



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

#### **4th Sunday of Advent Year B**

##### ***The House of David***

*Readings: Samuel 7: 1-5, 8-12, 14, 16, Ps 88, Romans 16: 25-27, Luke 1: 26-38*

In the interests of brevity the compilers of the lectionary have edited the Old Testament reading for today. Look at your textual reference and you will see that they have excised four verses. This is a pity because today's reading has two key and intertwining themes and by this slipshod editing they have managed to obscure one of them, arguably the more important.

Today's reading finds King David settled in the land, his kingdom secure and his stock 'on the up'. This is well before his adultery with Bathsheba, the organised murder of his loyal friend or the ruinous and heartbreaking civil war with his over ambitious son, Absalom. He looks around him and reflects that while he now lives in a beautiful house, the Presence of God, the Ark, still dwells in a tent as in the days of the wilderness. It becomes his noble ambition to provide a beautiful house for God. Nothing wrong with that. Indeed the prophet, Nathan, applauds his thinking.

However, this turns out to be merely human thinking and God soon speaks to Nathan to correct his approbation. It will not be David's task to build the Temple. The Lord reminds David that he cannot domesticate God. Rather, everything that David has is from God and, indeed, God will build him a house, a royal house that will last forever. From this provision will come the foundation of the House of God, the place where He will dwell among men.

The two intertwining themes then, obscured by overenthusiastic editing, are the security and futurity of the line of David AND that, through this, God will ensure His dwelling among men.

Here, on this fourth Sunday in Advent, it is given to us to remember these two key points. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke go to great lengths, both in genealogy and the accounts of the birth of Jesus to underline the historical connection. The credentials of the Messiah must include that He is of the royal lineage of Israel's great king, David. Not only the Gospels but also the earliest sermons recorded in Holy Scripture are careful to reference David. (Some of the doubts in Jesus' earthly lifetime focussed on this. Remember Nathaniel who doubted Jesus could be Messiah if He came from Nazareth. Hence the historical significance, not only of the bloodline but of the birthplace, the little town of David, Bethlehem. Where God had raised up the young shepherd king of Israel, so He would provide the Good and Eternal shepherd of Man.)

The provenance of the Davidic line was, and remains, essential to Christian preaching of the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies in Jesus.

To put it the other way round..... if these prophecies in Holy Scripture are from God, then who else in all history has or could fulfil the promise of the eternal and unbroken kingship of the line of David in his descendants. There is and can be no other candidate, only Jesus. So that is the first of the great and intertwining threads. The second is like it.

God promised David that He would provide him (David) with a house (a dynasty) that would provide God Himself with a house where God was glorified. Understandably the human thinking was to build a temple and, in Solomon's time, this was done. By the time of Jesus that Temple was long destroyed, the defeats, the exile, the return, the long struggle to rebuild had taken centuries. There was now a new magnificent Temple built by the deeply unloved and unlovely Herod, a half-breed collaborator with the occupying Romans. Clearly not what God had promised. Within a lifetime that Temple too would be dust, the kingdom destroyed and the people scattered in a new exile.

But God keeps His promise. The House of David will provide God with a house where He is glorified. But God does not choose bricks and mortar. He does not long for cedar panels, swirling silks and gold finials. He does not require baroque extravagance or vast colonnades. He seeks to manifest Himself in time, in history and in our humanity. To do this He comes to the line of David and chooses Mary to be the Mother of His Only Son. She is to become, one of her beautiful titles, Ark of the Covenant. Mary is the bearer of the Divine Word, the Manifester of the Presence, the Mother of God. And to Joseph, the line bearer, God gives the gift of guardianship.

This royal house now brings forth the King in whom God is eternally glorified and, beyond His earthly sacrifice and resurrection, becomes, both in His Divinity and His Humanity, the eternal King. Jesus.

Where God comes to dwell with Man, we are about to celebrate in the great Feast of the Nativity. The ones to whom He entrusts Himself are marked not by ostentation and grandeur but by loving, faithful hearts, by a spirit of humility and obedience, a desire for holiness and a yearning for the kingdom to come. However beautiful our temple may be, parish church or great basilica, it will require these qualities of its living stones, you and me, if God is truly to be glorified and a people yet unknown come to kneel in His Presence.

© 2017 Fowey Retreat