

## Readings and sermon for the 4th Sunday of Advent

### *Collect*

God our redeemer,  
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary  
to be the mother of your Son:  
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,  
so we may be ready to greet him  
when he comes again as our judge;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### **2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16**

<sup>7</sup>Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup>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." <sup>3</sup>Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you."

<sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup>Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup>I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. <sup>7</sup>Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" <sup>8</sup>Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; <sup>9</sup>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>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

### **Romans 16:25-end**

<sup>25</sup>Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup>but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the

Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—<sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

### **Luke 1:26-38**

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,<sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.<sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."<sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.<sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.<sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.<sup>32</sup>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 ancestor David.<sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."<sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"<sup>35</sup>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.<sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.<sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God."<sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Sermon by Mike Turner (Reader)

We're almost there.

Those of us who have reached a certain age will remember those words in the lyrics of a song recorded by the singer Andy Williams way back in the days of our youth in the 1960s. But all of us, whatever age we may be, probably recognise these words in a variety of other contexts.

If you have raised families you will most likely remember them as an automatic response to the age-old cry from our children, and probably our grand-children too, as we travelled on what to them seemed interminable journeys to some remote holiday destination or to visit far-flung relatives.

Are we there yet? We're almost there.

As we approach the Christmas holidays we enter a period when these words of question and response are regularly aired in cars throughout the land, but this year they may be less

common as the number of families travelling long distances will certainly be greatly reduced.

While we may have experienced a reduction in the use of these phrases in relation to travels, we may well have seen an exponential growth in their use during the ongoing pandemic each time a reduction in the number of cases is announced. Yet so often, like the parents response on a journey, it has often been a somewhat hopeful or fanciful answer. Indeed, both question and response have been much used in recent days with the arrival of several hopefully effective anti-covid vaccines - but once again I fear that this is a too simple response, for there may be some miles to go before we reach our longed-for destination of a vaccine being available for everybody.

As I read again the story in our gospel reading of how Mary gladly accepted her part in God's plan to give birth to our Saviour, I often wonder how much she realised what would be involved. The need to travel to Bethlehem for a Roman census was a later add-on, but even so I'm sure she and Joseph took it in their stride. But I do wonder if Joseph used the response on the road to Bethlehem to answer the heavily pregnant Mary's likely question after many days on the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Or perhaps when they had to flee from Herod's wrath and escaped into Egypt, or even after Herod's death, on their return journey with their small child, or on their trips to Jerusalem?

Leaving the season of Advent and approaching the season of Christmas, with the New Year festivities coming soon after, we enter a time of year when normally there would be much journeying and celebrating - unfortunately both somewhat subdued this year.

Even so, there will be journeys, both physical and spiritual as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour. They might be a physical journey to one of our Christmas services, or for those who are unable to attend church it might be joining in the online services - or just having a period of quiet reflection by ourselves. Whichever it is, many of us as we sit or kneel in prayer will imagine ourselves there before the manger like those shepherds of long ago as they paid homage to their Lord.

What thoughts they brought with them after seeing and hearing the angels and searching for that baby we will never know. Like them many of us will bring a mixture of thoughts and feelings after a very disappointing and difficult year; feelings of sadness for those lost, of fear and concern for our families and friends; sorrow that much selfishness has been clearly displayed in our society, rejoicing that we have witnessed the selflessness of outstanding people from all walks of life. Each of us will bring our thanks that God sent his Son to experience life on earth in all its fulness, both good and bad.

We are, in a way, modern day shepherds coming to the manger with myriad levels of faith and need. Some will have journeyed long and have a deep faith, others just starting their journey are looking to build theirs up; a great number will be somewhere in between.

Many come seeking forgiveness, many to give thanks, some will be searching - not knowing what they are looking for and wondering if it might be found here.

Nearly all will come seeking assurance that they are making progress, that they are on the right path, that they are trying to live up to Jesus teaching of loving God, loving our neighbour, and forgiving others as we are forgiven.

All, including you and me, will in turn need to ask that child of the manger, our Saviour. the same question each time we visit that stable:

Lord, are we nearly there yet?

For many the answer will be; 'No, you have more journeying to do but you're on the right road.

For a few the answer will be, 'Yes, you're almost there.'

And I pray that each and everyone of us will one day hear those wonderful words.