

Kerry Mansir  
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Advent 4  
Christ Church Gardiner

Our reading this morning from Second Samuel was chosen for the lectionary because it speaks to God establishing the house of David. This is God's promise: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."

Fast forward about a thousand years, and the angel Gabriel is visiting a young woman in Galilee to share the news that Mary, like David, has found favor with God. And that she will conceive and bear a son to be named Jesus. "He will be great," Gabriel says, "and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David."

This throne that God established with David, will come to its fulfillment in Jesus. It makes sense that these two stories should go together.

But I think the reading from Second Samuel has a deeper meaning for us as we find ourselves in the 10<sup>th</sup> month of a pandemic and unable to worship together safely in our church.

King David, for all of his faults—and he had many, loved God deeply. And we find in this reading that he is reaching the last years of his life. David succeeded in fighting and overcoming the enemies that surrounded Israel, and he established his throne in Jerusalem. And now, rather than spending most of his time on the battlefield, he is resting in his lovely, and likely expensive, house made of cedar. This boy that was called by God out of the fields where he was tending his sheep to be anointed king, understands the favor and blessing that were set upon him, and he wants to return God's favor by building God a house. If David has a fancy house for his throne than surely God deserves one, too.

But upon learning of David's intention, God has a message for the prophet Nathan to share. And that message is: God doesn't need a house.

The Lord said, "[David], are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle...I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went. (excerpt from 2 Samuel 7)

God doesn't need a house. God has been there all along and will continue to be present with God's people. God was with Abraham and Moses. God was with the Israelites in captivity and in their wandering in the wilderness. God was with them when they were exiled by foreign powers like Assyria and Babylon. God is with them a

thousand years after King David, when an angel visits a Jewish girl in Galilee to tell her she will give birth to the Messiah and he will be called Emmanuel which means God with us.

David won't be the one to build God's house. It is David's son, Solomon, who will build the great Temple. And what an ornate, extravagant, and expensive Temple Solomon will build. Solomon, more worldly than his father, desires a building that will have no equal in the surrounding kingdoms and the temples they built for their gods.

But we find in the saga of Solomon and all the kings that follow in Israel that building a house for God did not make the people less likely to stray. A Temple did not guarantee their allegiance to the one God nor make them any more likely to follow God's commandments. In fact, it was in exile that the people of Israel reclaimed their relationship with the God of Israel and found a sense of God's presence miles away from the Temple.

And that is important for our context today. Many of you may feel as if you are in exile from the house of God. Our faith community has been forced to worship outside of this sacred space. We see each other online or behind masks in the churchyard. But perhaps this time of exile from our church is the perfect time to reclaim that promise of Emmanuel, God with us. And reaffirm our belief that God was indeed born in Mary and came to us as Jesus, flesh and blood, just like us. Jesus who showed who God is by walking with people, healing and feeding and loving them—and accompanies us even now and lives in our hearts.

God has never been in the graven image or in our buildings. And right now, Emmanuel, God with us, *is* with us. On the move. Even during a pandemic. Especially during a pandemic. God is in the hospital rooms with COVID patients struggling on ventilators. God is with the doctors and nurses who care for them. God is with those scientists who developed a vaccine and those working on better treatments. God is with teachers struggling to teach and students struggling to learn. With those out of work and those striving to keep their businesses going. God is with all of us as we sacrifice gathering in groups this holiday season. God is with those of you that face acute isolation during these days and those experiencing depression from the anxiety and loneliness. God *is* with us. Even now. Especially now.

This may be hard to believe in these dark days. But the light of God continues to break through in small ways. And God waits with us, even when we dwell in the darkness. As we hear in the Gospel of Luke, "In the tender mercy of our God, the dayspring from on high shall break upon us, to give light to those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:78-79)

Emmanuel, God with us. Yesterday, today and tomorrow. May it be so. Amen.