

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Fourth Sunday of Advent, Dec. 19-20, 2020, Cycle B

Promises are what our scripture passages are all about on this Fourth Sunday of Advent: promises perceptibly not fulfilled, and promises fulfilled. Also, we focus on Mary as being the obedient servant through who God is able to fulfill His promises.

In our Old Testament passage from the 2nd Book of Samuel, we see King David now settled into his palace of cedar in Jerusalem, at peace with all his enemies. He now wants to build a great temple for God, and Nathan, David's court prophet, considers David's plans a good idea until the Lord presents a different plan. Instead of David building a house for God, God tells David: "I will establish a house for you." "I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your own loins, and I will make his Kingdom firm..." "Your house and your Kingdom shall endure forever before me, your throne shall stand firm forever."

Then came the Babylonian conquest of Israel, and exile into Babylon, with David's dynasty lying in ashes. God's promise to David was so embedded in Israel's consciousness that the promise was regarded as a bona fide covenant. The destruction of David's Kingdom and the Israelites being carried into exile were catastrophic. God promised! Does God renege on his covenants? Over the many years, the Ancient Israelites sat in captivity, they prayed about, pondered over and reflected on the tragedy that had overtaken their nation, and they came to realize that it was their own sinfulness that brought the Davidic dynasty down, not God. Nonetheless, they wondered could their sinfulness be so great that God would abandon them.

Our gospel passage from Luke, the story of Gabriel's annunciation to Mary, presents God's answer to Israel: No! God does not forget His covenants! In fact, God will fulfill his promise to David, in a new and wondrous and a most unimaginable way – through the obedience of a lowly virgin of Nazareth, Galilee.

Because Mary is full of grace, Gabriel says to her: "You have found favor with God." "...you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus." "...the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end." And Mary wonders how can this be "since I have had no relations with a man." Gabriel answers in a most astounding way: "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 called holy, Son of God."

Speechless, there was nothing left for Mary to do, but to respond to such unimaginable news: "Behold, I am the hand maid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." With "yes" Mary reversed the sinful "no" of Israel to God's will; and through Mary's obedience God was able to fulfill his promise and accomplish great things. Israel's sinfulness brought down the Davidic dynasty back up again through the Son she bore into the world.

Mary then, is the Advent model for all of us as we are on the threshold of the Christmas Season. God accomplished great things through Mary's "yes." God continues to accomplish great things through our "yes." Through Mary's obedience, God fulfilled His promises beyond imagination and become enfleshed with us – Emmanuel (God with us). Through our obedience, God continues to fulfill his promises, remaining with us – Emmanuel.

When we come to kneel before the crèche this Christmas, and remember that time long ago when Jesus became flesh through the obedience of Mary, be mindful that now we are the crèches where God chooses to be present to the World, but like Mary, we have to say "Yes!"