

4th Sunday of Advent, 2020 Homily

2 Samuel 7; Psalms 89; Romans 16:25 - 27; Luke 1:26 – 38

Nine months ago, we were just beginning to see the effects of COVID-19 and were being asked to adjust our way of life. Businesses, libraries, restaurants, bars, schools, and even churches were closing their doors. Governors were giving emergency orders. And we were asked to wash our hands, stay at home, wear masks, and social distance.

A lot has happened in 9 months. So many people have died and so many lives have been affected. Many people are ready to get the vaccine and move on to 2021. But before we look forward, the Church invites us to look back because there is something else that happened 9 months ago.

On March 25, 2020, nine months before Christmas, we celebrated the Feast of the Annunciation of Mary. Now, just 5 days before we celebrate the birth of Jesus, on this 4th Sunday of Advent, the Church invites us to contemplate once again Mary's encounter with the Angel Gabriel. The birth of Christ and our salvation as we know it would not have happened had Mary not been faithful and willing to open her life in total obedience to God's will. Mary has so much to teach us.

Mary not only pondered the words of the Angel, but also, by God's grace, was willing to participate. She said, "Yes" to Christ being born in her. Whenever there is a birth, there is a mother. A mother who has sacrificed her body, her time, her energy, her sleep and her life for the life of another. For Jesus and for all of us on Christmas, Mary is that mother.

I wonder how often Mary pondered the angels greeting during her pregnancy? I wonder how often she pondered the words "Do not be afraid, Mary"? How often did she ponder her own "Yes", especially as her body began to change because Christ was being formed in her womb? What were her thoughts when she first felt Jesus kicking within her? How often did she recall the words, "Nothing is impossible for God."

2000 years ago, Just a few days before the birth, Mary was most likely still on a donkey having not quite made their destination to Bethlehem. I have no idea what it is like to be 9 months pregnant, but I have witness my wife, three times, be 9 months pregnant. It is not comfortable. Most pregnant mother's want to "nest," make their home ready and set up the nursery. But Mary had to leave her home not knowing exactly where Jesus would be born. Nevertheless, I imagine Mary was still pondering what kind of home she and Joseph would make for Jesus. Wherever Jesus would be born, Mary would seek to make the best home possible.

Speaking of home. The last week of Advent and into Christmas, we are invited to ponder what home we may or may not have prepared for Jesus? Are our hearts open and willing to receive Jesus. Are we willing and open to say "Yes" to Christ being conceived in us? Are will willing to spend the time necessary for God to form Christ within us? Do we want to make our lives loving homes for Jesus?

In our Old Testament text, David is pondering making a home or building a house for God. A house for the Ark of the Covenant.

David is in a time of peace. No wars or battles. In his time of peace, he begins to ponder God's faithfulness and presence in his life. His attention turns to the Ark of the Covenant, the dwelling place of God. The Ark the Hebrew people built under God's specific instructions. The Holiest object in ancient Israel. The Ark which followed them in the wilderness and beyond, in and out of battles, and was where the presence of God dwelt.

The Prophet Nathan originally tells King David it's a good idea to build a house for God's Ark, but then in a dream God reveals to Nathan that David is not meant to build God a house. Instead, God would build David a house. A house that would last forever and whose Kingdom will never end.

This prophesy sustained the Hebrew people for hundreds of years, even after Jerusalem was taken and the temple destroyed and the last King of Israel, King Hezekiah, was blinded, taken into exile and died. For over 500 years there was no king of Israel, the Dividic kingdom was no more. Yet, from the Angel Gabriel Mary hears the fulfillment of this promise.

One scholar, Stan Mast, wrote: "This prophecy is "the fountainhead of all messianic hopes," the lynchpin text for the rest of the Old Testament and for Advent. It is the promise at the heart of Gabriel's Advent message to the Virgin Mary. **This promise was given in the best of times when it didn't seem necessary, and it was fulfilled in the worst of times when it didn't seem possible.**" God is faithful to his promises. He is building a home that will never end.

