

Advent IV FLC B
Luke 1-26-38
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LET ME TELL YOU A STORY

When we spoke of Matthew and his account of Jesus' life, we spoke of his reverence for the Old Testament, for the teachings of Moses and his five discourses as he trained his disciples for their ministry. These five discourses some have compared to the five Books of Moses: Genesis through Deuteronomy.

Today's lesson is from Luke, a very different Gospel writer. True, he spoke of the same Jesus and his ministry. But the **way** Luke tells it is very different from Matthew. While Matthew spoke of doctrine, Luke tells a story. And for us it is a very famous story.

So today I would like to speak to you of three stories: One from the OT lesson for today from the Book of Samuel, one from Luke, and one from today.

I

The first story has to do with King David, 1,000 years before Jesus. King David has put his enemies to flight, has settled into his palace, which was beautiful and impressive. The kingdom was at peace and David had time to reflect and to think on what he had done.

His thoughts turned to the source of his success, his faith and his God. He spoke to his holy man, Nathan the Prophet, and pondered the fact that he, David, lived in a beautiful palace, but the Ark of the Covenant, the Presence of God, still sheltered in a tent, the tabernacle of old.

He told Nathan that he planned to build a fitting palace, a house, for the Ark, where God's presence could dwell in dignity. That he could do. He was the King wasn't he? He would do it for God.

Nathan, ever diplomatic in the presence of the King, held his peace. But that night Nathan took this thought to God in prayer. The next day, Nathan came to the Palace and told David what God had said to Nathan: Never has God, in all the days that God has led his people, requested a house of cedar. But it was God who brought David from among the sheep to shepherd the people of Israel.

In short, it was not David who makes God great. Instead, it was God who made David great. In fact, God will make a "house" for David. A house, as in a dynasty, an inheritance, a worthy family of faith who will lead the people of Israel. This is a play on words, but it has depth of meaning: That it is God who does things here. The Word of God is powerful and does great things.

This is a greater gift than David could give to God! David could build for God a house of cedar, but God could make of David, a dynasty that would live forever! It is a gift that will last 1,000

years and will leave a legacy that will come to pass in the birth of the Messiah, Emanuel, God with us.

II

The second story grows out of the first: Mary, probably a teen-ager, in Nazareth, engaged to a man names Joseph, of the “house”, that is, of the family of the Great King David, is visited by the Angel Gabriel. This meeting, often referred to as **The Annunciation** begins the account of what results in the birth of Jesus.

Mary, visited by an Angel, a huge heavenly being, or Messenger, is at first frightened. The angel tells Mary “Do Not Be Afraid” One does not meet God casually! Certainly Mary wondered for her safety! Over 150 times in the Bible, we read of people who were frightened when they realized they were in the presence of God! The mighty God, creator of heaven and earth, the God who moves mountains, changes the course of wars and the fortunes of nations!

The Angel comforts Mary, and then reveals a message from God. The message is that she shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Jesus. Mary knew full well the name Jesus. Because that is the name that we call Joshua (Yeshua), the successor to Moses, the man who delivered the Children of Israel into the land of Promise. This son would be a deliverer of his people! Mary certainly had reason to be nervous!

Mary at first demurs: “How can this be as I am a virgin?” The angel replies that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you.” Mary understood that this is God’s doing. Mary remembered that in the story of Creation, in Genesis, God’s Spirit moved over the face of the waters. This was the creating Spirit or breath of God, that breathed life into the dust of the earth and created all people and all nations.

Further, the angel says, Mary’s son will inherit the mantle of the Great King David, whose reign over the house of Jacob will be forever, and his kingdom will have no end. And for that reason, Mary’s story leads to the third story:

III

The third story is OUR story and begins with the account that we will read at Christmas: the story of the birth of the baby Jesus. This is the child of promise. This is the child of prophecy. This is the child that Mary ultimately gives to the world and to us.

Luke’s well-known story tells us that Jesus is born in a stable, among the animals, a lowly place, hardly a “house of cedar” that King David wished for God. I like to think that Luke is telling us that this lowly place where Jesus is born is in our heart: your heart, my heart.

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We know what's in our heart. It is humbling to look there and see some of the trappings of a stable: Some animal instincts, some rough furnishings, splinters and all. Dust even. Some intentions of straw. Our heart carries in it some unsettled differences, some grudges, maybe some hard feelings. We are just as glad that it's dark in there, we don't want to see the details.

Yet, God is born in our heart, your heart and mine. God is able to deliver us from these things that bind us, from these cares that pursue us, from these temptations. Jesus is Yeshua, the Deliverer, to be born in our heart. "For the Lord of Hosts will do this." It is not of our own doing, or of King David's doing, or even of Mary's doing. The Lord of Hosts will do this. The Son of God will be born in our stable-heart to set us free!

This Advent, this time of preparation, is the time to open our heart to God and prepare a place for him there, that he may live there, build his Kingdom there, a kingdom that will never end. Amen