

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 24, 2017
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

When a newborn son is presented to his father, there might be kindled a hope that he will follow him. One day, he will take over the farm, inherit the family business, be trained in the profession, or swear allegiance to the Queen in military service. It's not uncommon for the son to share this expectation; at least for a while. It's only natural. "When I grow up, I want to be a [whatever] just like daddy." The priesthood is an exception: with certain exceptions, priests do not have sons of their own...but we do look into our congregations for possible vocations.

In today's first reading, David wants to build a house for the Lord, but it wasn't to be. "The Lord declares to you, David, that the Lord will make **you** a house." Not only that, but the Lord would raise up offspring and establish his kingdom. David accepts the steadfast love and faithfulness of God, but doesn't lose his dream. Scripture tells us that David laid up materials for the construction of the temple, getting things ready for Solomon (1 Chron 2:5). He placed his hopes in his sons, even in the face of the betrayal of Absalom and the intrigue of Adonijah. We remember his anguish: "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son! (2 Sam 18:4)." We remember his joy: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted one of my offspring to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it (1 Kings 48)."

2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16
Ps 89
Rom 16:25-27
Lk 1:26-38

But David's hopes were both moderated and exceeded by what he heard from God through the Prophet Nathan: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom." He knew that the descendent promised by God would follow in the dimly lit days of the future after his death; that he would cry to God, "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!"; that he would sit on a throne built for all generations; "your throne, David, shall be established forever."

The promise made to David is fulfilled in today's Gospel. "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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And his coming was the work of God. David wanted to build a house for God, but God built him a house instead. First, the Holy Spirit laid up materials. He spoke through the prophets, preparing the people of Israel to receive their Saviour. He made them children of the poor, hopeful of salvation, repentant through the preaching of John the Baptist. From them came Mary, immaculately conceived without the stain of original sin, through the merit won by Jesus on the cross.

She is the ark of the everlasting covenant, full of grace, the spouse of the Holy Spirit through whom Jesus would be conceived: "The Angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'" And Mary agreed. The whole of creation held its breath...and Mary agreed. "Let it be done to me according to your word." She responded with the obedience of faith, submitting intellect and will, giving herself completely, with a faith that never wavered through sorrow and trial.

Fathers have hopes for their sons, met by a combination of disappointment and joy. But it's mothers who care for them, body and soul, dragging them to church, and praying for their salvation. For some reason, children are more likely to keep the faith when their fathers go to church. Whether their mother goes seems to make less difference. So we entrust our wayward children to Mary, our mother in faith, knowing that salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit, and grace is a gift from God. But we pray for fathers, that they might persevere in faith, receiving the Eucharist as they worship God.