

THE HOUSE OF DAVID

2 Samuel 7. 1-11, 16

Romans 16. 25-27

Luke 1. 26-28

I speak to you in the name of the † Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

If we are to better understand our Old Testament reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, it is helpful to have a bit of background. In the chapters that precede our appointed text in 2 Samuel, David has been anointed the King of Israel (5. 1-5). Following his coronation, David consolidated his political power and took control of Jerusalem, which then became the capital of the united kingdoms of Israel (northern) and Judah (southern). A royal palace was built for David in the capital, using precious cedar brought from Lebanon (Tyre); the King took more concubines and wives, and so became the father of numerous children (including Solomon, cf. 5. 6-16). David went and fought against the enemies of Israel, in particular the Philistines, and was victorious over them (5. 17-25). Following these victories, the King decided to bring the ark of the Lord (which contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, the rod of Aaron and a golden pot of manna)¹ to rest in a tent in Jerusalem (6. 1-23). This event was accompanied, as you might imagine, with great drama and liturgical fanfare.

It is only after these events have occurred that we come to chapter 7 of 2 Samuel. Our text begins with an interchange between David the King and Nathan, a prophet of whom we have heard nothing up until now. We read, ‘Now when 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,

¹ Cf. Heb 9. 4.

but the ark of God stays in tent.” Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you” ’ (7. 1-3).

David is clearly feeling very comfortable in his lodgings and presumably desires that the ark of the Lord (which was accompanied by God’s very presence) have a house as well. Nathan the prophet appears to approve of David's wishes, which are to build a temple in Jerusalem for the ark of the Lord.

That night, however, the Lord intervenes by way of Nathan with an everlasting promise, a theological statement about the ‘house’ of David.

The promise, anchored in a reference made by God to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt (7. 6), plays with the Hebrew word *bayit*, meaning house. David sits in his palatial house in Jerusalem, contemplating building a house for the Lord. The divine promise, however, is of a house not of stone or cedar, but a royal dynasty that the Lord will establish for ever (7. 16). Unlike the Lord's blessing of Saul, which was revoked (1 Sam 15. 26), the blessing of the David’s dynastic house will continue always, despite the failings of his successors (7. 14-15).

This dynastic house is intimately connected with David, although it is clear that the building and blessing of the dynasty are the Lord's doing. ‘I took you from the pasture...’ says the Lord (7. 8b), who recalls his own personal intervention in the life of David, his call and his appointment.

As God speaks, he also takes care to mention the people of Israel (7. 10). He promises to ‘plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more’. The royal dynastic house is not established solely for David, the monarch of the day, but also for the Lord's people.

And as we come to the end of our passage, it climaxes with the promise of an everlasting house and kingdom: the line of David.²

This Old Testament passage provides the historical and theological perspective we need to fully appreciate what is recounted in our text from St Luke's gospel, where we read: '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' (1. 26-27). Not only has David's dynastic house been established for ever; it is our Lord himself who will take up this royal line.

When we consider the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, we see that the Davidic line was in fact reinterpreted. If we look at David, his son Solomon and the kings that followed them, we are forced to admit that they abused their monarchical power and authority at times. Happily, these errors did not lead to a cancellation of God's promise. The house and line of David continued; and God continued to be faithful to his people, even though the kings of the Davidic dynasty did not show the same faithfulness to them. Yet when Christ came to earth, he modelled a new type of kingship: that of a servant. And his eternal kingly reign, as well as his incarnation, will for ever be marked by that servanthood.

When we think of our Lord's First Advent to earth, it is easy for us to picture it in the context of servanthood. As we saw last week, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God's mighty arms, which were accustomed to swirling galaxies, were bound in swaddling clothes. And God the Son, who from the dawn of creation was serenaded by choirs of angels, dozed to the lullaby of his mother our Lady. Indeed, Christ's physical arrival occurred in the most modest of circumstances, in a stable.

² As such, David's initial desire to build a house of cedar for the ark of the Lord is put off to David's son, Solomon (7. 13).

Throughout his life, and until its very end, our Lord showed exemplary servanthood. As the prophet Isaiah writes, ‘he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, (and) nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others;...he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter’ (53. 2, 3, 7).

Today, as we look towards Jesus’s Second Advent or Coming, perhaps we are less inclined to see in it the marks of servanthood. It is true that when he comes, he will be accompanied by the archangel’s call and the sound of God’s trumpet (1 Th 4. 16); he will appear in the clouds, much the same way as he did when he ascended to heaven (Acts 1. 9, 11). And when he does come, every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow before him (Ph 2. 10).

But this exaltation has been given to him by God the Father *precisely because* ‘he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness’ (Ph 2. 6, 7). As a result of his humility and servanthood, the risen and ascended Christ, the one who is yet to come again, has been given a ‘name that is above every name’ (Ph 2. 9, ‘therefore’).

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, as you and I prepare to celebrate the First Advent of our Lord to earth, and as we look forward to his coming again, we can be reassured. God the Father has indeed appointed a place for us (2 Sam 7. 10) and has given us a King, an eternal Servant King who is also our Shepherd. As we look to him to provide for us and to care for us, and as we prepare to follow him in the pastures through which he will lead us, let us offer him not only the worship of our hearts. Let us also resolve to honour him by imitating his servanthood ourselves.

Amen.