

Luke 1: 26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, "Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you." She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, "Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?" "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" the angel answered "and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people call barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God." "I am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary "let what you have said be done to me." And the angel left her.

Mary's greatness doesn't begin with her 'fiat', with the words: "*I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me.*" For listen to the Angel's greeting: "Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you." "You have won God's favour." Mary's greatness begins at the moment of her conception. She is truly immaculate; 'full of grace' (God's love). This is God's gift to Mary, in readiness for her to bring to birth the Son of God. But this doesn't mean that Mary had it easy. Think about how worried she was when the young Jesus was lost in Jerusalem; her concern for her Son as his popularity grew; how she felt at Calvary, watching her Son die. Mary's greatness lies in her trust of God; in her openness to do his will. St Augustine wrote that - "Mary received Christ in her heart, before ever receiving him in her womb." This gift is offered to us all, especially at this time of year, when we recall the coming of Jesus into our world.

Fourth Sunday of Advent ***Year B***

20th December 2020

Manifestation of the Announced Mystery



The fourth and final Sunday of Advent is often referred to as the vigil of Christmas. Today's readings and prayers very much introduce the characters & sets the scene for the Birth of the Lord. But because the Christmas story is so familiar, we can easily pass over it without thinking. Luke challenges us today. The Baby born of the Virgin will be called 'Jesus'; a name which means 'to deliver', 'to rescue'. Not only will he be of David's line and the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, but because this has been brought about by the Holy Spirit, he will 'be holy and will be called Son of God'. Let us allow God's Word to enter into our minds and hearts this Christmas

Opening Prayer

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.

2 Samuel 7: 1-5. 8-11. 16

Once David had settled into his house and the Lord had given him rest from all the enemies surrounding him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "Look, I am living in a house of cedar while the ark of God dwells in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go and do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you."

But that very night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus the Lord speaks: Are you the man to build me a house to dwell in? I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be leader of my people Israel; I have been with you on all your expeditions; I have cut off all your enemies before you. I will give you fame as great as the fame of the greatest on earth. I will provide a place for my people Israel; I will plant them there and they shall dwell in that place and never be disturbed again; nor shall the wicked continue to oppress them as they did, in the days when I appointed judges over my people Israel; I will give them rest from all their enemies. The Lord will make you great; the Lord will make you a House. Your House and your sovereignty will always stand secure before me and your throne be established for ever.'"

The 2nd Book of Samuel follows Deuteronomy in the Old Testament and together with Joshua, Judges, Ruth and Kings, it presents the history of God's People after the death of Moses. 2 Samuel focuses in particular on Israel's greatest leader, King David, whose reign lasted for 40 years 1010 – 970 BC. David was initially acclaimed king at Hebron by the tribe of Judah and later became accepted by Israel after the death of King Saul's son. In spite of his short comings, he is presented as the ideal king. After capturing Jerusalem from the Jebusites, he made it his royal city and residence. Shortly afterward he brought the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem, publicly acknowledging the Lord's kingship and rule over himself and the nation. Under David's rule the nation prospered. In today's passage, we hear how David plans to build a house (temple) for the Lord, but through the Prophet Nathan, God tells David that He will build him a house (dynasty) which will last for ever. In today's Gospel we read: "*The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.*"

Psalm 88

I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord; through all ages my mouth will proclaim your truth. Of this I am sure, that your love lasts for ever, that your truth is firmly established as the heavens.

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your dynasty for ever and set up your throne through all ages."

*He will say to me: "You are my father, my God, the rock who saves me."
I will keep my love for him always for him my covenant shall endure.*

Romans 16: 25-27

Glory to him who is able to give you strength to live according to the Good News I preach, and in which I proclaim Jesus Christ, the revelation of a mystery kept secret for endless ages, but now so clear that it must be broadcast to pagans everywhere to bring them to the obedience of faith. This is only what scripture has predicted, and it is all part of the way the eternal God wants things to be. He alone is wisdom; give glory therefore to him through Jesus Christ for ever and ever. Amen.

The above passage concludes Paul's great Letter to the Romans, written around AD 57 and addressed to a young Church comprising both Jewish and Gentile converts. Paul had begun his letter praising God and he ends it in a similar manner. He thanks the Father for giving us life, freely, through faith. This plan, which makes God's love visible and has been hidden since the beginning of time, is now fully revealed in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

*Alleluia, Alleluia! I am the handmaid of the Lord:
let what you have said be done to me. Alleluia!*

(Gospel overleaf)

Prayer over the Offerings

*May the Holy Spirit, O Lord, sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar,
just as he filled with his power the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

Prayer after Communion

*Having received this pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God,
that, as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer, so we may press
forward all the more eagerly to the worthy celebration of the mystery of your
Son's Nativity. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*