

KING FOREVER

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Luke 1:26-38

Fourth Sunday in Advent (Series B)

December 24, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The sermon for this Fourth Sunday in Advent is based on both the Old Testament lesson, which we read earlier from 2 Samuel 7, and the gospel lesson, which comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 1, verses 26 through 38. You can find it on page 723 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, the angel Gabriel appears to a young girl. He tells her of a miracle that is about to occur inside her body and how this miracle will fulfill God's promises to the house of David. Please stand as you are able for the gospel. From Luke 1, beginning at verse 26, we read in Jesus' name.

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And 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. ³⁶ And 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And 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.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The first thing we're going to do this morning is hop in our "Way Back Old Testament Time Machine," and go back to about 1000 BC. David is the king of Israel.

Now David was the second king of Israel. The first king, Saul, was given to them because the people begged for a king. Prior to Saul, God was their king, and this should have been good enough, but the people wanted to be just like every other nation, so they demanded that the prophet Samuel anoint them a king. And even though their intention was wicked, God told Samuel to give them what they wanted. (1 Sam. 8:4-9) So Saul was anointed and became king

over Israel. The people rejected God as their king in favor of a human king. And God let them have what they wanted, but he did not give up on being their king.

Then, about forty years later, on account of Saul's wickedness, God took the throne away from Saul and gave it to David. Now David had his faults too but was really much better than King Saul. And God made some promises to King David, and these promises reveal that God had not given up on being king of Israel. Even though they had rejected him as king and would do it again, God's plan could not be stopped.

So the Old Testament lesson, which occurred around 1000 BC, began with some good intentions. David wanted to do something for God.

The LORD made David king and gave him rest from all his enemies (2 Sam. 7:1). Things were going well for David. He was king. He had peace. And he had a really nice palace. Life was good. And David realized that God had given him all these things. So David wanted to do something nice for God. So he called up his prophet friend, Nathan, and said, "Hey, you know that tent God has been dwelling in for the last 450 years? I'd like to upgrade that to a real house." David's concern was that God should have a permanent place to dwell with his people.

When the Israelites left Egypt, God commanded them to build a tent for him to dwell in. This was called the Tabernacle. And for about 450 years now, this tent had been the place of worship and the place where God dwelt with his people. When the people were wandering around in the wilderness, it was good to have a tent; it could move with them. But now that God had planted them in a more permanent place, David thought it would be a good idea to build a permanent house of worship where God could dwell. It was a good intention, and Nathan thought it was so obvious that he didn't even consult with God before he told David to go for it (2 Sam. 7:3).

But that night God spoke to Nathan and told him otherwise. He basically said, "I never asked anyone to build me a house. I'm fine." God had his own plan for how he would dwell permanently with his people. It also happened to be the same as his plan for how he would become their king again. So God gave Nathan a message concerning the house *he* would build and the throne *he* would establish.

Now David already had a palace and was already the king of Israel, but Nathan said to him, "The LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house" (2 Sam. 7:11). So God totally flips David's plan right on its head. Instead of David building a house, God would build a house. Despite David's good intentions, God basically says, "No; that's not the way this works. I don't need anything from you. Instead, I am going to keep giving and giving and giving." Because that's the way things work with God. David wanted to build a house for God, but God wanted to be the builder instead.

By this God did not mean another house made of cedar and gold. God was talking about the royal house of David—the kingly line he would establish. And all of this had to do with where God would dwell with his people. Instead of David building God a house to dwell in, God would make David a house, and this was how God would dwell with his people.

So God goes on to talk about the royal house of David—the offspring who would come from David and rule over his kingdom forever. God says, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." (2 Sam. 7:16)

Now this is a fascinating promise. It kind of seems like God is exaggerating. A brief survey of world history would quickly reveal that no kingdom is forever. At best, a kingdom will last for a few hundred or maybe even a thousand years. That's a long time, but it's not forever. Kingdoms rise and fall. They have their golden age, but they eventually weaken, and someone stronger comes along and overthrows the kingdom. It's the cycle of world politics. But God promises a throne that will be established forever. And the only way this is possible is if there is a king who cannot be overthrown by anyone or anything—not even death. It sounds like a crazy promise, but God made it.

So what happened after David died? Did the throne continue on forever? David's son Solomon assumed the throne, and he was a good king ... most of the time. God allowed Solomon to build a temple—the house David wanted to build. And this was good, but it didn't last forever. The temple didn't even last as long as the tabernacle. That's because the temple wasn't really the house God had in mind. It wasn't the way God ultimately wanted to dwell with his people forever.

