

Sunday 20 December 2020

Fourth Sunday of Advent



'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

Introduction

People of God, Prepare! On the Fourth Sunday of Advent we watch and wait with Mary the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, who bore the Christ Child for all humanity. As Advent draws to a close we hear God's story through a female voice. Maranatha - Come, Lord Jesus.

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16

David is given the commission, through the prophet Nathan, to build the temple of God in the new capital city of Jerusalem. In the end however, it was David's son, Solomon, who finally built the first temple.

Now when David, the king, was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.'

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

Gospel: Luke 1.26-38

Luke's version of the story of Jesus begins with the announcement to Mary that she is to be the mother of the Son of God. Mary might seem passive in this scene, but later she reveals her true character in the words of the Magnificat

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him 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 ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection

Mary's one question is a clue to her nature. She does not demand to know exactly what God is hoping to achieve; she does not ask what will it cost; she does not preen and demand praise because she is the one God is asking. All she asks is, 'Aren't I a bit of a problem? Are you sure I fill the requirements?' And when the angel replies, 'It is all taken care of,' then Mary agrees.

Such an odd, almost low-key conversation to announce that God is coming to make the world his home, and so to make it our home too. Such sensible, manageable care for Mary, at this stage, putting her in touch with Elizabeth, who is the one person who will understand what has happened.

(Jane Williams, Theologian).

Prayer

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**