

# Bible Study: Advent 4 (B) – Dec. 20, 2020

## 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

While David has in mind what most people would conceive of in hearing the word “temple,” God appears to be thinking of something altogether different. This is especially clear whenever we read this passage through the lens of the New Testament. David desires to construct a building for the Lord. Yet, we see that God is resistant to the notion, not because he dislikes the idea in general, but because David is not the one he has chosen for this task, and there is more to the notion of temple than a physical building. New Testament authors and the Church Fathers and Mothers would later read this passage typologically, depicting human bodies as God’s temple. Mary certainly had a hand in this construction in bearing Jesus, the person in whom God’s fullness dwells. Jesus also constructs the temple of God out of the Church. The point in all of this is not that God doesn’t want a temple in which to dwell, but rather that David’s blueprints do not quite align with God’s. We will come to find out that God prefers human bodies over inanimate buildings.

- How should we treat ourselves knowing that our bodies are temples for God, and how should this notion impact how we relate to others?

## Canticle 3 / Canticle 15 (Luke 1:46-55) The Song of Mary

This is a familiar song, yet I am struck each time I come to it by the depth of the transformation it presents. Mary’s words here are part of a broader conversation. Just prior to this, Mary’s cousin Elizabeth honors Mary as the mother of God. Mary, though, turns the praise back toward God, honoring the way God uses the lowly and insignificant, the poor and unimportant, who will receive the deliverance of God. The rich and powerful, though, will reject it and walk away empty. God’s mercy transforms lives, turns things upside down, liberates us so that we can see with new eyes the changes that God brings into the world.

- In what aspects of your life do you feel lowly and poor?
- In what ways might God be using these to transform and liberate you?

## Romans 16:25-27

In this doxology, Paul would have us lift our hearts to the God who can strengthen us “according” to three different things, and these three accordings form an interesting progression of thought. To paraphrase, God strengthens us according to the proclamation of the Gospel, according to the revealed mystery of Christ (which

now incorporates the Gentiles), and according to the sanctifying command of God. The movement is from the mere reception of the Gospel, to the reinterpreting of the Old Testament Scriptures in light of the mystery revealed (and beholding the cosmic Christ in light of this revelation), then to the life of obedience that forms the response to these things. If we are to immerse ourselves in the wisdom of the “only wise God,” we must keep these dynamics together. God’s wisdom will not permit us to simply receive the Gospel and do nothing with it, nor will it let us be negligent towards the inclusion of all sorts of people in the Church as we seek to live lives of obedience. The wisdom of God keeps all of these dynamics intimately together. We should do likewise.

- Which of these dynamics has strengthened you in your faith journey? To which might you need to be more attentive?

### **Luke 1:26-38**

In Luke’s Gospel, the story of Jesus doesn’t begin where one might presume it should begin. It doesn’t begin with Jesus. Rather, the story of Jesus begins with his mother. While we may be tempted to read our own finely-tuned theological presumptions back into this story, we would be wise to read the text for what it is saying and not for what we have come to expect it to say. In other words, the Incarnation is not the central theme in this passage, nor is Luke trying to convince us that Mary is the Theotokos (“God-bearer”), although aspects of these ideas certainly can be inferred. Rather, Luke would have us turn our attention to the fact that God has used the meekest of human beings to accomplish his divine will. He would have us meditate upon Mary’s response to God (her willingness in saying, “Let it be...”), and perhaps it is this preexisting demeanor that has earned her the title “favored one,” even before the child is conceived in her womb.

- How important is Mary’s “let it be,” and how does it enhance how we think about the Incarnation?
- How significant is it that God does not bypass human participation in bringing about his divine will?