Thus, Nathan's prophecy is linked to the Angels words to Mary. As Mary is pondering the Angels greeting. The angel says, "Do not be afraid, Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

David's home would be established forever. God is building the house through Mary's Yes and Jesus' life, death and resurrection. What glorious news!

One approach to Biblical scholarship and understanding is called Typology. Typology is a method of biblical interpretation whereby an element (person, place or thing) found in the Old Testament is seen to prefigure one found in the New Testament.

Saint Augustine said it this way, "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New."

One of the reasons Mary is so significant in the Christian faith is not only that she is the mother of Jesus, but through her "yes" and as the mother of Jesus she became the fulfillment of many Old Testament types. Just as Jesus is called the "New Adam." So Mary is called the "New Eve". Eve was the mother of creation, Mary is the mother of the New Creation.

Saint Irenaeus wrote this between 180-199 A.D.:

"Mary the Virgin is found to be obedient, saying: "Behold, O Lord, your handmaid; be it done to me according to your word." Eve, however, was disobedient...Thus, the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith."
Against Heresies (3,22,4) (Jurgens-224)

Another Typology of Mary in the Old Testament is the Ark of the Covenant - the very Ark that David wished to make a house for. The Ark was holy and precious to God. Covered in gold and was where the presence of God dwelt. The Ark also contained three vital items from the Hebrew people and their journey. Inside the Ark was: A jar of Manna that sustained the Hebrew people in the wilderness (The miraculous bread from heaven), the Tablets of the Law, (The ten commandments) and the budding staff of Aaron. (Hebrews 9:4).

With Mary's Yes, Christ was conceived in her womb. Through her act of obedience and faith, Mary became not only the New Eve, but also the New Ark or the Ark of the New Covenant. Whereas the first Ark of the Covenant held a jar of Manna, Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant, held in her womb the Bread of Life. Jesus said, "Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness and died, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever." Mary held within her the Eucharist, the flesh and blood of Christ. Whereas the first Ark held the 10 commandments, the tablets of the law, Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant held within her the very Word made flesh. Jesus said, "I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it." Mary held Jesus, the author, perfecter and fulfillment of the law and gospel. And whereas the first Ark held the staff of Aaron, representing the Old Testament priesthood. Mary held within her the One Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, who offered his life once and for all for the sins of the world. Mary held within her, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

St. Ambrose in the 4th Century wrote: "**Now what else should we say the Ark was but holy Mary.**" (Serm. xlii. 6, Int. Opp., S. Ambrosii) (Blessed Virgin, p. 77).

While I appreciate the connection between the Old and New Testaments in Typology, it is important to realize that Mary is more than the "New Eve" and the "Ark of the New Covenant." Mary is the **First disciple of Jesus**. The first to say "yes" to Jesus being conceived in her. The first to let Christ be born through her. The first to give Christ a home in her heart and to follow him throughout her life. Mary was holy and faithful and was wholeheartedly committed to her son and His mission, even knowing that her heart would be pierced at his suffering.

In this way she participated in God's building. We too are called to ponder and participate in God's will and work.

As we ponder Mary's role in salvation history; As we ponder what type of home we are making for Jesus. As we listen to God's Word of favor and invitation to "Fear Not", May we thank God for Mary and her humble, loving "YES". May Mary inspire us to **ponder** and to **participate** saying "Yes" to our role in the building of God's great kingdom.

And while we pondering, let us not forget. God is ultimately building a house for us. His house and His Kingdom will never end.

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve

St. Ambrose (c. 339-397)

"The prophet David danced before the Ark. Now what else should we say the Ark was but holy Mary? The Ark bore within it the tables of the Testament, but Mary bore the Heir of the same Testament itself. The former contained in it the Law, the latter the Gospel. The one had the voice of God, the other His Word. The Ark, indeed, was radiant within and without with the glitter of gold, but holy Mary shone within and without with the splendor of virginity. The one was adorned with earthly gold, the other with heavenly" (Serm. xlii. 6, Int. Opp., S. Ambrosii) (Blessed Virgin, p. 77).