

#### Advent IV

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Ps 89:1-4, 19-26 (or Canticle 15); Romans 16:25-27  
Luke 1:26-38

Where does God live? Is it here in the church? Does God live in every single church we pass by as we drive to St. Peter's? Does God live in the woods? How about in Temple Beth Zion on Delaware Avenue in downtown Buffalo – is that where God lives?

Where does God live?

Our first reading from the Book of the Prophet Samuel tells the story about King David wanting to build a house for the Lord. You see, up until that time, for well over 1,000 years, the people of Israel had lived in tents. During that time, God was thought to have lived among them in the special holy tent called the tabernacle. In the tabernacle was an object called an ark – the Ark of the Covenant. The people of Israel believed that the Ark of the Covenant represented the Presence of God. The Ark of the Covenant had been carried by the people of Israel from the time of the Exodus from Egypt (about 13<sup>th</sup> C. B.C.E.). It was very grand, covered with gold and carried on golden poles. It was held in the highest esteem and treated with great care and reverence. No one would ever think of mistreating the Ark, and when it was briefly captured in a battle with the Philistines, the people of Israel were heartbroken until it was returned.

At the time of our story, David the shepherd boy has grown up to be the King of Israel. He has been a great warrior and has subdued the enemies of Israel. He has built himself a house and is living in the City of Jerusalem. There were villages and towns all around the countryside. The days of moving about in temporary camps and living in tents were over. Now, King David wants to build a grand home for the Ark of the Covenant so that God will have a permanent dwelling among the people of Israel.

We read: "Now when the king (that is, King David) was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." (2 Sam. 7:1-2) At first, Nathan thinks it is a good idea to build a house for the Ark, but later, God speaks to Nathan with a very different response than the one he anticipates. The Lord, it seems, doesn't want a house. God says to the prophet Nathan, "Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word...saying "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" (2 Sam. 7:7) You don't need to build me a house – I will build *you* a house..."Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Sam. 7:16).

That message is pretty clear. God will not be confined to a house built by human hands, as our ancestors in the faith seemed to believe he could be. We can't put God in a box – no matter how ornate and beautiful it may be. That has implications for our worship, doesn't it? It has implications for what happens when we walk outside the doors of this (or any other) church. We don't leave behind our religion. We don't leave behind our God at the altar or in the tabernacle where we house the reserved sacrament after Holy Communion. Surely, the presence of the Lord is in this place, but it is by no means can we confine it to this place.

That brings us to this morning's Gospel. The angel Gabriel carries a message from God to the Virgin Mary, declaring to her: "You will bear a son...and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:31-32) The words of the angel Gabriel to Mary are the same as the words of God to the prophet Nathan, many hundreds of years before the birth of the Christ child. They are a sign that the baby Jesus, born of Mary, would be the one who was the continuation of the line of David, a King of Israel of who would reign forever. This is the Messiah that the people were awaiting, the Lord's anointed One.

So back to my first question: "Where does God live?"

Where did God choose to live when God came down to earth to be with us as a person? First, God lived inside Mary, a teenage mother. The baby who was born to her was named

Jesus, the one foretold long ago who would establish the reign of God on earth forever. God lived among us as a person – not as an object, not *in*, or *on* an object, not in a house made of human hands but in a human body.

Now it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, who lives among us. And where does God live when God is among us in the person of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit of God lives within the house that God makes for us: within ourselves, our souls, our bodies.

To be sure, Mary was set apart for a very special mission in this world. Yet each one of us has a reason for being here, too. Listen to these paraphrased words of the angel Gabriel as if they were directed to us: ‘The Holy Spirit can come upon *you and me*, and the power of the Most High can accomplish miracles of love in and through *you and me*. All we have to do is to be willing to say “yes,” like Mary. “For nothing is impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37).

Where does God live? In me and in you. This reality has deeply profound implications for the way we live. We are like holy ground. We are like living Arks of the Covenant. We are people who carry inside us the very Presence of God. Let us treat others and ourselves in ways that show that we believe this to be true.

Amen.