

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WEST TEXAS

Sunday Readings for Advent 2017

Advent IV

Sunday, December 24

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

If you have a home Advent wreath, the following simple liturgy for lighting the fourth candle on your wreath.

Prayers for candle-lighting

The Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

[Light the candle]

For nothing is impossible with God.

The Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

Interpreting the Readings

We hear several important themes emerge from our readings this week: God is always present and on the move in the lives of God's people, recognizing and honoring those who are humble and open to hearing and responding to the word of God in their lives.

Our first reading comes from the canonical book called 2 Samuel. Most scholars agree that both 1 and 2 Samuel were written during the Babylonian exile (6th century BCE). They offer theological interpretations of the reasons for the demise of the kingdoms of Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south) over the course of the preceding centuries.

More specifically, our Advent IV reading from 2 Samuel focuses on a "dialogue" between Israel's great King David and the Lord (through the prophet Nathan). This passage, as with much of 1 and 2 Samuel, presents King David as a man clearly blessed by the Lord despite his complex, ambiguous character.

We briefly mentioned some of the major themes of the Gospel of Luke in Session Three. In this gospel, Jesus works to free, comfort, heal, feed, and reconcile his people to God. In his ministry, empowered by the Holy Spirit, Jesus enacts the great jubilee proclaimed by Isaiah ("the year of the Lord's favor"), a time when debts are forgiven, captives are freed, and land returned to those who were earlier forced to sell it. In Luke, we might say that Jesus "levels the playing field" for all people, raising up the lowly and outcast of our world, while bringing down the high and mighty to their proper place before God.

These major themes in the Gospel of Luke are introduced in the *Magnificat*, also

known as the Song of Mary, assigned for this Advent IV Sunday. We hear the young Mary's gratitude that God has looked favorably on her, God's "lowly servant" to use her own words of self-description, while casting down the mighty from their thrones and sending the rich away empty.

In Luke's story of the Annunciation to Mary, which is today's gospel reading, we hear echoes of our first passage from 2 Samuel. The angel Gabriel tells Mary "the Lord is with you" and promises her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her, and the power of the Most High will overshadow her. As Mary's life takes this unexpected and dramatic turn, she can take comfort in the abiding presence of the Lord in her life.

For Reflection

From the beginning, God's faithful people have regularly looked back on earlier events in their lives and tried to identify the many ways God has been active, both with blessings and with creative judgments.

As you begin this fourth and final week of Advent, take a few minutes to look back on earlier events in your own life and that of your congregation. Do you now see more clearly some of the ways God was at work, at times confirming your faithfulness and at other times judging your waywardness to help you get back on track? Give thanks to God for all these insights, since our lives today are shaped both by the blessings we've received, as well as the redirection that comes from our stumbles.

Recall an experience in your own life when your awareness of God's abiding presence helped you through a difficult or challenging time.