

#### **4 Advent, Year B (RCL) – *Are we Ready?***

**2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26**

**The Rev. Skip Bushee**

Well here we are. Christmas is but a few days away. Unless you are a procrastinator like me, your shopping is about done; the Christmas tree is up and the house is all decorated. And now we can begin to look forward to the celebrations to come.

But hold on. In all of the mad rush to get ready for Christmas, have we perhaps forgotten something, left something behind? In all of the rush to get our house in order for Christmas, have we forgotten what it takes to make a house a home?

Well, that's what I think our lessons are about today – building God's house and making it into a home for all people.

In our Old Testament lesson, King David wants to build a temple in Jerusalem for the Lord, seemingly a reasonable idea, since the Israelites had ended their wanderings and were building permanent dwellings. If they were settling down, perhaps the portable tabernacle that had served as God's abode was no longer appropriate. David may also have had a political motive in mind: if he made Jerusalem the center of worship for the Jews, that action would strengthen the importance of his capital as the political center for his kingdom.

But the Lord, through his prophet Nathan, tells David that he doesn't desire such a dwelling. Instead, God declares that his house will not be built of mere brick and mortar but will be built on David's dynasty. Instead of a physical dwelling, God desires a home based on human flesh and blood. Of course, the Jews were disappointed when David's political dynasty came to an end in 587 B.C.E., but we know now that God was talking about something more than an earthly kingdom. Christians interpret this passage as a prophesy that the Son of God would be born of the house of David and this eternal kingdom would be for all, not just for the Israelites or those who ascribe to a particular religious doctrine.

The key message is that God does not desire fancy temples or cathedrals. Instead, God desires a true home within the hearts of each of us. Churches, synagogues and mosques are places where people come to worship but often leave God behind when they exit the building. God wants to dwell with us always, not just when we come to Church.

Our Gospel lesson builds on this theme as the archangel Gabriel appears to a humble frightened young woman and declares that she will be the mother of the Son of the Most High, fulfilling the prophesy in Samuel. Significantly, the angel tells her that she is to name the child Jesus, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, meaning "God has saved." How appropriate for the one who came to save us all.

God did not choose a woman of status or property to give birth to the Messiah. Rather, God chose someone of modest means, betrothed to a simple carpenter. Jesus was not

born in a palace or great cathedral; he was born in a stable. The point is inescapable: God does not require a fancy house; God required a true home – a home within our hearts.

So the question we must answer for ourselves today is: as we prepare our houses for the coming of the Christ child, including this one here at 178 Clinton Street, what are we doing to prepare a home for the living Jesus?

Here are some questions we might need to ask ourselves:

As we look forward to celebrating with family and friends, are there any long-standing animosities or hurts that we still harbor? Perhaps we need to offer forgiveness in our hearts and thereby open a long-closed door.

Is there some sadness that we carry in our hearts, perhaps the memory of a loved one with whom we shared joyous Christmases in the past? Perhaps we need to ask God to help us put away the sadness and honor the person's memory by finding new joy this season.

Are we anxious about the future – anxious about our job, our financial well-being, or our health? Perhaps we need to pray that God will walk with us as we bear the burdens of life and relieve us of our anxieties.

Do we feel a sense of guilt over things we failed to do? Perhaps we failed to call or visit a friend at a time of need or perhaps we never got around to volunteering for that project to help the homeless. Whatever it is, we might say a prayer asking God's forgiveness and help toward motivating us in the future.

All these things that we carry tend to close our hearts to the warmth and love of God within us and by releasing them, we prepare the home for God within us that God so dearly desires, especially as we celebrate the incarnation of our Lord.

And lastly, what about this house here at St. Peter's? Remember that God did not want David to build a temple in Jerusalem, presumably knowing that humans would try to lock God up within its walls, rather than make it a beacon to spread the good news throughout the world. Is St. Peter's a place where God's light shines forth throughout the community and the world or is it a private club where the "members" come to share an hour or two of fellowship once a week? Are we fed by our experience here, enabling us to enter the wider world as emissaries of God's grace or do we leave God behind as we walk out the door? Do we focus our energies as a community on maintaining and improving our building for our own use or do we seek to find ways that our building may be of use to the wider community?

Sometimes I feel that we would be more successful as a church if we woke up one morning and found that all of our magnificent churches, all of our beautiful and historic cathedrals had magically disappeared during the night. Then we would be forced to take our ministries to the wider world, instead of spending all our energies on maintaining a few crumbling buildings.

So as we make our final preparations for the joyous celebration of the coming of the Christ child, we must not forget one final task: to prepare a true home for the living God within our hearts and in our church. Have we cleaned out all the old animosities, hurts and feelings of guilt to make room for the Christ within us and are we prepared to share that light throughout our community and the world? I am convinced that the more we are able to do these things, the more joyous our Christmas celebration will be.