

Scripture Readings and Sermon

December 20, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Like many Hebrew words, the word translated as house has several different meanings. David's house is a palace but the house he intends to build for God is a temple. God responds by declaring that God will build a house for David meaning a royal dynasty. In all of these understandings, the word house has to do with permanency. Israel was transitioning from a mobile herding society to a stable city and farming society. In the nomadic tradition of the Bedouin, God traveled in a tent and reminded David that he at one time was a shepherd living in a tent. This passage, however, shows that Israel was becoming a kingdom with hereditary succession and centralized worship. With the establishment of Jerusalem as David's city and the building of a palace, David was centralizing the political power of Israel within the territory of Judah. It is because of the location of the capitol in Judah that other nations began calling the people Judeans or Jews rather than Israelites. Later Christians would understand this text not as a reference to a palace, a temple, or a royal dynasty but as Jesus - Emmanuel. In Jesus, God was once again with the people and moving about with them. This image would be linked to Jesus referring to his body as the temple that would be raised in three days and Paul referring to Christians as being temples in which the Holy Spirit dwells.

2 Samuel 7:6 I have not lived in a house but I have been moving about

Do we try to put God in a box? What about a church or a day of the week?

Does God walk with us through our days and nights?

Is there any place in our we don't want God to walk into?

Is it easier to think of God as limited to prayer time or Sunday morning?

What if Jesus was your house guest for a week, month, or year? What would you do differently?

Commentary on Luke 1:26–38 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Gabriel is only found in Daniel 8:16 and 9:21 and in Luke 1:19 and 1:26. The use of Gabriel ties Jesus' birth to the Messianic predictions in Daniel. While the term virgin is highly debated by scholars, the point of the term virgin is that Mary should not have been able to have a child and yet "nothing will be impossible with God." This point is made clear with the inclusion of the reference to Elizabeth whose age suggests she was well past menopause. The text says that Gabriel said that Elizabeth was six months pregnant and, according to earlier verses, it was while Zacharias was serving at the Temple. According to the statement, Zacharias was of the division of Abijah and that division served on around June which means that the annunciation probably took place in December (not the birth). Gabriel told Mary that Elizabeth, like Sarah, was also "well advanced in age". What is interesting to note is that in the stories of Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth, the news of conceptions was addressed to the men first (Moses, Eli, and Zacharias). It is only in story of Mary, that a woman is asked if she was willing to become pregnant. While the focus of the miracle is usually on the inexplicable pregnancy, the true power of the text is that Mary is given the option to say no. This story also differs from the other miracle birth stories because it is not an answer to prayer but instead initiated by God on behalf of humanity. Not only did God ask the question but God gave Mary the power of free will to say yes or no. This invitation of God becomes foundational in Christian understanding of our relationship with God.

Luke 1:38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord"

How would you respond if an angel suddenly showed up?

We want God to answer our prayers but do we want to be the answer to another person's prayer?

Are you ready to say "Here I am" when God calls you to radically change your life?

Do we prefer God working according to our agenda and fulfilling our plans?

Do we give Mary credit for being the first disciple to answer the call?

Commentary on Luke 1:46b-55 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

There are a number of miraculous births in the Old Testament among the most well known was Samuel and Issac. Samuel was born to Hannah who was barren. Scholars argue that Mary's "magnificat" is based on Hannah's praise of God in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Rather than the terms "soul" and "spirit", Hannah uses "heart" and "strength". While the Greek and Hebrew terms for soul and heart are frequently interchanged in the Old Testament, the term for strength is distinctly different from spirit. This may reflect the Christian understanding that our strength come from the Holy Spirit. The two also differ in the emotional place of both stories. For Hannah, her pregnancy was an answer to a long prayer for both a child and delivery from abuse by the other wives in the household. Her barrenness had become her daily torment from which God delivered her. This explains the references to adversaries, enemies, and weapons of war. Mary, however, response to this unfolding miracle with humility and a bit of fearful uncertainty. Rather than the justice of the oppressed mentioned by Hannah, Mary appears to refer to the blessing of the weak and lowly. Both flip society upside down but Mary is worded in a way that hints at Jesus' grace rather than judgment.

Luke 1:47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior

Do you view God as your savior or your judge?

How do people's view of God shape their spirit?

How is it with your soul, your spirit today?

What do you need to let go of so your spirit can rejoice?

Sermon "Boxes, Boxes, Boxes" ([Sermon Video](#))

Looking out my kitchen window lately, I have seen truck after truck delivering boxes to people's front doors. During this time of social distancing, gone is the time when the family would load up into a car and go to the "city" to shop at the mall. Instead of hours spent wandering the aisles and going from store to store with arms full of packages, we now order online and have boxes delivered to our front doorstep. This has been a year of change when old ways seem to no longer fit in their traditional boxes.

Maybe it is because of boxing up things after Leighanne's death or the move in June, but boxes have been on my mind recently. Going through the Christmas decorations, boxes surround me. There are the boxes for my daughters who want ornaments that no one else is interested in. And then, there is the box for memories that we want to keep but not on the tree. There is also another box, Pandora's box. You know the box. It is the box where things too painful, too complicated, or too volatile are place into for "a later time". We all have a Pandora's box. We know that one day we will have to open the box but just not now. It is the way we handle things and people that are feel are too much to deal with.

David wanted to put God into his Pandora's box. Everything was going great. David was in his house in the city he conquered. His enemies were quiet and everything was perfect so why not build a Temple to put God in. The Law had already been put in a box (the ark) and that box had been placed in a larger box (Holy of Holies) and now all of that would be put inside a larger box (the Temple). God, however, lives outside our boxes. God will not be limited to one day a week or even one hour on that day. God will not be scheduled like a doctor's appointment, limited to a certain prayer time or a casual

blessing before a meal. God reminded Nathan and David, his servant (not king), that God was limitless and forever. When we begin to limit God to one of our boxes, we soon find that even those boxes are full and there is no room at the inn. God gets pushed out to the stable with the rest of the beasts of burdens. Our God, however, is an awesome God that knows no boxes except the ones our limited minds create.

Mary was happy inside her box. She had a good home and her future was planned out with good husband (or at least a very understanding one). She was comfortable. God has a way of breaking into our boxes often with the most unexpected news. Pregnancy was the last thing on Mary's mind and yet that was the news she was given. She faced a choice between staying in her comfortable box or trusting God with the impossible world outside her box. Things are only impossible because our limited imagination fails to grasp what is beyond our experience. Mary's leap of faith opened a new world of God's grace for all of humanity.

Having a new child is like opening a box of endless possibility. Mary's soul magnified the Lord and her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior when she pondered with Elizabeth what would be possible with the impossible child growing inside of her. There was no way, however, for her to prepare for the many surprises her son would bring from his birth, childhood, ministry, and death. In the end, she faced to death of her child and the end of all those possibilities until the empty tomb reminded her that God will not be boxed in and nothing is impossible.

As we open Christmas presents and eventually put the decorations back into their boxes, may we remember that God is not limited to a box. At anytime throughout the year, the Christ child can be born again in your heart bringing comfort and joy. We don't have to wait for the holidays to come home and where ever love grows is where love can be found even outside our box. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and the shell of the seed is bust open, it will remain just a seed. But if the shell, the box, is broken open then new life can spring forth. Leave your boxes behind and find the Christ child once again. Merry Christmas.