

Advent 4B (12/18/11 – *God Will Dwell in a Human House*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

King David had finally succeeded in defeating the enemies of Israel. Better said – and to put it Scripturally – ***the LORD had given [David] rest from all his surrounding enemies*** [2SAM 7.1]. Whenever we are successful at anything that is good and God-pleasing, it is the LORD Himself Who has given us success. We tend to think of it as our own accomplishment. That is a problem – a sin-problem – of pride ... and of failing to see that every good in our lives is from God. For this we must repent.

It was out of Godly piety that David noted the difference between his own dwelling – ***in a house of cedar*** – while ***the Ark of God dwells in a mere tent*** [2SAM 7.2]. That seemed quite inappropriate to David. Why should his human dwelling be better than the place of God’s gracious Presence among His people – where He came to meet them above the cherubim of the Mercy Seat of the Ark? Should men live better than God?

There is truth to David’s words. Nathan thought so also – and encouraged King David to ***go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you*** [2SAM 7.3]. Surely, the House of God ought to be better than our own dwellings – just as surely as He Who is the Creator is infinitely greater than we who are merely His creation. The places we build to worship the LORD, our God and Savior, ought to be reflective of His greatness ... and of holy reverence for Him and the Gifts He gives us through His Gospel Word and Sacraments.

It is good that the sacred space of the Church be a place that turns our hearts and minds to contemplate aright the riches of God’s grace ... the priceless treasure of His forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ. The pew should not be like our favorite comfy-chair at home. There should be a “restlessness” about it – to remind us of our struggle against sin ... and how we ought to feel about our sins. We dare not be comfortable in our sins. Still, we ought to be quite comfortable in the pew ... by regular attendance here ... and an earnest desire to receive what God has for us here – namely, the forgiveness of sins.

On the other hand, in building and maintaining a dwelling place for God – a

church building – we must never think that **we** have done something great for God. Nor dare we think of Him in the same terms as ourselves. God does not really need a dwelling place. He needs it just as little as He needs our sacrifices. **Everything** is already His. For, *[t]he earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein* [PSA 24.1]. Moreover, His heavenly dwelling is infinitely greater than anything we can build ... or even imagine.

Whatever we have done, even when it properly exalts the Name of our God, is insignificant, really. It is nothing about which we may boast. Yet boast we often do ... at least in our thoughts. Merely to think that we have done something noteworthy – is, again, nothing but sinful pride ... especially if we are attempting to boast before God. For, as the Prophet Isaiah declares by inspiration: *all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags* [ISA 64.6].

And yet, **God WILL Dwell in a Human House** – just not the way David was thinking. God does not need a house for Himself. But He does need one **for our sake!** We need God to dwell in a house. We need God to come to us and to take on our flesh and blood and dwell in this human house – this tent we call the body – so that He might save us ... and make an eternal home for us in heaven. We need a place where we may gather before God and have the sense that He is truly here in our midst – holy, righteous, beyond us ... and yet at the same time **God with us** ... Immanuel.

As always, it is **God** Who provides for us! As He declared to His servant David through the Prophet Nathan:

I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over My people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. ... Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your

throne shall be established forever. [2SAM 7.8-10a, 11, 16]

So here is the amazing thing about the incarnation of the Son of God – as if that very fact **alone** were not sufficiently amazing in itself. The astounding thing about the incarnation of Christ by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary is that God is making His dwelling in a human house – in our flesh – in order to establish for us an eternal kingdom. *God Will Dwell in a Human House*. The Son will **be** a Human ... become like one of us ... be one with us ... and join our human flesh to His eternal divinity. And He will do it to make a house – a home ... a dwelling place – for us. *God Will Dwell in a Human House* to be and do what His human Name declares – which is to say, to be a **JESUS** for us and to save us from our sin.

In this way – by dwelling in a human house – He will establish the throne of David forever. For David's kingdom (as great, powerful, and blessed as it was) was only a type – a greatly inferior example – of the eternal, spiritual, heavenly Kingdom of God. Likewise, all kings are merely a type – a greatly inferior example – of Him Who is King of kings and Lord of lords [REV 19.16]. But the kingdom of Israel was the type of God's Kingdom on behalf of His people. And God's promise to David to establish his throne forever was a promise to the Throne of Him Who would shepherd His people eternally – to establish the Throne of Christ the Son of God.

Since we cannot ascend to heaven – despite what the builders of Babel thought ... and what our own arrogant, sinful flesh still thinks today – the Son would have to descend to us ... and dwell in a human house with us.

That is what the angel Gabriel was sent by God to proclaim to Mary of Nazareth in Galilee. *Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!* [LK 1.28] And that is true in more than one sense. The Lord was with Mary in the sense that He drew near to her through His Old Testament Word and Sacraments to keep her in true, expectant faith. More than that, the Lord was with Mary because the Son of God was taking up residence in the human house of her womb ... while He knit together for Himself the human house of His flesh.

We think it is a mystery that when the Christ-Child was born and laid in a

manger, He was still Lord of the universe ... holding all things in the palm of His hand. And so it is. Here the One Who receives a house of flesh and blood in Mary's womb, is at the same time the One Who is the Builder. The eternal Son of God is conceived and begins as a single human cell ... to grow and divide and miraculously become limbs and organs, flesh and bone. He Who *has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them* [SC II.1] is Himself receiving the same in the womb of the Virgin – all the while, sustaining the universe.

That is what is going on when Gabriel says: ***Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.*** [LK 1.30-33] That is what happens when *the Holy Spirit* comes upon Mary *and the power of the Most High* overshadows her [LK 1.35].

God Will Dwell in a Human House. And He has taken up residence in Mary's womb. There He builds Himself a tabernacle of human flesh so that, once again, He might *mov[e] about in a tent for [His] dwelling* [2SAM 7.6] ... to go before us, His people ... and shepherd us in paths of righteousness for His Own Name's sake [PSA 23]. In this way – in the flesh – the Son of God will establish His throne ... by dying in the flesh upon the Cross. In this way – in our human flesh – the Son of God opens the Kingdom of heaven to all believers. The incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary is what it takes for God to fulfill His promise to David ... and to all believers. Thus, it comes to pass that ***God Will Dwell in a Human House.***

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word." [LK 1.38] God grant that we also receive such a great yet humble faith – that we may ever believe in the ever-incarnate Son of God ... and believing in Him, dwell in His Kingdom, which has no end.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]