

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 20, 2020 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord God, Spring of Joy, come and be with us as we gather to listen to your Word. Mary our Mother, pray for us and help us to follow your example by saying ‘yes’ to what God asks of us. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week’s Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week’s Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the First Reading, David wishes to build a house for God but God has other plans. He intends to house himself in Mary and manifest himself in the flesh (Gospel). The Second Reading speaks about the mystery of salvation about to be revealed.

Let us listen to God’s Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: 2Samuel 7:1-5, 8-16

This reading is regarded as one of the most important passages in the Old Testament because it sets off Israel’s messianic hope, the beginning of words about a Messiah who would come from the House of David.

At this time in David’s career, he has defeated all his enemies and is living in a nice palace. Seeing that God (symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant) is living in a tent, he wants to build a Temple for God. He reveals his thoughts and plans to Nathan, a prophet. But God has other plans which he reveals to Nathan.

God tells Nathan, “Go tell my servant David that instead of him building a house for me (something his son Solomon will do), I will build a ‘house’ for him”—a reference to the dynasty of David from which Jesus will come. (Luke tells us in today’s Gospel that Joseph is from the house of David.)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 89

This Psalm echoes the sentiments of the First Reading by focusing on God’s fidelity to his promise to be with his people forever.

SECOND READING: Romans 16:25-27

This reading contains the three concluding verses to a long doctrinal epistle. They appear to have been

selected for their reference to the “mystery” which was hidden for all ages but which is now made manifest. The “mystery” is God’s plan for the salvation of all people without distinction. Jesus is at the center of this plan.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 1:26-38

As we listen to this First Reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this Second Reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Luke 1:26-38

Only in Luke’s Gospel do we read the Annunciation story. Neither Mark nor John has stories about Jesus’ birth. In Matthew, the Annunciation story features Joseph, not Mary.

At the beginning of the Gospel story, we are told that Joseph, Mary’s future husband, is of the house of David. So the promise God made to David will be brought to fruition in Mary’s child. He will be given the throne of David and will rule forever.

Mary's initial response to Angel Gabriel's appearance and greeting is fear, a pretty common reaction. Sensing Mary's fear, the angel speaks one of the most common phrases in Scripture: "Do not be afraid."

The angel proceeds to tell Mary about her "miraculous conception." While remaining a virgin, she will conceive a child through the power of the Holy Spirit. Unlike any other child before or after him, this child will be both *human* (born of Mary) and *divine* (born of the Spirit).

In the Annunciation story, the name 'Jesus' is significant. The name means 'savior.' His purpose and mission will be to bring salvation to his people.

To help Mary grow in her understanding of God's mysterious ways, the angel informs her of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy. Though advanced in years, she too is with child for "nothing is impossible with God."

The Gospel story concludes with Mary's 'fiat' ("Let it be done to me.")—Mary's 'yes.' Her 'yes' to the angel makes her a model disciple. It expresses her openness and receptivity to God's call.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Mary received her call to ministry at a young age. When and how did you receive your call?
3. Can you name a time when it was very hard for you to say 'yes' to God?
4. What is your relationship to Mary? What has helped it to develop?
5. Name one thing today's Gospel says so us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Try to be aware whenever you say 'yes' and 'no' to God. Pray for opportunities to share your faith this Christmas Season.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Mary, your 'yes' to the Angel makes you a model disciple for us. Help us to say 'yes' to God even when we do not want to.*

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: For what and for whom shall we pray? Remember to pray for all for whom Christmas is a difficult and painful time.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*Come and dwell among us, O Lord,
as we wait to celebrate the moment
when your Word became flesh.
Help us to sense your presence this Christmas
and to witness to it
when we get the opportunity.
Amen.*