

**Homily for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent Year B (20<sup>th</sup> November 2020)**

**By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD**

**Readings: 2 Sam 7:1-5,8-12,14,16; Ps 88(89); Rom 16:25; Lk 1:26-38**

**Theme: The God who keeps his Covenant!**

David succeeded Saul as the king of Israel. First, he was anointed king over Judah in Hebron (cf. 2 Sam 2) and later over all Israel (cf. 2 Sam 5). David fought so many battles until he had rest from all his enemies (cf. 2 Sam 7:1). He then built a palace in Jerusalem and brought back the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 6). The Ark of the Covenant is the visible sign of God's presence among his people. It contained the two tablets of stones of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. The Philistines had captured the Ark (cf. 1 Sam 4-5). When David brought back the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem with great joy and merriment, he built a tent for it (2 Sam 6:17).

In our first reading today, David feels a sense of guilt that he is living in a magnificent palace while the Ark of the Covenant is dwelling in a tent. He tells the prophet Nathan his intention to build a house for the Lord, that is, a Temple. Intuitively, Nathan tells David to do what is in his mind because the Lord is with him. Nathan presumed the response of God. But that night, God spoke to Nathan with a contrary message to David. God reminds David of how he took him from the pasture and made him great, and how he (God) fought the battles of the Israelites from the time of the Judges. David is not the one to build a house for the Lord. Instead, God will make David great and build him a house. While David was thinking of a physical structure, God wants to make David an everlasting house. 'The Lord will make you great; the Lord will make you a house... Your house and your sovereignty will always stand secure before me, and your throne be established forever.' Although the word, *berith*, covenant, is not mentioned in the text, God was establishing an everlasting covenant with David.

The Psalmist highlights that God had made a covenant with David. 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to David, my servant: I will establish your dynasty forever and set up your throne through all ages.' God becomes a Father to David and promises to keep an everlasting covenant with David and his house forever. The promises of God seemed to have been thwarted with the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles, which not only destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple but brought the Davidic dynasty to its knees. The prophets anticipated the restoration of the kingdom and the coming of the Messiah, who will be the new David.

Our gospel reading announces the fulfilment of God's covenant with David through the instrumentality of the virgin, betrothed to Joseph. He was of the House of David. St. Luke emphasizes that Mary will conceive and bear a son, who 'will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.' Just as God was a father to David, so this child will be the Son of God. Luke further shows that Jesus will fulfil the promise of God to David in words, 'The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will rule over the House of Jacob forever, and his reign will have no end.' Jesus is the one who fulfils the promise of an everlasting dynasty. God is now building a house for David, no longer the physical structure or an earthly kingdom, but an eternal kingdom, which Jesus will inaugurate.

To fulfil his promise to David, God sent his son into the world. God chose Mary to execute this task. She will conceive through the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a difficult task because Mary was a virgin and had no sexual relations with Joseph. Despite her ignorance, she consented and submitted entirely to the will of God. Her word, 'I am the handmaid of the

Lord, let what you have said be done to me' sealed the covenant between God and the house of David.

St. Paul, in the second reading, tells the Romans that the Good News he is preaching is the revelation of a mystery which was kept secret for endless ages. In other words, Jesus is the revelation of that hidden mystery. 'This is only what scripture has predicted, and it is all part of the way the eternal God wants things to be.' Therefore, the incarnation is a fulfilment of a hidden mystery manifested in the fullness of time.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, the readings highlight first, that Jesus is the fulfilment of the promise that God made to David. We can see the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. The Old lays the foundation for the New. There is continuity between the message of the angel to Mary and the fulfilment of the covenant with David. Second, God has built an eternal house for us. While David was thinking of a physical structure, God planned to open the doors of his kingdom to us. We are fortunate that at the end of our lives, we shall have an everlasting home. Third, as Christians, St. Paul reminds us to 'broadcast to pagans everywhere to bring them to the obedience of faith.' Let us use this Christmas to remind our families and friends that the birth of Jesus should be at the centre of our celebration.

It has been a challenging year! For many of us, it would be a very strange Christmas, not able to gather with our families. The good news is that the Lord is always with us in our struggles and challenges. Let us not lose hope. May the birth of Christ and the celebration of Christmas this year re-ignite in us a ray of hope, and fill us with inner peace and joy. Amen. I wish you all a MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HOPE-FILLED 2021.