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Advent IV, Year B

December 24, 2017

2Samuel 7.1-11, 16; Luke 1.26-38

### **But God chose Mary.**

Two stories; two very different personalities. One God.

This is the picture that has been painted for us on this fourth Sunday in Advent.

2 Samuel, our first reading, gives us the story of King David;

Luke, meanwhile, tells us of the annunciation, the message that the angel Gabriel brings to Mary.

Now we are probably comfortable with the gospel passage. But I'm guessing not so confident with the old testament passage, so before we go any further we to give a quick background. At this point in the story of Israel, David has been anointed king of Judah for 7 years,<sup>1</sup> and has finally concluded a civil war against Ishbaal, the son of King Saul. This makes him king over all Israel.<sup>2</sup> He successfully unifies the tribes of Israel – Judah, and the Northern Tribes. David established the capital city for this empire at the freshly conquered city of Jerusalem<sup>3</sup>. To further his authority, and out of his genuine respect for God, David recovered the ark of the covenant to reside within Jerusalem's gates.<sup>4</sup>

Within David's capital city lies the ark of the covenant, the traditional symbol of God's presence among the Israelite people. A symbol of God's presence with us on earth.

And carried in Mary's womb is a child, a son, the Immanuel – God with Us. God's presence with us on earth.

Two symbols of God.

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<sup>1</sup> 2Samuel 2.11

<sup>2</sup> 2Samuel 5.1-3

<sup>3</sup> 2Samuel 5.9

<sup>4</sup> 2Samuel 6.1ff.

Two symbols protected by two very different Biblical characters, separated by about a thousand years; two characters of whom many stories and legends have been imagined over the centuries.

David rose from obscurity, a shepherd boy, to become the revered ruler of the people of God. Scripture gives us a picture of a shrewd politician, a brutal soldier and great military tactician, passionate, gregarious, and a survivor. We are told that David once feigned madness in order to avoid being executed;<sup>5</sup> that he was a gifted musician;<sup>6</sup> that David engineered the death of Uriah in order to conceal his own adultery;<sup>7</sup> that David wept at the death of his own son Absalom even though he had been trying to kill David,<sup>8</sup> and yet showed no mercy in liquidating Saul's relatives.<sup>9</sup> David is described as a man after God's own heart,<sup>10</sup> and is revered as the leader who sparked the golden age of Israel. A deeply flawed, but God-fearing, brilliant man.

And then there's Mary. Now, we have to be careful, because scripture doesn't really tell us much about Mary at all. History and legend have filled in the blanks, and who knows how accurately. But we do know this. She was engaged to Joseph,<sup>11</sup> and they were poor.<sup>12</sup> She was a devout Jew,<sup>13</sup> displayed obedience to God,<sup>14</sup> and devotion to her son.<sup>15</sup> But for all her piety, she was a nobody. Bracketing for a moment, the whole giving birth to the Son of God...you know, that whole thing...she isn't recorded as doing anything dramatic, but she's always there, in the background.

David's career really flourished after setting the ark at the center of Jerusalem. After a series of swift and decisive battles, he secured peace with his neighbors.<sup>16</sup> He gained wealth, success, beautiful wives and many children.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1Samuel 21.13

<sup>6</sup> 1Samuel 16.16ff.

<sup>7</sup> 2Samuel 11.14ff.

<sup>8</sup> 2Samuel 18.33

<sup>9</sup> 2Samuel 21.1ff.

<sup>10</sup> 1Samuel 13.14

<sup>11</sup> Luke 1.27

<sup>12</sup> Luke 2.24 Joseph & Mary's poverty is implied; the offering of a lamb following childbirth, for the purification of the mother, is detailed in Leviticus 12.6, but for those who cannot afford a lamb, two turtledoves or pigeons may be offered in its place.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 1.28 by implication.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 2.38

<sup>15</sup> Luke 2.51 by implication.

