

## **4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, Cycle B**

### **December 21, 2008**

**Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38**

### **Make a Home for Jesus**

It's cold and snowy and downright nasty outside. It's terrible to be homeless at any time, but especially during these cold winter months and during the Christmas holidays. Being homeless is something most of us have never experienced, and will hopefully never experience in the future. But we know that there are many in our community who have fallen on hard times; who are struggling to have a place to live or to keep the heat and electricity and water turned on. It is a time for us to be generous and compassionate, but not in a condescending way, not looking down on others. We need to do it out of respect and honor for our fellow man and his inherent value as a human being made by God.

In our first reading this morning, we find God symbolically present in the Ark of the Covenant which was housed in a tent, called the tabernacle. David is thankful for all that God had done for him and the people. He decides that now that they have finally settled down in one place, now that he has a fine permanent place to live himself, that it is time to build a suitable house for the Lord who has wandered homeless in the desert with the Israelites. He makes his decision not out of compassion, but out of honor and respect. But God, the Creator, rejects the offer of David, His creature. He insists that He does not need a physical house; that what is important is His presence among the people and that cannot be confined by walls and buildings. Instead He promises David that he will build him a house, a dynasty that will be passed on through the generations. And God promises that He will not withdraw His favor from the people even though they may go astray and need chastisements and punishments to correct them. God does eventually instruct David's son, Solomon, to build the temple in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant; not because He needs a home, but so that the people will have a formal place to worship. But it is not the ultimate home that God had planned. God was looking forward to when He would prepare Mary for that purpose.

God prepared Mary as a virgin conceived without the stain of original sin to be the new Ark of the New Covenant. The Creator fashioned a new home for His Son. The Ark of the Old Covenant contained symbols of the Israelites' time in the desert. It contained the stone tablets that Moses received on Mt Sinai with the Ten Commandments inscribed upon them. It contained a gold urn of manna, the bread from heaven that sustained them on their journey. And it contained Aaron's staff that miraculously budded, a symbol of priesthood. And Mary conceived Jesus in her womb, it was God's new earthly home; it was the new ark. It contained not words of law on stone, but the fulfillment of the Law embodied in flesh. Mary's womb contained not manna, the bread sent down from heaven to sustain physical life; it contained the Bread of Eternal Life. And it did not contain a staff, symbol of priesthood; it contained the Eternal High priest Himself.

God created a new home for His Son. And Mary said yes and welcomed Him into that home. Jesus would dwell in there for nine months, but once again God would be homeless. There would be no place for Mary, the Ark of the Covenant, in the inn. The

Ark would now live, not in a tent, but in a stable. And Jesus would be born into our world as a homeless baby. And after He grew up and started His ministry, He had no place to call home; no place to lay His head.

Jesus died for our sins and sent us His Spirit to remain with us until He comes again. Jesus came once and He will come again, but in-between He did not leave us alone. Through His Spirit that we receive in baptism, He now lives in each and every one of us. We are all temples of the Holy Spirit; we all need to be treated with respect. Jesus tells us that at the Last Judgment, He will separate the sheep from the goats. And the goats will ask: *“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?” And He will answer them, “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.”*

As we draw to the end of Advent, and we await the coming of the Lord, let us be sure to look for His presence already among us. It is easy to see that presence in those that are close to us; those that we love. But look also for His presence in those who are strangers; who are poor and suffering and needy. Be a sheep, not a goat. If you can see the face of Jesus in the homeless today, you will more clearly see the face of God in the infant Jesus, born in a stable as a homeless baby on Christmas morning.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**