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

**Romans 16:25-27**

**Luke 1:26-38**

It must have killed King David to hear the Lord say through Nathan the prophet: “Are you the one to build me a house?” You can’t miss the inferred NO! “No, David,” says the Lord, “You are NOT the one to build me a house.” God, it seems, is not interested in a house made of cedar like the one David has. What a blow! It must have crushed David. It’s like telling one of today’s billionaires that he cannot have an aircraft carrier.

Building temples was exclusively a royal prerogative. If David could pull it off, it would have put him and his tiny kingdom on the map. Kings who pursued lavish building projects were parading two things, the first of which was their deity. Lavish temples sent a message to would–be invaders: “My god can beat up your god!”

The ancients believed that when nations went to war, it was their deities who fought for them in the heavenly realms. Whichever side won had the stronger, better god. That’s why there’s so much warrior language in the Old Testament – smiting this group and killing that one. It makes us recoil now but that was one of the ways Divine Life was understood millennia ago – through the lens of power.

The other thing on parade when monarchs pursued lavish building projects was their wealth. Constructing magnificent temples, royal residences and public buildings was often less about public beneficence and more about personal vanity. So it was no small thing for David to comply with God. It took tremendous selflessness and willingness to lay aside his own ego.

He could very well have voiced the words his young relative would say some 900-or-so years later: “Be it unto me according to your word.” That young relative being, of course, Mary of Nazareth.

It wasn’t a prophet like Nathan who spoke to her but the Angel Gabriel, beginning his discourse with: “Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you!” Mary may legally have had the most tentative ties back to King David but at this moment she is a “nobody,” in a village filled with nobodies: Nazareth.

“Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God.” Don’t be afraid? How could she not be afraid? Angels don’t come to this neighborhood and they certainly don’t come to poor peasant girls like her. The angel must have been looking for a different Mary.

But he continues: “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, 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.”

It must have sounded beyond ridiculous. No great ruler had ever come out of Nazareth. And yet there he is, the angel, speaking of ancestors, and thrones and kingdoms. Why choose a barely-engaged teenager to carry God’s son? But Mary says the words that have been the envy of everyone since her who longs to follow God in obedience and trust: “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Mary’s surprise is our surprise. The news from God is often too good to be true but God is in the business of surprising us over and over again. Scripture is filled with God showing up in the most unlikely ways like bushes that burn, donkeys that talk, raging whirlwinds, and under starry night skies. God has a way of amazing us on the tops of mountains, at wells in the noonday sun, and by strangers bearing gifts. No matter how often we look for God in the familiar places, God will somehow be revealed in the unexpected, the unlooked-for, and the unpredicted.

The birth of Jesus to an unwed teenage mother, in a backwater town a little south of nowhere, was perhaps God’s biggest surprise of all. No kings or dignitaries to welcome the Holy One. Instead the lowest in society – shepherds – attended the birth of God-made-flesh, as well as his temporarily homeless family and a handful of barnyard animals.

King David was not meant to build a house for God. His descendent Mary provided a dwelling for nine months – her womb. In one sense Christmas is about God being homeless, until God finds a home in us. Mary is our teacher here. She shows us how to say yes to God; how to invite God into our lives and into our very bodies. The human frame becomes God's home as Jesus dwells with us and within us through the Holy Spirit……..but only if we, like Mary, say yes.