

## **HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT-DECEMBER 20, 2020**

**READINGS: 2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8-12, 4a, 16;  
Responsorial Psalm-Psalm 89;  
Romans 16:25-27;  
Gospel of Luke 1: 26-38**

**Advent: A time to surrender, a time to trust-- God is love.**

When you think back to Christmas last year, what did you imagine that Christmas 2020 would be like? We expected this year's Christmas to be like any other Christmas that we have experienced in the past. We expected that we would celebrate the annual Christmas parties with our colleagues at work; that our churches would be filled with parishioners some we don't see often at Mass and that we would come together with families and friends for the big Christmas dinner. We would also be expected to come home for a visit with gifts for the kids during the Christmas season. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic with the rising daily of infection rate, our expectations have been upended. In fact, we have been asked to celebrate Christmas with only members of the same household. To many of us, our celebration of 2020 Christmas is not going to be what we would have expected.

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, the readings for the celebration of Mass share one theme-- the theme of expectations. We begin with the first reading from the Second Book of Samuel. Today's passage is about the prophecy concerning David's son. God had given David a string of successes and a life of security and peace. As a sign of his gratitude to God, David with encouragement from the Prophet Nathan decided to build a suitable house for God-- a temple for the Ark of the Covenant. According to tradition, the Ark of the Covenant contained the two tablets of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The Ark therefore symbolized the presence of God among the Jewish people. However, God opposed David's plan. God didn't expect David to build a house for him. God revealed his own plan to David through the prophet Nathan. God told David: "I would raise up an offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I shall establish his kingdom". The relationship of God and David's offspring would be like that of father and son relationship. Biblical scholars teach that this prophecy of a future son and king and his kingdom formed the basis for the Jewish expectation of a messiah.

The story about the prophecy of David's son in the first reading leads us to the Gospel reading from Luke. To understand the significance of the story we must know a little about what scripture scholars refer to as a "birth narrative". In the Bible, birth narratives are stories about the birth of someone who later became great. According to biblical scholars, the story was composed, not to describe a birth exactly as it occurred, but to teach the significance of that person's birth, as it is later understood in the light of subsequent events.

Today's passage is the narrative of the Annunciation-- the announcing of God's plan of the Incarnation. The vivid description of the encounter of the Angel Gabriel and Mary revealed the identity of the baby. The baby to be conceived in Mary's womb is the Son of God and from the house of David. The baby would reign over the house of Jacob, and his kingdom would last forever. The story is to teach that Jesus is divine. Today's Gospel reading can be seen to be parallel with the prophecy in the first reading. The Church considers the offspring of David in the prophecy to be Jesus. The passage from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans in the second reading can be described as the summary of the first reading and the Gospel passage. Today's passage ends Paul's Letter to the Romans. Paul taught the early Christians about the role of prophetic writings in the revelation of God's plan of salvation for his people. The mystery of the revelation is about Jesus. By his preaching of the gospel, Paul has made Jesus known to both Jews and Gentiles. Paul ended his Letter with praise to God through Jesus, "to whom be the glory forever!"

My friends in Christ, what do the three readings tell us about our faith? For the first time during Advent, we read one of the stories about the birth of Jesus-the Messiah. Today's encounter of the Angel Gabriel and Mary revealed some characteristics of Mary: her courage, fidelity to God and her willingness to be part of God's plan of salvation for his people. The statement that Mary made to the angel at the end of their encounter reveals Mary as a faithful servant of God ready to do the will of God. Mary said, "Here I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word".

Mary's statement to God was unique and it was unexpected. Mary had her own expectations-- to marry Joseph to whom she had been engaged. By saying yes to God, Mary therefore did what was unexpected in her time. She gave up her expectations because she trusted God. She put her hope in God. We admire Mary for her unique relationship with God.

As we continue our Advent journey, what can we learn from today's readings? What can we learn from Mary? Our Advent this year has been very different due to the COVID-19 pandemic with its uncertainties and challenges. Yet, as part of our preparation to celebrate Christmas, this is the time that we still need to focus on the spiritual side of Advent. Perhaps we can reflect on the deeper meaning of God's plan of salvation for us in his Son. The prophecy about David's son in the first reading has been fulfilled in Jesus. God's plan was based on his unconditional love for us. In the Bible God has done the unexpected throughout salvation history. As we come closer to Christmas, we acknowledge that we might not be able to do the things that we had expected to do this Christmas. Yet, today's stories about Mary, David and Paul encourage us to learn to develop an attitude of surrendering ourselves to God. Surrendering ourselves to God may deepen our trust in his love for us. God's love for us is revealed in the coming of the Messiah. This is the spirit of Advent.

**Fr. Yaw Acheampong**

Please note: This homily has been prepared for a congregation at a distance