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Advent IV
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 1:26-38

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Christians tend to have a love/hate relationship with this time of year.

We love the preparations.

We love our Advent wreaths, the waiting, the candles, the tree.

We love decorating and baking and giving and receiving.

We love the time off school and the days off work.

We love time with family and remembering which family stands at the center of it all.

We love the familiar stories, the characters—
the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary.

We rejoice at the annunciation,

where Scripture is fulfilled,
and God bends to our time,
takes on our flesh,

becomes one of us and with us.

We love the familiar hymns and even find ourselves singing them at home.

And we hate it when anything or anyone breaks this perfect picture of Christmas.

We hate the rush of the stores and the non-stop adds on tv and clogging our inbox.

We hate how early it all began.

We hate the false sentimentality and the watered down versions of what passes for Christmas.

We hate that the point is missed—

that the best our world can do is to extol the family,
but say nothing of the Holy Family.

We hate that the angels are cute cherubs, and do little more than bounce from cloud to cloud.

Do the world's angels ever speak such words of peace and joy as did Gabriel to Mary?

Were such glad tidings ever spoken as what we just heard?

"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Lk 1:28)

We hate that Christ is no longer the center of Christmas,

but is replaced by Santa, or worse yet, Frosty or Rudolf!

We hate that the Church's worship takes a back seat to the parties and the egg nog.

There's always this sense in the Church that we've got to defend Christmas.

There's this anger against those who seem to attack this precious time;

and there's a sadness that Hallmark has won the day (and the season!).

What are we to do?

King David's great idea was to build a Temple.

He was ashamed that his God and Lord had nothing more than a box for a house.

Now that there was peace and a bit of rest, he'd do something for God.

No more being schlepped back and forth in something so unbecoming of God!

David vows to defend God from all that is beneath His dignity.

And in so doing, David threatens to undo grace.

Thanks be to God that our Lord will have none of that!

“Would you build me a house to dwell in?

I haven’t lived in a house since I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day!

But I’ve been moving about in a tent for my dwelling.

In all places where I’ve moved with all the people of Israel,

did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel,

whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying,

‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’” (2 Sam 7:5-7)

David’s very pious intention has it all backwards, and it could cost him his life—
as well as the life of the world!

It’s a lot like Peter, who so very piously tells Jesus that there’s no way He’s going to the cross!

Or like Peter saying he’ll never have his feet washed *by Jesus!*

Or like Peter and the rest of the Apostles trying to get those children out of the way of Jesus.

Or maybe—more to the point—it’s like us, trying to defend Christ from our world’s Christmas.

We’ve got it all entirely backwards.

Christ has no need of our defense.

You can’t get more below dignity than to wear the sin of the world on the cross.

You can’t get much lower than the way Christ put Himself underneath every single person,

of all times and all places,

of all colors and shapes and tax brackets.

He humbled Himself to the point of a servant, Paul says;

and He did it for us.

But, to be clear, it wasn’t becoming Man that was part of this humiliation.

It wasn’t humbling for God to wear human flesh.

He still wears it now, and always will for ever and ever.

It’s not humbling for God to dwell with man.

What’s humbling is the manner in which He suffer for us.

God’s being carried around in a small wooden box,

was part of His binding Himself to the Cross for us.

Just as his manger, that wooden feeding trough wasn’t cute by any means,

but part of his having no place to lay His head.

And all these humble, wooden, and temporary dwelling places,

point us towards the ultimate, wooden, temporary, dwelling place: the blessed Cross.

That is the ultimate humiliation.

That’s it’s end, it’s perfection, it’s fulfillment.

And from the cross, the lifeless body was laid in a cave—

another humble dwelling that wouldn’t hold Him for long.

The point here, is that our Lord never asks us to bring up His dignity by providing a proper house.

We're not in the house-making business, but He is.

So the Lord had Nathan the Prophet tell David,

"Thus says the Lord of hosts,

*I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep,
that you should be prince over my people Israel.*

*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.

*And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them,
so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more...*

Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house...

And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.

Your throne shall be established forever." (2 Sam 7:8-11, 16)

It's the Lord who does it.

He does the descending and the building, the glorifying and the saving.

It's our dignity that's in jeopardy—not His.

It's our livelihood, our shame, our sin that must be covered—not His.

He needs nothing from us; we need *everything* from Him.

St. Paul picks up on this "God the Builder" idea with the Ephesians:

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,

*but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,*

*Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone,
in whom the whole structure, being joined together,
grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*

In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

(Eph 2:19-22)

So it's not David who builds, or Peter or Paul, or you or me,

but God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And it's not God who needs defending this time of year—

as if it's something new for Him to be left out of that which is properly His—

but it's us—we need defending and guarding and protecting that *we* not be lost.

For this, for this fear of being lost, overlooked, uncared for, forgotten,

for this fear of having our shame exposed, our dignity rubbed in the mud,

for this, the Angel Gabriel was sent to the blessed Virgin Mary.

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus.

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 Father David,

and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever,

and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Lk 1:30-33)

Nothing can upset Christmas.
Nothing can pull Christ from the season.
Nothing can thwart His plan of salvation, or stop His word from coming.
For it is finished.
His humiliation is over.
The victory is won.
And you are free.

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Lk 1:38)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit