriel is a spirit, not a man, and, while Joseph is mentioned as Mary's betrothed, he plays no role in the narrative. As Tina Beattie says, "Man has claimed the right to silence every voice but his, but when God speaks to Mary, he restores the power of speech to women by explicitly excluding man from the event." Truly something/One new is incarnating here.

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