

## **4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent (Cycle B)**

**December 21, 2008 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.**

### INTRODUCTION

I know it seems like I was just up here . . . and I was, just three weeks ago, on the First Sunday of Advent. But the deacons usually preach on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, so we can give the priests a little break before they have to give all those Christmas homilies to the folks we won't see again until Easter.

This is also the first time I've preached when I can actually see. I had my cataracts removed a few weeks ago. Before, everything was kind of a blur, even with my glasses on. I couldn't really see you. Then Dr. Schanzer removed my cataracts. Now I can see all of you very clearly . . .

[Look around . . . ]

I think I'll see if Dr. Schanzer can put the cataracts back . . .

### MOVE

Three weeks ago, I talked about the idea of starting over. Advent is a good time to start over. It's never too late to start over. You may remember that my friend Deb started over, even though she had started over many times before. Then she started over that one last time. That was the one more "starting over" that she needed.

It's kind of like the Old Turkish Proverb. Well, if it's not an Old Turkish Proverb, it ought to be:

"No matter how far you have gone down the wrong road, turn around."

### MOVE

Today's readings talk about building God's house. David had it made, living in a big cedar house, when it suddenly dawned on him that God – God's presence in the Ark of the Covenant – is housed in

a tent. That just didn't seem right. Nathan the prophet's not much help. He says, essentially, "do whatever you have to do."

But then Nathan has a dream. We don't hear it today, but . . .

## ASIDE

You know, it seems like I often find myself referring to something in Scripture that "we didn't hear today." Our readings are set in the Lectionary, but I think it's interesting to look back, look forward. This is kind of the time of year to do that, isn't it? We look back, we look forward.

We can look backward and forward in the Bible and see what came before and what came after . . . and we can look backward and forward in the Sunday readings and do the same thing. We might learn a lot from that. I'm not much on New Year's resolutions, but that might be something to think about.

## ANYWAY . . .

Anyway, later on in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, the part we don't hear today, Nathan tells David that he had a dream. In Nathan's dream, God said to go ahead and build a house for him. So that's how David's Temple got built in Jerusalem about 3,000 years ago.

David built God a "house." And God promised David a "house" – a house in the sense of a line of descent, a dynasty to last forever, a lineage to be fulfilled when David was long dead, a thousand years later, in Jesus.

## MOVE

Maybe God wants us to build Him a house. Not a big fancy stone building like David built – that was easy for him, a king with all the money and labor and power he needed.

It can be harder for us to build a house for God – in our hearts. Human hearts can be harder than any stone David ever saw.

## MOVE

The readings today are about saying yes to God. In today's Gospel, Mary's answer . . . when the angel asked her to do as God asked . . . "May it be done to me according to your word . . ."

Her heart was God's house, as ours should be. That's the only house he wants, the only house he asks us for – to shine on us, to shine in us, in our hearts.

## MOVE

David thought he'd do something for the Lord by building him a house. But it's always God who does for us . . . we don't do for God. God doesn't need anything from us. He may want it, but he certainly doesn't need it. We can't do him any favors.

So today we hear of a favor God did nine months and two thousand years ago, when he approached an obscure young woman, showered her with grace and blessing, and proposed an outlandish plan to her, a plan of salvation for the whole world – but only if she would consent, freely and unconditionally.

She didn't have to consent. Some might say that God has a "bad habit" of respecting the free will that he gave us. He invites us. He doesn't require us. It's all up to us to accept or not, to let him in or not, to build him a house in our hearts, or not.

## MOVE

God spoke to the prophet Nathan in a dream. To Mary, it all must have seemed like a dream. You may remember that He spoke to Joseph in a dream, and to many others too.

I think God does sometimes speak to us in our dreams. Maybe it's because when we're awake, we're preoccupied and distracted with all our other cares and worries. So he waits until we're asleep so he can get our attention.

Maybe he doesn't speak to us in words. But I suspect we've all had the experience of going to bed worried or burdened about something, then waking up with a sense of hope and peace that we couldn't find in the darkness of night.

Maybe it's because we're so tangled up in our own search for solutions when we're awake that we can't hear God's solutions then. When we're awake, we're so busy telling God what we want . . . we can't hear His answer. We've gone so far down that road – that road of what **we** want – that it's hard to turn around.

MOVE

We look back, we look forward. We look at the road behind us. Maybe we've been on that road for a long time. Has it taken us where we want to be right now? We look forward, down the road ahead of us. If we look far enough, we might see where we're going if we stay on that road – if we don't turn around.

But “no matter how far you have gone down the wrong road, turn around.” Listen to the dream. Build a house for God in our hearts. Listen.

## READINGS

### Reading 1

2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

When King David was settled in his palace,  
and the LORD had given him rest from his enemies on every side,  
he said to Nathan the prophet,  
“Here I am living in a house of cedar,  
while the ark of God dwells in a tent!”  
Nathan answered the king,  
“Go, do whatever you have in mind,  
for the LORD is with you.”  
But that night the LORD spoke to Nathan and said:  
“Go, tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD:  
Should you build me a house to dwell in?’

“It was I who took you from the pasture  
and from the care of the flock  
to be commander of my people Israel.  
I have been with you wherever you went,  
and I have destroyed all your enemies before you.  
And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth.  
I will fix a place for my people Israel;  
I will plant them so that they may dwell in their place  
without further disturbance.  
Neither shall the wicked continue to afflict them as they did of old,  
since the time I first appointed judges over my people Israel.  
I will give you rest from all your enemies.  
The LORD also reveals to you  
that he will establish a house for you.  
And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors,  
I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins,  
and I will make his kingdom firm.  
I will be a father to him,  
and he shall be a son to me.  
Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me;  
your throne shall stand firm forever.”

### Responsorial Psalm

Ps 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

#### **R. (2a) For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

The promises of the LORD I will sing forever;  
through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your faithfulness.  
For you have said, “My kindness is established forever”;  
in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness.

#### **R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

“I have made a covenant with my chosen one,  
I have sworn to David my servant:  
Forever will I confirm your posterity  
and establish your throne for all generations.”

#### **R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

“He shall say of me, ‘You are my father,  
my God, the Rock, my savior.’

Forever I will maintain my kindness toward him,  
and my covenant with him stands firm.”

**R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

**Reading II**

Rom 16:25-27

Brothers and sisters:

To him who can strengthen you,  
according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,  
according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages  
but now manifested through the prophetic writings and,  
according to the command of the eternal God,  
made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith,  
to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ  
be glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Gospel**

Lk 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent from God  
to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,  
to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph,  
of the house of David,  
and the virgin's name was Mary.  
And coming to her, he said,  
“Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.”  
But she was greatly troubled at what was said  
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.  
Then the angel said to her,  
“Do not be afraid, Mary,  
for you have found favor with God.

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,  
and you shall name him Jesus.  
He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,  
and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,  
and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever,  
and of his kingdom there will be no end.”  
But Mary said to the angel,  
“How can this be,  
since I have no relations with a man?”  
And the angel said to her in reply,  
“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.  
And behold, Elizabeth, your relative,  
has also conceived a son in her old age,  
and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;  
for nothing will be impossible for God.”  
Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.  
May it be done to me according to your word.”  
Then the angel departed from her.