

Advent 4 2020
Rev. Adam T. Trambley
2 Samuel 7:1-11,16; Luke 1:26-38
December 20, 2020, St. John's Sharon, Pandemic Worship Service

When the world turns upside down, God is here.

This morning's readings, we have two key turning points in Salvation History regarding the coming of the Messiah. In the first reading from Second Samuel, God makes a promise to King David that his house and throne will continue forever. This promise comes to fruition in Jesus Christ, born of the house of David, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and, by the way, is seated on a much higher throne than David ever imagined.

The Gospel reading is the story of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and tells her that she is to bear a child who will be Son of the Most High and fulfill God's promise by giving him the throne of David. Mary says, "Yes" to God, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be done with me according to your word." This most highly favored lady becomes the mother of Jesus.

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Often we explore these stories from the big picture perspective, looking at the incredible work that God is doing in the world. This morning, I want to look at them through the eyes of David and Mary. They had rather short conversations with messengers of God that upended their lives. Yet even in the midst of that dislocation, or maybe because of it, God was standing with them.

King David was planning to build God a temple in Jerusalem. Since Moses time, the Ark of the Covenant was travelling around in a tent. This arrangement made a lot of sense wandering around in the desert, but God's people had been in the promised land for generations by the time David became king. David, with God's blessing, overcame his internal and external enemies, and established his capital in Jerusalem. Now he wanted to make a suitable edifice to house God's holy of holies.

This undertaking would be huge. When Solomon finally builds the temple, it involves international treaties to acquire materials and skilled labor from abroad, and funds needed to be raised and workers organized. Beyond that, for David having the Ark of God settled in his city of Jerusalem meant safety and security. But God sends the prophet Nathan to tell David not to build the temple. God will build a house for David, but David is not to do so for God. All David's plans are abruptly halted.

We can also imagine the near future Mary envisioned as her marriage to Joseph approached. She would have been looking forward to a joyful start of her own family with the support of the network of small town relations in Nazareth. She was not planning on being pregnant and having to navigate that situation with her future husband and her community. She was not planning on having to ride a donkey south to Bethlehem and give birth among the animals. She most certainly did not expect to have to flee as a refugee to Egypt after the baby was born. She

probably didn't expect angelic visitations, and certainly didn't expect to be the mother of the Messiah. In a conversation that seems to have taken about 5 minutes, Mary's world turned upside down.

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For many of us, life has gone topsy-turvy in no time. I remember a Monday in March when the vestry passed a pandemic response policy. By Thursday, we made the horrible decision to close down coffee hour and Sunday school classes, and the next day Bishop Sean closed all our churches for at least three weeks. That three weeks turned into months, and we are still living in the midst of numerous pandemic upheavals. Many things we had planned on and hoped for have been suspended or canceled as a church and in other aspects of our lives. Many have lost jobs or changed jobs. Students and teachers at all levels have had to navigate ever-changing educational situations and scenarios. Our health care workers, as well as many other service employees, have been at increased risk and working under highly stressful conditions. Many have become sick during this time, either from the COVID virus or other causes. We have celebrated weddings and buried the dead without entering the sanctuary, and Christmas looks be isolated and lonely for many of us.

Our lives have changed in an instant, much like David and Mary's lives. We may not have received visitations by angels or had conversations with prophets. All that as happened in the past year may seem more the result of hard-hearted human choices than the working out of God's providential plan. But that doesn't mean God isn't going to do something with it. We don't have to like or even understand what is happening. We only have to live in the midst of it, and go forward into the future God lays out for us from here. With God's help, we can do that.

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We have two takeaways today. The first is that no matter how overwhelming everything in our lives and the world today seems, it is not overwhelming to God. God created the heavens, successfully navigated the intricacies of Middle Eastern politics in the time of King David, and sustained Mary, as well as Joseph and others, through the stresses leading up to and after and during the birth of Jesus. God can handle the pandemic and the ways it affects us. Many aspects of these times are very difficult, but we can still trust God to work out good for those who love him. God knows how to get us through this time and he will do it.

Second, God remains present to us, especially in the midst of these crises. Christmas is the time we celebrate Immanuel, God-with-us. However dark the days, or lonely the COVID isolation, or scary the news cycle, God holds us in the palm of his hand. God surrounds us in his love. God never leaves us or abandons us. And however we mark Christmas this year, we are acknowledging once again that Jesus Christ has come into the world to ensure that we remain with God for ever. Thanks be to God. We can trust that saving work.

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