

This week's Scripture - Sunday 20th December 2020 – Advent 4

2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16; Luke 1.46b-55 or Psalm 89.1-4, 19-26; Romans 16.25-27; Luke 1.26-38

2 Samuel 7.1-11,16: King David is distressed that there is no temple for God, though he has built himself a palace. In our reading today, God speaks through the prophet Nathan to David that God never desired “a house to live in,” but rather, God desires to make David and his throne a home for the people of Israel. This home of identity will be a place of peace and rest. The people’s identity and homeland will be tied to David and his throne, a kingdom established forever.

Luke 1:46b-55: The first selection for a Psalm reading is the Magnificat. Mary sings her song of praise, echoing the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. She sings in response of what Elizabeth has said to her, telling her that God has blessed her, and sings to glorify God. Mary’s vision of what God will do for the people echoes what Hannah sang, and what the prophets spoke of, that the proud are scattered in their thoughts, the lowly raised up. The powerful are brought down from their thrones. The hungry are filled with good things and the rich are sent away empty. God has remembered the promises of old, made to Abraham and Sarah and all their descendants.

Psalm 89 is the alternative psalm which begins with the psalmist singing praise for God’s steadfast love and covenant made with David and to his descendants forever. This longer psalm sings of God’s reign, and God’s promises made to David. Vs. 19-26 recalls the vision God gave the prophet Nathan, and that God remains faithful to David and his kingdom forever. God will protect David and deliver him from his enemies, and David will call God his Father, his Rock and his Salvation.

Romans 16.25-27: The benediction of Paul’s letter to the church in Rome speaks of the mystery that was kept secret and has now been revealed. Through all the prophetic writings of scripture, Christ has been revealed to the Gentiles as well, so that all people, of all backgrounds, may be faithful to God.

Luke 1.26-38: The angel Gabriel visits Mary. Like Zechariah in the verses before this, Mary wonders what sort of greeting this might be, that the angel of God has come to speak to her. But unlike Zechariah, whose question is about proof that his wife Elizabeth will conceive, Mary’s question is more of “how can this be possible?” With Zechariah and Elizabeth, the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Elkanah and Hannah would have been known. However, for Mary to conceive without being with a man was unheard of. But when Gabriel tells her how she has found favour, how her son will be called Son of the Most High, and that nothing is impossible with God, Mary gives her consent: “I am God’s servant. Let it be with me, according to what you have said.” With Zechariah and Elizabeth, Gabriel was delivering news of a long-prayed-for child. With Mary, this was quite unexpected, but her response is to say yes to God, to serve God, and to fulfil what the angel has said to her.

Reflection: God is the fulfiller of promises—the promises of old, and the promises to us. God’s promises are not often fulfilled how we would expect, or when we would expect—but God remains faithful. For the early Christians, they saw the fulfilment of God’s promises to David and his kingdom through Jesus, reigning of the kingdom of God on earth. Our Jewish siblings have other interpretations of how God’s promises are fulfilled, but our stories teach all of us that God remains faithful, even when we do not, even when we forget and fall away. For God is love; God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Praying with others or alone...

Call to Worship

We are expectantly waiting;

Christmas is almost here!

We have lit our candles and watched for signs;

Christmas is almost here!

We've counted the days and counted the blessings in our hearts;

Christmas is almost here!

Come, Lord Jesus, enter our world and our lives in a new way;

Be born in us again, Lord Jesus!

Prayer of Brokenness / Confession

Ancient of Days, we confess that we are an impatient people.

We want a response to our prayers right now.

We want answers to the questions we have and if we have to wait,
we begin to waver in our faith.

We are impatient for justice when it serves us,

but delay it for others when it is inconvenient or requires us to relinquish power or control.

Forgive us. Call us into Your ways, to put aside our selfish desires and instead,

seek the well-being and wholeness of others, especially those who are on the margins,
those who have suffered oppression.

May we remember that our own prayers are answered

when we love one another and care for one another, because then we know Your love and care.

In the name of Christ, who calls us into this expectant waiting,

who is the Word that became Flesh and lived among us, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness / Blessing

God's steadfast love endures forever.

God remains faithful, even when we do not.

Know that God's love never ends and is always with you.

The light shines and cannot be extinguished.

You are forgiven, loved, and restored.

As we approach Christmas, may you be filled anew with wonder and awe,
and know that God's love is making all things new. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Turning, we approach this Solstice,

this point when the northern hemisphere is wrapped in cold and dark,

and the southern hemisphere in warmth and light, we know that things will change.

In this year of Covid, we turn into a new year with hope for vaccines and life to flourish again.

We turn to a new year with hope that we have learned lessons about our need to care for others,
to do our part to mitigate risk, to recognize how fragile our systems are as people struggle.

We turn to Your light, to a renewal of living into Your ways,

and seek the light in the world and the people around us, as well as within.

Light of the World, shine through us in new ways. Amen.