

"David and Mary"
The Fourth Sunday in Advent
24 December 2023
Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California

II Samuel 7:1-11
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Romans 16:25-27
St. Luke 1:26-38

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On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we have several references to David, an understandable inclusion that stems from the view that Jesus is "the Son of David." It might be a good time then to look at Luke's use of this term (Matthew uses it as well) to understand its intent and value. For that study we ought to look at Luke 20:41-44,

"Then he said to them, "How do they claim that the Messiah is the Son of David? For David himself in the Book of Psalms says:

*"The Lord said to my lord,
"Sit at my right hand
till I make your enemies your footstool.""*

Now if David calls him 'lord,' how can he be his son?"

This is Jesus' answer to the scribes who have asked Jesus about the resurrection (see Luke 20:27-40). Jesus in turn questions them about the connection of the Messiah and the title "Son of David" – what is its meaning? Jesus unsettles the very basis of patriarchal society. How can a son be "lord", when the father must be the lord. Messiahship and all of the expectations that accompany it become all muddled as Jesus stirs the theological and political pots. The expectation was for a Davidic Messiah who would rid the Jews of the meddlesome Romans. Jesus, however, is asking them to entertain an entirely different proposition. Jesus sees the Messiah (the Christ) as being more than a son of David. By using the quote from Psalm 110:1, Jesus makes an even greater claim, for the "lord" he is talking about is *the Lord*, YHWH, who will raise Jesus from the dead. Luke wants us to look beyond David and see Jesus as the Risen One. In Advent, we don't look for the coming baby, but rather remember the child who is the Risen One.

If we look backward from this story, we will see a David who has brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, a hint at the desire to build a temple, and his break with Michal, daughter of Saul. It's time then to look beyond these things, and that is what happens here with the oracle of Nathan from the first reading. It is the first of David's dealings with Nathan – a much later encounter will be much more dramatic. What happens here, however, is a rehearsal of YHWH's choice of David as leader, and an

indication that YHWH will continue to make certain that David's house that "shall be made sure forever." With this vision we have the foundations of what would become a messianic expectation that would bring Israel hope in the midst of exile, and other difficulties.

Of special value in these verses is the review of God's deal with a wandering Israel. God's leadership of and connection with Israel is made vivid in this verse: "And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them." There is a permanence hinted at here that applies much more widely than just to the House of David. That David should be seen later, through the scrim of the ages of exile, and persecution, as the hope made manifest in Jesus is the point here, in the Gospel of Luke. And now we must deal with Mary.

In his film, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pier Paolo Passolini begins with an image that calls to mind the annunciation to Mary. He pictures a young woman standing in front of a stone wall, with a stunned look on her face. That is all. The Annunciation to Mary, in Luke, is modeled on several examples from the Hebrew Scriptures, with these elements: a divine messenger, the emotions of the recipient, the message itself, questions from the recipient, and finally acceptance. We see this in the story of Ishmael and Isaac, and Samson, and of Samuel himself. What we have here is a confluence of traditions about the birth of Jesus, and a Luke who forms these traditions into a narrative that speaks to his agenda in his Gospel.

The Gospel begins in Jerusalem, and will end dramatically in Jerusalem, but in this instance, we are brought to Galilee, where the ministry of Jesus will begin in earnest. We will be drawn again to Jerusalem in order for Luke to tie Jesus to David, the king, but the beginning of Jesus' story really begins with this announcement in Galilee. What we have in Luke is the juxtaposition of the grandiose and the commonplace: Jerusalem and Nazareth, Gabriel and Mary, the mighty and those of low estate, angels and shepherds.

In earlier readings, today, we have seen David, as chosen by God and favored by God. But here it is Mary, and we are clued into that by the angel's greeting, "O favored one". Both the greeting and the title are related to the Greek word for "grace". Like David, Mary is the chosen and is the recipient of God's grace, in ways that will challenge her and our imaginations. One wonders if her being overcome by the Holy Spirit engendered not only the Child in her womb, but her prophetic nature as well, speaking in clear and definite tones in the Magnificat. Fred Danker writes in his commentary on Luke with regard to Mary calling herself a "handmaid of the Lord", "Mary is therefore a model of what Israel ought to be, and her self-description is a mark of identity for the new community." And that is what we are left with on this final day of Advent – a Mary who wonders but accepts. One wonders what her thoughts were during the nine months of her pregnancy. Perhaps we share with her a wondering as we await the coming of Jesus – not the baby in a manger, but the Jesus who frees all sorts and conditions of people. But until then, let us journey to the manger, and let us get ready to adore.

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