



Longing for the Light

WAITING FOR GOD
TO ARRIVE AT ADVENT

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

READING: 2 SAMUEL 7:1-16; PSALM 89:1-4, 19-26 LUKE 1:26-38

Our journey through Advent nears completion. We have been circle around and building toward the arrival of the Christ child. Although we are not quite there yet, we are tantalizingly close. Now is the time to ensure the route to the hospital has been rehearsed as Issac Jaffe from Sports Night would say, or in the case, I guess the route to the room with the manger. However, even as this comes more into focus, we still have to wait. On our journey, we have stopped at various places along the way. In preparation, we wondered what kind of king Jesus is, and we saw him as a shepherd king who offered care, protection, and rule. We recognized that our journey through Advent and towards Christmas first begins in darkness, and we started by recognizing the sin around us. From there, we looked and heard that God himself was going to act and that comfort was coming. This allowed us to see, through Mary's song, that when God acts and the Messianic age comes, it will be characterized by justice and righteousness. Our final stop is to decipher what we can learn about this coming Messiah. Where does he come from, who is he and what is he all about?

My mom has been doing a lot of work on my family tree over the last few years. It is through one of those websites where you get connected and once you confirm everything, a world of new people opens up to you. As I look at my lineage, I can directly trace some of my ancestors to New France in the mid 17th century, some others to a specific community in France prior to that. This can be very fascinating as you can get lost in lineages because there is so much information there. Moreover, it is important information because it tells you the story of who you are and how you became who you were. It is your origin story. This is backstory is also true for the Messiah. Our passages give glimpses into the lineage of the Messiah and what that means. We get to understand the backstory of where he will come from, just like I can locate my ancestors in a specific part of France before they came to what is now called Canada.

We begin in 2 Samuel 7, where the narrative has passed a transition in the life of David. After years of tumult, violence and war, King David has been able to settle down in a house of Cedar. His desire is to build a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant, specifically a Temple for the Lord. David appeals to the prophet, Nathan, and the Lord responds. God offers a strong 'no' to David's request to build the temple. Instead, God offers a vision of a different purpose. Instead of a permanent home for

me, the Lord says, I will make your reign permanent. Forever, someone from the line of David will reign. There is a lot more to this story and more interaction between David and Nathan upcoming but the foundation of Messianism is here. David and his lineage are incredibly important. David is told that God took him from being a shepherd to sheep to being a prince over God's people. And God will make David into a house, a dynasty but David will not make God a house. This lineage and symbolism will return again and again, in the Psalms and the Prophets. And when the dynasty of Israel splits and fails, when Israel and then Judah go to exile, the urgency and hope of this house rises to the surface.

Our second reading, Psalm 89 is one example of a Psalm that speaks to this hopefulness and a reminder of God's promise to the house of David. This promise is a reminder of God's continued faithfulness to his people. The Psalm says that God will 'establish your (David's) descendants forever.' This is paralleled with God's promise to 'build your throne for all generations.' It is a reminder that the dynasty God established, will never fail. God has a plan for his people, and at the centre of it is a son of David. The Psalmist then spells some of this out. Because of the covenant God made with David, his people are assured that God's *'hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him.'* They will be protected from the enemy and the wicked. God's *'faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted. I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'* This is all good news for God's people, one of their own will always be reigning.

However, around the first century, things did not look good. The David ideal had been lost. An Edomite, Herod the Great, was King and Judah were servants of the Romans. The Maccabean era had not turned out to be as ideal as was anticipated after they overthrew the Greek Seleucids and established their own rule. But the covenant is not dead and the promise has not been forgotten. A few verses before what we looked at last week, we are introduced to the young woman who stands at the heart of the Christmas story. In the region of Galilee in a town called Nazareth, there is a young woman, a virgin, who was engaged to be married. In itself this is not very interesting. There would have been many young women, virgins even, in the area who were engaged. Even now there are many. This one, Mary, was betrothed to a descendant of King David, though less common is still merely interesting. Then everything takes a turn because there is an angel with a special announcement and a strange greeting. "Hello, favoured one, Yahweh is with you." Mary is understandably bewildered at this greeting, pondering about it before the angel continues speaking. She is told not to fear because she has found favour with God and will bear a son. But not just any son,

one who will be great, viewed as son of most high and he will fulfill the role of David's heir, ruling over Judah forever. Her son will have a never-ending kingdom. After a clarification of the means of her pregnancy, the Holy Spirit and God's power will be at work in her, overcoming the small problem of her being a virgin, Mary submits in service to God's word.

These verses from Luke, force us to recall the story of David in 2 Samuel 7 and promises in Psalm 89. There is some conceptual overlap and a couple words that repeat, drawing us in to realize this is the culmination of what Nathan was telling David. The Messiah is David's son and will be his greatest descendant. He will be a king even greater than David. His reign will be characterized by justice and righteousness. He will bring true deliverance to his people and defeat their greatest enemies, not the Romans of Herod, but sin and death. Because although he is David's son, he will also be his Lord.

When David heard the promises, he did not fully understand where this story was going, nor did any of the Psalmists or prophets. I think they had a sense of things, a general idea of Yahweh's character and would have anticipated certain aspects but they wouldn't have fully understood. We, with the benefit of hindsight, barely seem to understand what was going on. But here it culminates the young virgin, the one who was perplexed when she met an angel would bear a son, Jesus and this Jesus would rewrite history around himself. Everything that was before is now understood through him, so is everything that comes after. He is the lynchpin around which everything finds meaning. He is now the key player in the genealogy, the one who frames the story of salvation. This story, that salvation is available to all who give allegiance to him.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

How did your lineage or ancestry shape the story of who you are today? Are there any specific episodes in your heritage that stand out to you?

In what ways have you experienced God's faithfulness and steadfast love in your life?

Has there been a time in your life where you did not understand where the story was going? Looking back with hindsight, does it make sense? How or how not?