“Promise of Love”

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2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:26-38

December 24, 2023 (10am) Advent 4

***2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16***

***7 Now when the king was settled in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” 3Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind, for the Lord is with you.”***

***4But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 5“Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 6I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. 7Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’ 8Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel, 9and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place and be disturbed no more, and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel, and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house******.  16Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.”***

***Luke 1:26-38***

***26In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” 29******But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37For nothing will be impossible with God.”  38Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.***

The first scripture that Dave read this morning was from the old testament text of 2 Samuel. The book of Samuel, originally one set of writings, was set down about 650 years before Christ. It tells of the dynasties of Saul, David and Solomon. These are pieces of Israelite history that led communities to recognize God’s work among Israelite history. References to the words of the prophets are what the people of Jesus’ time would have looked to whenever they hoped for God to help them. The reading today is a reminder that God promised that the House of David would continue forever.

However, when the Lord said to King David, through the prophet Nathan, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” the words were not referring to a physical house, kingdom or throne. After all, what was known as the Davidic Kingdom fell 400 years after this promise was made. Promises made to the Israelites have long made up a kind of checklist of things to look for when looking for the coming savior, the coming Messiah. This is why we read so much in our gospel stories about Jesus being from the lineage of King David. Check. The gospel of Matthew begins, “An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham,” and continues to list all of the following generations. Our second reading from the gospel of Luke is careful to refer to Joseph as “Joseph of the house of David” early on in the description of who the angel Gabriel came to talk to. It’s why we have Christmas carols like “Once in Royal David’s City.” In the carol, “O Come, O Come Immanuel” one verse begins, “O Come O Key of David Come.” The link to David is crucial to our gospel writers because of this promise that the house of David will be eternal.

I wonder if Mary would ever have imagined that she would play a part in the continuation of God’s covenant with David. Not yet even married, she finds herself startled by an angel. My kind of girl, Mary was justifiably suspicious – “But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.” Good for her! The angel assured her she had no need to be afraid, and then amazed her with these seven grand pronouncements:

“You are highly favored. The Lord is with you. You will give birth to a son. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Not to be blinded by grand promises, Mary still asked again, “How can this be?” Rather than silence her for questioning him like this same angel Gabriel did to Zechariah, Gabriel answers her. I’m pretty sure that his answer, “the power of the most High shall overshadow you” made about as much sense to her as it does to you and me. But when Gabriel said that this same miracle had happened to her relative Elizabeth, that brought Mary some comfort. Maybe Mary knew she would be able to share the mysteries of the experience with someone. Commentator Rachel Mann, a priest in the Church of England writes, “Mary’s willingness to unite her will and purposes to those of God is no mere afterthought. There is an extraordinary, quiet, and deeply prophetic determination when Mary says, “Let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She joins a long line of those who take their place in God’s work of justice and love. Mary speaks and claims her place. She will not simply be done to. She transforms God’s invitation into service and action.”

I love this take on Mary’s “yes” to Gabriel. Rachel Mann offers just one way to understand the willingness of Mary. I love it because it means that when confronted with something that could be a promise from God, we can make a choice “unite our will and purposes to those of God,” and be a part of that “long line of those who take our place in God’s work of justice and love.” It means that we can keep the mystery of these miracle events while still finding a way to hope that even in our lives we will be able to recognize and participate in God’s work. I’m sure Mary didn’t see it coming. God may not make broad announcements in advance and give us time to plan for opportunities to follow. It’s our job to find a way to pay attention to God that works for us.

How does God speak to you? In nature? Private quiet moments of prayer? During physical work – exercise, gardening, physical labor? While making music? Dancing?

None of us is unreachable. God will speak to us in the midst of chaos, a whirlwind, or in a still small voice, maybe even like that tiny gnat we keep waving away from our face!

The Christmas season that the world gives us comes in a rush, fast and furious with merchandising, the best deals we can’t miss, things to spend money on, and then poof, it’s gone, and along with it are the good will and sense of belonging many of us hoped for.’

But the Christmas season that Christ brings us stays around every day of every year and does not end. As we return this evening to celebrate the remembrance of the beginning of Christ coming to be with us, to celebrate the birth of the child promised to Mary, may we bring with us the hope and comfort that has come with that child.

Amen.

**1My struggle with Mary:** Can Jesus’ mother be redeemed from the church’s tendency to parcel her up into a patriarchal box and then label it “glory”?

by [Rachel Mann](https://www.christiancentury.org/contributor/rachel-mann) in the [December 2023](https://www.christiancentury.org/issue/december-2023) issue of Christian Century; *Rachel Mann is a priest in the Church of England, a theologian, and author of*Spectres of God*.*

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-of-advent-2/commentary-on-luke-126-38-6>