And Solomon's throne didn't last forever either. Solomon reigned for forty years, and he died. Then his son Rehoboam assumed the throne and everything fell apart. Right away he lost ten of the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Kings 12). But the kings in David's line managed to hold onto the two southern tribes for a few hundred years. But eventually they lost them too, and the throne was gone. That's because none of those kings were really the offspring God had in mind when he promised to establish David's kingdom forever.

There was another way God had in mind by which he would dwell with his people and rule over them as their king forever. And this is what the angel Gabriel comes to tell Mary about.

It was in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (1:26). Elizabeth was a relative of Mary and the very geriatric mother of John the Baptist. That pregnancy was a miracle in itself, but it pales in comparison to the one Gabriel comes to announce.

Now Mary was a young virgin—probably in her early to middle teenage years. And she was betrothed to a man named Joseph. Girls typically got married at a young age in that culture; that's just the way it was back then. The betrothal had the same legal authority as a marriage, but Joseph and Mary had not yet been married, and had not yet engaged in what married people do.

So here we have this very young woman, and the angel Gabriel appears to her and says, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (1:28) Now that's not the sort of greeting that usually invokes a reaction of fear. But it did frighten Mary. She was "greatly troubled" and tried to figure out what this greeting was all about (1:29). You look at the words of the angel and then the reaction of Mary, and there seems to be a disconnect. So why was Mary troubled? The thing is, angels are terrifying creatures. I'll explain that further tonight. And even when angels appear in the gentlest way possible, they still trouble a person. So Mary is troubled, and Gabriel says, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (1:30). This is a good angelic visit.

And Gabriel makes a pronouncement that fulfills both God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7, and the prophecy of Isaiah 7(:14) that a virgin will conceive and bear a son. Gabriel says,

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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. (1:31-33)

Now Mary was still inexperienced in these matters, but she had been taught enough to know that things don't usually work this way. So she asks, "How will this be, since I am a virgin" (1:34). Now that's a good question. Literally, Mary asks, "How will this be, since I do not know a man?" That was how they talked about sexual intercourse back then. Mary was, in fact, a virgin in the technical sense of the term. Scripture is perfectly clear that Mary had never had sexual intercourse with a man, and the conception of a child in her womb was an absolute miracle. So, naturally, Mary would like to know how this happened. If Joseph was confused when he heard about it later (Matt. 1:18), Mary was even more confused. Something's not adding up.

So Gabriel answers her question. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (1:35). You remember how the Holy Spirit hovered over the face of the deep when God created the universe out of nothing (Gen. 1:1)? Now the Holy Spirit comes upon Mary as God brings an embryo into existence in the most miraculous way. And this embryo is no ordinary human being. He is the Son of God in human flesh. And this is really the miracle of the incarnation. We usually think of the birth of Jesus at Christmas as the miracle. But it wasn't. The birth was perfectly ordinary as far as childbirth goes. I'll explain that further tonight. The miracle was the virgin conception when the angel Gabriel visited Mary. Now it's certainly amazing whenever a tiny person is living and growing inside a woman. The whole thing seems miraculous, and I won't argue with anyone who wants to call it a miracle. But in the case of Jesus, the conception—and only the conception—is the moment when God intervened to circumvent the rules of how his creation usually functions.

And this is marvelous. The Son of God snuck into this world, and no one knew it but Mary. Even Joseph—her betrothed—learned about it later. So Jesus Christ—the Son of God—is conceived into this world without the help of a man. And so he enters into this world with a different nature than any other human being. His nature is fully human. Every cell and every chromosome is perfectly human. But there's one thing missing from his nature, and that is sin.

And this, of course, is because Jesus comes to redeem us of our sin. He was conceived without sin, because he came to perfectly fulfill the Law in our place. It wasn't until his death when he would assume our sin, for that is when he sacrificed himself in our place. At his death he was perfectly guilty, though he had committed no sin. And at his birth he was perfectly pure.

This was God's plan for how he would come and dwell with us permanently as our king forever. His dwelling is not in a temple built by human hands. It's even more intimate than that. His dwelling is in real, physical human flesh—our flesh, which he assumed as his own. David wanted to build a temple for God, but God built his own from the lineage of David—the Son of God and Son of Mary, descended from David—the God-Man, Jesus Christ. His body is his temple, and his throne is the cross. It would have been too little of a thing to ascend a golden throne in Jerusalem and restore David's kingdom. He came not to rule merely over Israel, but over all of heaven and earth. The cross is where our eternal king, in the temple of his body, conquered the enemies of his kingdom—our sin, death, and the devil.

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He came into his kingdom at the cross when he won salvation and the forgiveness of sins for all the world. And his temple was rebuilt, and his kingdom was established forever when he was raised from the dead on the third day. He is God's eternal temple, and our king forever.

And all who trust in him have what he promises—the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and everlasting salvation. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.