<sup>16</sup> 2Samuel 8

<sup>17</sup> 2Samuel 5.13-16

Mary remained...just Mary. Mary and Joseph remained poor. Joseph died.<sup>18</sup> Her son gained some notoriety, but it was the wrong kind for earthly success. Her son was executed. She was taken in by her son's best friend.<sup>19</sup> She lived out the remainder of her life in exile.<sup>20</sup>

So it's interesting, isn't it, when we consider each of these characters: David, and Mary, and their contexts as the protectors and preservers of God's presence on earth.

Specifically, David desired to build a house of cedar, rather than the tent in which the ark had resided since the early years of the Exodus. David desired to build a house, a grand temple to fix God's position at the heart of Israel. The temple would secure God's presence; just as David's consolidated rule over the 12 tribes was beginning – the peak of Israel's glory days – David wanted to make sure that YHWH was set at the heart of this new nation.

And God said no.

God said no. You don't get it David. You are a man – you may even be the greatest of men, but you are just a man. Humans don't direct God. Humans don't fix God's location.

God chooses. Not humans.

“In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God...”

And Mary said yes. God chose; Mary answered.

Mary, lowly, insignificant, Mary. God's “favored one.”<sup>21</sup> God chose Mary to bring his presence into the world, to bring the incarnate Christ to live among us. God chose this poor peasant woman and her husband to nurture and raise God's son.

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph is not mentioned again following the visit to Jerusalem in Luke 2.41. It is thus accepted that Joseph must have died between this time and the start of Jesus' ministry as an adult.

<sup>19</sup> John 19.26-27

<sup>20</sup> Scripture's last direct reference to Mary, mother of Jesus, is in the company of the believers at Jerusalem in Acts 1.14. *Tradition* places Mary as living out her remaining days in Ephesus in the company of John the Theologian; 'The Virgin Mother of God St. Mary' is referenced in a synodal letter of the Council of Ephesus in 431, but whether this refers to the woman Mary or a church dedicated to her is disputed. As I have indicated, there is more legend than indisputable fact when it comes to the life of Mary.

<sup>21</sup> Luke 1.28

God's economy, God's way of looking at the world, is different. God loves David. In 2nd Samuel, God reminds David that, "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, 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."<sup>22</sup>

God makes David a great man. To be fair, David's faithfulness to God makes him a great man; his willingness to listen to God, to repent and atone for his sins, makes David a great man.<sup>23</sup> But David is a human leader, exercising worldly power.

Mary, on the other hand, she gets it; she *can* articulate God's economy, God's inversion of the world's concerns. We heard her words in Canticle 15 today, *the Song of Mary*:<sup>24</sup>

He has mercy on those who fear him,

He scatters the proud,

He casts down the mighty and lifts up the lowly,

He fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty.

That's God's economy!

Mary is emblematic of those who will be lifted up...

And yet...somehow...her life doesn't look much different on the outside. She's still just Mary. And yet inside, she is changed forever. Mary is the embodiment of what a life of faith looks like. She is a model of holiness, obedience, and devotion. Her 'yes' on behalf of all humanity, her unwavering, unquestioning affirmation of the angel's request, this is precisely why we adore her above all the saints of God.

Mary remained poor and an insignificant member of her earthly world. She experienced loss, tragedy, grief. But she remained God's favored one. "She treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."<sup>25</sup> She was rewarded in love.

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<sup>22</sup> 2Samuel 7.8-9

<sup>23</sup> 2Samuel 12.1ff.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 1.46-55; Book of Common Prayer, Canticle 15, p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> Luke 2.19

David, too, was rewarded for his faithfulness to God. Ironically, while David wanted to build a house for God, it was God who turned the tables and promised a house for David, a house *of* David; a dynasty.<sup>26</sup> Jesus of Nazareth, the legal son of Joseph, of the house of David,<sup>27</sup> becomes the culmination of that line.

David and Mary are separated by about 1000 years of history. In our contemporary culture we continue to salute the 'Davids' of the world, the forceful, the ambitious, the survivors, those who get after it and do whatever's necessary to stay ahead.

God loves these people.

But God chose Mary. God's favored one. Meek, mild, lowly Mary.

We should pay attention to that.

Amen.

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<sup>26</sup> 2Samuel 7.16

<sup>27</sup> Luke 2.4