

Advent Study 4

How is your Christmas shopping going?

How do you deal with the commercialism of Christmas versus the “real meaning of Christmas”?

What is the real meaning of Christmas for you?

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

1 Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 the 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." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." 4 But 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? 6 I 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. 7 Wherever 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?"

8 Now 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; 9 and 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. 10 And 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, 11 from 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.

16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

In verses 3 & 4 we see that even prophets get it wrong. Have you ever had an experience when the Word of God has come to you?

How do we hear God? How do we know when God is with us?

David wants to build God a house (v. 2) but God turns that idea around and says that David he will make David a house (v. 11). What does this mean?

David's house for God vs God's house of David - How can we see this story relating to us and the way we go about Church?

We say that the church is not a building but a people. How might it be seen that we try to box God into an idea about who God is?

Luke 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He 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. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

35 The 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. 36 And 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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

38 Then 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.

What might it have been like to be Mary after she had heard this news as an unmarried girl in a judgemental culture where adultery (sex outside of marriage – at least for women) was punishable by stoning to death?

What worries would she have had? How do you tell your family and fiancé that you are pregnant but are still a virgin in a culture where such an announcement meant great and lasting shame on the family's honour?

How easy or hard do you find it to believe in this part of the story – that the Virgin Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Jesus?

Nothing is impossible for God (v. 37). Do you believe this to be true? What are your doubts?

Where do you draw the line for the limits of possibility- At angels; at the virgin conception; at miracles; at Jesus being the Son of God; at the Spirit of God; at the existence of God?

Advent is a special time when we contemplate the sacred. The Scriptures tell us that God came near. The disciples were witness to this reality and the Church – we the people of God - still experience God with us today. Wherever there is doubt, God breaks through to light the flame of faith or gently blows with the Spirit and breathes life once again.

Romans 16:25-27

25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith --27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.