

Fourth Sunday of Advent

2Sam 7:1-5, 8-11, 16. Rom 16:25-27. Luke 1:26-38.



In the readings today there is a sense of God coming close, and seeking and finding a dwelling, a house in which to be with human beings. Firstly there is David the king of Israel. The fact that David's name occurs more often in the Bible than that of Jesus or of any other indicates his high stature. The promise made to David in this reading was to be the main support of Israel during the exile. Despite his human weaknesses, David always remained a friend of God, and related to the Lord with the spontaneity of love as he would to any friend. And David's genuine concern that the Ark of the Covenant should have a fitting dwelling place touches God's heart. In response the Lord rewards him beyond all expectations establishing through him as a royal dynasty, the house of Israel. Through David this royal people are called to be a house of divine presence in the world. Nor have they ceased to be this, for the vocation of the Jews, as Rabbi Abraham Heschel reminds us is to be 'the track of God in the universe'. And for this we give thanks.

Secondly there is Mary. In the first lines Luke emphasizes the virginity of Mary, noting it twice and also mentions Joseph's origins in the house of David. Jesus is both Son of God (by his virginal birth) and as human is a historical son of Israel. As a Christian one cannot read this signature Annunciation text without amazement. The *admirabile commercium* of the Christmas liturgy begins here. The presence of the Holy Spirit invokes the newness of what is happening. As the Spirit came upon the waters in the creation story, now in Mary's womb the Spirit inaugurates a new creation. Israel as the house of divine presence is renamed as the womb of Mary, and ultimately as Mary's Son, in whom the Lord becomes a truly human presence amongst us. Here the sheer wonder of Incarnation making Christmas the quintessential Christian celebration.

And reflecting on this, Paul, the interpreter and ambassador of Christ, as usual sets the mind racing with new overtones. In his letters he is never overly didactic as to who Jesus is; he simply invites us to entrust ourselves to the good news, to enter into the mystery -*mysterion* - or plan of God from the beginning.

In this plan the entirety of creation and history, including human sin, of which Paul is keenly aware, is taken up and transformed in Christ. And before this *mysterion*, says Paul, we can only give glory. :-

*O Christ our Morning Star,
Splendour of Light Eternal,
Shining with the glory of the rainbow,
Come and waken us
From the greyness of our apathy
And renew in us your gift of hope.*

The Venerable Bede (671-735).