

24th December 2017

Advent 4

Purple



Collect

God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son: grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

2 Samuel 7:1-11,16 English Standard Version (ESV)

The LORD'S Covenant with David

7¹ Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, ²the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” ³And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you.” ⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, ⁵“Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. ⁷In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges^[a] of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’” ⁸Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince^[b] over my people Israel. ⁹And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your

enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. ^[c] Your throne shall be established forever.”

Footnotes: a. Compare 1 Chronicles 17:6; Hebrew *tribes*. b. or *leader*. c. Septuagint; Hebrew *you*.

COMMENT: This passage ends with the promise to David that his reign would be established forever hence its choice as a reading before Christmas. This almost appears as a ‘quid pro quo’ for David fulfilling the commission given through Nathan the prophet to build the temple of the LORD in David’s new capital city, Jerusalem. As it turned out, David did not fulfil his part of the bargain. A number of scholars have drawn attention to its parallel in Psalm 89 and some have suggested that there is a direct linkage between the two. Professor George Bradford Caird (1917-1984) pointed to the first four verses of the psalm as presupposing the existence of the prophecy of Nathan in verse 16 of this reading, and concluded, however, that there is every reason to believe that both the psalm and this reading were dependent on an earlier tradition of uncertain date. His analysis of the passage pointed out its true value as Christian scripture: “*The belief in David’s everlasting kingdom, which persisted even after the down fall of the Davidic dynasty at the time of the Exile, contributed to the later eschatology of Judaism in which many pious hopes were centred in the coming of the great David’s greater son.*” The New Testament Gospels were written as a further extension of this eschatological (the end times) belief. The difference is that the gospels declared that the promise had been fulfilled the promise in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah/Christ. The two genealogies in Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38, and the earlier note in Romans 1:3 make this point especially clear.

Luke 1:26-38 English Standard Version (ESV)

Birth of Jesus Foretold

¹²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He 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 father

David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

COMMENT: The announcement to Mary sets up a parallel to John’s birth and mirrors a number of birth announcements in the Old Testament. But this passage’s mood is very different from the Zechariah account. A simple calmness rules the exchange between Mary and Gabriel. Where Zechariah was in the midst of activity before the whole nation in its religious centre, this announcement comes to the future child bearer privately, in the country. Had we designed these events, pomp and circumstance probably would have attended the announcement and birth of Jesus, but God chose to use an average young woman and to announce his intentions in quiet obscurity. The fulfilment of God’s promise came to earth in an unadorned package of human innocence, without any pomp, far away from any palace. The promised one entered human life as he still seeks to meet it: at the level of everyday experience with everyday people. God again takes the initiative when he sends Gabriel to Galilee, a region some forty-five to eighty-five miles north of Jerusalem. God’s announcement comes to a betrothed virgin; Mary. God will bring an unexpected addition into her family. Betrothal in the ancient world was part of a two-stage marriage process. The initial phase, the betrothal, involved a formal, witnessed agreement to marry and the giving of a bridal price (Malachi 2:14). At this point the bride legally became the groom’s and could be called his wife. About a year later the actual marriage followed, and the husband took his wife home. In the first century betrothal could take place starting at the age of twelve. Mary’s age is unstated. It is during this betrothal stage that Gabriel breaks the news. Mary’s chaste character is highlighted by the description of her as a *virgin*. It is clear that the account attributes Jesus’ origins to the Holy Spirit (verses 34-35). But the human Davidic connection, the tie to the royal line, is also noted in verse 27. The point is important, for it seems that this connection is attributed to Joseph and comes to Jesus through him. Joseph need not be the biological father in order to pass such lineage on to Jesus. The virgin birth is one mark of superiority for Jesus over John the prophet. It makes Jesus totally unique. The only other person to have had such a direct divine intervention (in Hebrew Mythology) in his birth was Adam – a point Luke notes in 3:38. This point is not lost on others such as Paul describe Jesus as the ‘Last Adam’ 1 Corinthians 15:45

Psalm 89:1-5,27, 29 *Misericordias Domini* Grail Psalter

℟ I will sing forever of your love, O Lord.

¹ A Maskil. *For Ethan the Ezrahite.*

² I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord;
through all ages my mouth will proclaim your truth.

³ Of this I am sure, that your love lasts for ever,
that your truth is firmly established as the heavens. **℟**

⁴ “With my chosen one I have made a covenant;
I have sworn to David my servant:

⁵ I will establish your dynasty for ever
and set up your throne through all ages.” **℟**

²⁷ He will say to me, ‘You are my father,
my God, the rock who saves me.’

²⁹ I will keep my love for him always;
with him my covenant shall endure. **℟**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because you sent him to redeem us from sin and death and to make us inheritors of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may with joy behold his appearing, and in confidence may stand before him.

Post Communion

Heavenly Father, who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of the promised saviour: fill us your servants with your grace, that in all things we may embrace your holy will and with her rejoice in your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, scatter the darkness from before your path, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit rest upon you now and forever. **Amen**