

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT B

READING I 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-11, 16

READING II Rom 16:25-27

GOSPEL Lk 1:26-38

Nathan's oracle is the basis of the so-called Davidic covenant. It is, more precisely, a royal grant that is an outright gift with no strings attached, an unconditional favor. The background of the oracle is David's desire to build the Lord a house: A temple. Given David's innovations up to that time, a temple would have been too shocking for the more conservative elements that insisted upon (the precedent of) the tent from the time of Israel's desert experience. Nathan's reply plays on the word 'house.' The Lord God will build David a house, not vice versa, and that house will be the Davidic dynasty.

Vv 8b-9a emphasize the Lord God's previous dealings with David. Namely, his rise from shepherd in Bethlehem to king in Jerusalem. At the same time, The Lord God assures the king that his people will enjoy rest from all their enemies. More important, David's line will last forever, even if his descendants prove unfaithful.

This passage in Romans is perhaps a non-Pauline doxology which was written by another author and added later. The doxology notes that God strengthens Christians in their faith and leads pagans to believe and obey. God achieves this through Paul's Gospel: A proclamation which has Jesus as its object. This message, too, is part of God's plan. At first it was hidden. But now it is understood in the writings of the prophets which are fulfilled in Jesus. The Christian reaction to this plan is to praise God through Jesus Christ.

Luke's annunciation to Mary is not a blow-by-blow account of God's actual communication to Mary but rather a theological picture of the significance of Jesus drawn from Old Testament models. In keeping with the annunciation literary genre in the birth narratives of Ishmael, Isaac, etc., there is an appearance of an angel which leads to the recipient's fear. Then follows the message itself: The description of Jesus as Davidic Messiah. This in turn provokes Mary's question: The apparent impossibility of compliance because of her virginal status. This question articulates Luke's description of the Davidic Messiah as Son of God through God's creative Spirit. Although Mary does not ask for it, a sign is given to confirm God's intent: Elizabeth's conception.

Luke's picture of Mary as the Lord's servant is taken from Mary's role during the ministry of Jesus and thereafter. According to Luke (8:19-21; 11:27-28), Mary is one of Jesus' disciples. She hears the Word and acts upon it. In Acts 1:14 she forms part of the prayerful Pentecost community. For Luke, Mary's openness to the Word begins at the conception of Jesus.

In humans we still trust. We worship an almighty God. God, therefore, does not need us. We recognize an all-knowing God. Yet, God can do nicely without us. We acknowledge a provident God. Still, God does not require our failures and weaknesses. Nevertheless, God runs the risk of having humans run a truly human world. God still maintains the position: In humans we still trust.

Israel entered a new era when David became king. David believed that humans can and do make a difference: Human initiative is proper to the kingdom of God. Though David also exhibited great weaknesses, God relied on him to provide for his people. The Davidic covenant was a vote of confidence in humans. David thereby became the Old Testament example of the Lord God's stance: In humans we still trust.

The world entered a new era when Mary complied with God's wishes. God chose to rely on the virgin to bring about God's plan for humanity. Mary did make a difference. By saying yes, she became part of the drama of salvation history wherein God chooses to need humans. Mary of Nazareth thus coincided with David of Bethlehem/Jerusalem, for God continued to say: In humans we still trust.

The shy and timid who meet the challenges of their world demonstrate God's reliance on humans. Leaders who speak out against injustice and lack of concern show God speaking here and now. The talented who develop and share their gifts to serve others indicate that God's confidence is not ill placed. Parents and educators who faithfully communicate a Christian lifestyle reveal a God who chooses to need humans. In all such instances God insists: In humans we still trust.

Eucharist proclaims that humans can and do make a difference. Eucharist dwells on the concern of Jesus to work out the will of his Father and so provoke the kingdom. Eucharist offers the modern community the Father's concern to provoke the kingdom here and now. Eucharist thereby repeats the Father's viewpoint as seen in Jesus. Namely: In humans we still trust.