

Sermon for the 4th Sunday of Advent - Sunday, December 20, 2020

Based on 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Preached at Zion Lutheran Church, Lebanon PA

(David is directed to build the Temple - The Angel Gabriel visits Mary)

Pastor Bruce Osterhout

It is good to be back with you in worship today. I missed the past 3 Sundays because my wife and I contracted the coronavirus. Thank you for your prayers. Please continue to wear your mask when you are around other people. Based on my experience, this is not something that you want to come down with.

I have created a handout to go along with this sermon today. Please look at this handout to further help you grow in your understanding of Israel's story.

Our scripture readings for today, this the Fourth Sunday in Advent are very exciting and educational to our faith as well. Our first reading from Second Samuel has the prophet Nathan telling King David that it is time that David builds a permanent house for God to dwell in. The second reading from Romans expands God's mission to all of the Gentiles, that is to everyone. The Gospel Reading tells us about the visit of the Angel Gabriel to young Mary, that God is coming to dwell inside of her, that she will be the "mother of God's son".

First, let us talk about the people of Israel for a moment. You all will remember their sacred story. How they were in slavery in Egypt, how God delivered them using Moses and 10 plagues, how God opened the Red Sea, and how God led them to Mt. Sinai where they received the 10 Commandments, how God provided manna and quail and water from the rock when they needed it. They carried the Tent of Meeting-The Tabernacle with them when they moved, setting it up in each place. Today's first reading tells us about the moment that God wants them to settle down in one place. The prophet Nathan tells King David to build a house for God to dwell in, instead of the tent. David's son, Solomon will finish this First Temple about 960 years before Jesus is born.

That first Temple would be destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. It was rebuilt over many years. Around 37 BC Herod completed the second Temple. This building would be destroyed by the mighty Romans in 70 AD. The Romans crushed the rebel Jews and laid waste to Jerusalem that year. But the seed of love had already been planted and was already growing strong and spreading

I tell you all of this and point you to my handout for today, that shows the design of the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle, in order to connect the very design of this House of God to that very Tabernacle and to that Temple.

Yes, the architect of this building knew about the design of the Tabernacle and Temple as a sacred space. (At this point, I will leave the pulpit and give a verbal walking description of the nave/chancel/sanctuary of Zion Lutheran).

Once back in the pulpit, I continue:

So, let me now connect the dots on this very sacred story on this most holy day. Are you ready to listen to me and follow what I am saying?

When you open your Bible and read Genesis, “in the beginning”, you learn that it is the Almighty God who created all things and the Almighty God that was first before anything else. Two people became a whole people of Israel. God remained out there as someone who walked through the garden, who guided and directed the steps of people until they were formed into a people that had to rely on God for everything. This people owed God for their very life. They did what God told them to do. They built a tent where they could meet God in. This people often wavered in their trust of God. When they were at their best, they prospered. When they were at their worst, they failed. Their best leader, David, was directed to build a permanent home for God to dwell in. After all, people have always tried to control God and fence God in. The human mind has always wanted to be able to describe God, paint a picture of God, mold a sculpture of God, compose music that inspires faith in God, build a sacred place for God to live in. Those places are all temporary. God tried to write God on the hearts of God’s people. That didn’t work. They still forgot God. **Now, my friends, and here is the very big news of this day. This same God has a plan to come and live inside the womb of a young girl.** And you know what? They child that she will give birth to will live an amazing life. He will be killed but come back to life. It was all a part of God’s plan. And faithful people talked about him and spread the word about him to the ends of the earth, *even to those who are not Israelites.* **When they meet, they will share a meal of his body and blood. They will read words about God’s love when they gather. They will pray. They will sing.** And you know what? This Good News is for everyone. And this same guy will return on the final day, at the end of time, at the Last Judgement. You are waiting for that, right?

There you have it. The whole Bible story in just a few words.

And today on this last Sunday before we celebrate The Nativity of Our Lord this Thursday night, we remember the faithfulness, the bravery, the great trust that young Mary must have had, to begin this glorious adventure with God. Mary will carry the son of God in her womb. Mary just might be the most faithful and trusting human in the whole story. Maybe that is why there are statues of her all over the world.

We are all to be willing servants of God, just like Mary was.

How are you doing on your journey of servanthood?

May the almighty God of the Israelites and David, the one who sent Gabriel with directions to a young girl, about 2,000 years ago now, yes, that same God who zapped a guy named Saul on the Damascus Road and made him into a preacher named Paul, who wrote so long ago and I quote “the revelation of this mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings whose love has been made known to all people, the only wise God of heaven and earth. That’s who is acting to save the world, isn’t that just like God who has always acted to save his people.

Watch, my friends, just watch. God will act to save the world. In a manger out back. God’s throne is established forever in the city of David, Bethlehem. The real question is, “Does he live inside you?” I hope and pray that your answer today is YES.

Why YES, he does. Amen and Amen.