

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 21, 2008
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

"A House for Christmas"
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

There has been a lot of talk about houses lately with the housing mortgage crisis, foreclosures, declining home values, and other things. In the process for some people, the theme for this day might appear to be an impossible promise: "A House for Christmas." Yet as we look at the Scripture readings for the 4th Sunday in Advent we will learn that the promise is sure and certain. As we examine the promise through the thoughts of an ancient king and a prophet and then through the reaction of a humble maiden, a virgin, to an angelic messenger, we will see the reality of a "House for Christmas." May the Spirit of God guide us in our meditation on this day through His holy Word.

I. 1000 B.C.

We need to journey back to time to about 1000 B.C. In the Old Testament lesson, we see the shepherd king of Israel no longer living as a shepherd. David the king has reached the pinnacle of peace and prosperity in his kingdom. He has conquered the Jebusite city of Jerusalem and established it as the capital city of Israel. He has built a comfortable house (palace) for himself of cedar wood, one of the prized building materials of the time. And David considers the fact that while he has such a beautiful place to live, the ark of the covenant of the Lord dwells in a tent. He proposes to the prophet Nathan to build a house for the Lord as well. At first, the prophet agrees with David's plans and tells him, "Go, do all that is in your heart for the Lord is with you." But that night, the word of the Lord comes to Nathan the prophet that such words of encouragement were premature. He is to tell David that the Lord has never dwelt in a house from the time of the Exodus, that he never asked any judge to build him a house of cedar.

In the parallel account in the book of 1st Chronicles, we learn that part of the reason that the Lord did not want David to build his "house" was because David was a man of blood, a soldier and though he had brought peace to Israel it had come at the price of much warfare. The Lord was also aware of the other tragic and sinful episodes in David's life which were to come. But in spite of telling David that he would not build the Lord's house, that task would be left to his son Solomon, the Lord still has a glorious promise for his servant David regarding a house. Listen to the closing verses of the Old Testament lesson: "The Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house ... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." What a marvelous promise of grace this is. And yet at close inspection what an impossible promise to fulfill in human terms. There has never been a kingdom that has been made sure forever. Yes, David's son reigned in his stead, and after Solomon his descendants over the kingdom

of Judah for about 400 years. But then would come the Babylonian captivity, the end of the Davidic monarchy in exile. There would never again be a son of David to sit upon the throne. At least from a human perspective. So did the promise of God fail? Most assuredly not. For did not we say that the promise is "A House for Christmas."

3 B.C. (or so)

God never fails in his promises. And to see that we need to go forward in time about a thousand years from King David's time to 3 B.C. or so. We need to look in on the home of a humble young virgin betrothed to be married. We need to be surprised with her at the appearance of an angelic messenger, Gabriel, and hear his greeting, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you." The message the angel has to bring is even more wondrous. "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." But there is more to this child to be born. Gabriel continues: "He 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." There is a house mentioned here, though it is the house of Jacob. But note that the throne of David his father is also clearly mentioned as well as the words "forever" and "of his kingdom there will be no end." The promise of God will be fulfilled. The promise to David will not fail.

Yet for Mary there is a problem. She asks almost bluntly, "How will this be since I am a virgin?" That is a question worth answering and yet the answer comes from the angel without a pause, "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." For nothing indeed will be impossible with God. And Mary humbly and in faith accepts the word of the Lord through his messenger. "I am the servant of the Lord", she says. Here is the clear and sure declaration of the incarnation. It is true that next week on Christmas Eve and again on Christmas Day we will hear the words of St. John's Gospel, "the word became flesh and dwelt among us." Yet that event did not happen at Christmas, they occurred already in Nazareth, in the home of Mary, when the Lord's promised One was conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. That was the incarnation. The Lord took upon himself our human flesh at his conception. He became man for us. And in the process God began building a house. The house promised to David. The house that would never end. St. John uses the language of a tent, he made his dwelling among us. But the house language is appropriate as well along with the language of a temple. For in his body, the fulness of the deity dwells. In our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's love and grace. And in Him, we all have a house for Christmas.

III. 2008 A.D.

That brings us to this present moment. The promise to David stands. The promise made to Mary stands as well. The child whose birth we prepare to celebrate once again in just a few

days has given us a house. Now it is not a house of brick and mortar, or wood and stone. It is a house made up of his own body and literally we are part of it. As St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord." A temple, a house, a building. As the hymn, "Built on the Rock" states, "We are God's house of living stones built for his own habitation ..." And in the midst of times when many may be concerned about their own homes, when in countless places in the world there are people who have no home at all and who seek shelter from the storms in remote and abandoned places, the promise of these words of our Lord are as great as they can be. We have a place. We have a home. We have a loving God who planned it all for us. And we are part of God's salvation plan. We have a house for Christmas.

David's Son is David's Lord. Mary's Son is her Lord as well. And the child of Bethlehem is our Lord and Savior. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, remember it is not just something for one day of the year, it is an eternal and abiding hope. For the Lord Jesus still lives with us. His redemption gives us a place in the eternal mansions where there is fulness of joy forevermore.

O Jesus Christ, thy manger is
My paradise in which my soul reclineth
For there O Lord doth lie the word
Made flesh for here in thy grace now shineth.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.