

**Sermon Notes December 24,2023**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**The Holy Gospel of Mark 1: 1-8**  
**“God Keeps His Promises”**

Most likely many churches could have a small crowd gathered around the Word this Sunday morning. And it may be a tough sell for some assemblies to worship at all on this morning of Christmas Eve. Nonetheless, December 24 is a day for rich storytelling, and the fourth Sunday of Advent does not disappoint.

Now especially in that He is victorious over His enemies and “settled in his house” (Sam. 7: 1). Young King David has high expectations for the gifts God will bestow upon him and his subjects, the people of Israel. Like the grandmother I knew who built her family for all to enjoy in so many ways, her house was our safe place, a Christmas present each year; and so it is that David wants to build from scratch a permanent house where the people (God's family) can experience Him.

To build a house for the ark of God - the symbol of God's fullness among the people -begins with the expectation that God is on their side and will never leave them nor forsake them. “I am persuaded,” the psalmist sings to God, “that your steadfast love is established forever” (Ps. 89: 2). The twist in the story comes, however, when God reminds David of his humble origins and it is God who builds a house for the people, not the people who build a house for God. As noted, God will not be confined to a particular place, but is free to move about powerfully among His people, leading them from slavery into freedom.

While David is young and ambitious, Paul is old and wise. His letter to the Christian assemblies in Rome is his last, and these final verses are both doxology and blessing. Many who gather with beloved friends and family at this time of year may wonder, “Will this Christmas be their last?” The time is ripe to speak from the heart. Paul speaks from the heart when he invokes the good news of Jesus Christ - to whose death and resurrection, Paul says earlier, we have been united in our baptism (Rom. 6: 3-5). He bookends this good news with his powerful doxology and enters it in the mystery of the incarnation.

We have been building up to this incarnation since the beginning of Advent, and now it comes to fruition in the angel Gabriel's proclamation to Mary. As we note, the reception of Mary and her prophetic song is more of a climax to the story than the actual birth of Jesus. Mary is the best of both David and Paul: young and humble, but also wise beyond her years. Believing the Angel Gabriel, she quickly recognizes that she is the unique and privileged vessel and bearer of

God's incarnate presence for the people. The one in her womb will make a home in this world, beginning with her brave reception. Surely Mary deserves our affirmation.

What gifts are we hoping to receive on Christmas? How are we feeling about the expectations for Christmas this year? May the message today tap into all the emotions that come with those expectations. Sometimes the gift we most want is not the one we most need. In the hustle and bustle of holiday preparations, the mysterious gift of God's incarnate presence may not be the gift we most readily think about, but it is the gift we most need - and one that makes all the difference.