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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-24-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Second Samuel chapter 7. Then we move to the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans and conclude with the Gospel lesson from the Gospel of Saint Luke. Christmas is only one from this Sunday's lesson so we pray that all of you have a very Merry Christmas.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Second Samuel. This is the second Book following First Samuel, and was originally one Book until the separation made by the translators of the Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint. First and Second Samuel were written by an unknown author and chronicled the events from the birth of the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-28) until the last words of King David (2 Samuel 23:1-7). First Samuel opens with a description of the corruption of the Levitical priesthood (1 Samuel 2:12-17) and the threats from Israel's main enemy the Philistines who captured the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4). One of the main things that happened in these two Books was the pronouncement by God of the Davidic Covenant. This is the Covenant which is God's promises to David made through Nathan and found in 2 Samuel 7, the text of today's reading.

Note: The intervening verses that were skipped in the reading were included below in order to provide the full context and meaning.

First Reading:

1 Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you." 4 But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, 5 "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? 6 For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"' 8 "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 ruler over My people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. 10 I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, 11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. 12 When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."'" (2 Samuel 7:1-16).

According the rules given the Moses the Lord's dwelling place was in the tabernacle, but King David desired to build a temple for God (v. 2). Nathan the Prophet told David instead that the Lord would make a house for him (v. 11) and that his descendent (whom we know was his son Solomon) would be the one to build the temple of God (vv. 12-13). The promises from God to David as relayed by the Prophet Nathan included first, that David would have rest from his enemies (v. 11), that his descendent would build a temple of God (vv. 12-13), and finally that the "throne of David" would be established forever (v. 13 b). We understand that after God later revealed the mystery (as we will see in the second reading), the One who would sit upon the throne wasn't King David's son Solomon, but the Lord Jesus Himself. Verse 14 is a description of Jesus' Second Advent, the coming rulership of Jesus during his coming earthly reign as we see confirmed by Revelation 12:5, "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." Israel is the one who gave birth to Jesus, and at His First Advent He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). Jesus is the One that will sit on the Throne of David. Although Mary was the earthly host of Jesus, He was born as a child of the Nation of Israel, "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, and through the mystery of the church the Messiah of the Gentiles as well.

As you were reading the verses from 2 Samuel, it can be confusing as to whether the author was speaking about King David or the coming Messiah, the Son of David. The people in King David's era hearing about Samuel's prophecies may have desired to see David's greater son and believed that somehow Solomon would reign forever. However, Jesus is the One called the Son of David. In the opening of Matthew's Gospel Jesus is called the Son of David (Matthew 1:1). Later in Matthew Chapter 9 two blind men called out, "Have mercy on us Son of David" (Matthew 9:27). Even those that doubted knew Jesus' identity. At one point after Jesus had performed great miracles the crowd called out, "this man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" (Matthew 12:23b). When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the crowd cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus had a messianic title, and was the One to whom was promised His reign would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:13).

As we celebrate Christmas tomorrow, this is the Royal Person that we commemorate being born in the manger, where all ceremonial lambs are born. After Jesus' resurrection, He "sat down at the right hand of the Father" (Hebrews 10:12), "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (ibid). He is "waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET" (Hebrews 10:13). "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:13). Paul said that salvation is a free gift that comes through faith. "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). No matter how hard we try, Jesus' work is still finished for us. We walk in the strength of God's power for His purposes as we see in the very next verse of Ephesians. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). As believers we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, as Paul said in Chapter 1 of Ephesians. "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). These are the spiritual truths that we are celebrating during Christmas.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move onto the second reading from the closing version of the Paul's Letter to the Romans, we see that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of a great mystery that wasn't understood until after He came. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was something that was hidden in the former times, but is now understood, a mystery revealed by God through Jesus Christ.

Second Reading:

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)

The Good News (or Gospel) is appointed as a light to all the nations (v. 26d) which leads to the obedience of faith (v. 26e). Although this was a mystery in the ages past (v. 25b) it was manifested both by the many prophetic verses in the Scriptures and through the voice of the Prophets as we saw in the first reading. Paul said more about this mystery Ephesians:

2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:2-5)

The salvation of the Gentiles through Jesus' sacrifice and the church age was a mystery that wasn't revealed until after Jesus came. Although the prophecies were there concerning the in-grafting of the Gentiles into God's kingdom (see for example Isaiah 56:6-8 "foreigners," the salvation of the Gentile Rahab in Joshua 2:9-11, the salvation of the Ninevites in the Book of Jonah). Isaiah was more explicit about this coming salvation for the Gentiles. He said about Jesus, the Root of Jesse, "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10). Again, these are the spiritual truths that we celebrate during Christmas

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Luke and records the miraculous event of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary.

Gospel Reading:

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 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 father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)

Many points arise from the reading. First, Mary is called the "favored one" in verse 28. She said

about herself later in this chapter, "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed" (Luke 1:48). One can hardly imaging the calling which God placed her to be the bearer of the Son of God. In the reading, God called Mary who found favor with God who was to be the bearer of God's Son Jesus who would through the "ark" (see below) of His bodily sacrifice save the world from their sin. Jesus was conceived not through normal human means but through the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 34). Mary, was obviously very perplexed at all that was happening and called out to the Angel to explain these things (v. 34), who was more than glad to do so. Second, Mary's Son would be called "the Son of God" (v. 35) and the Lord would give to him the throne of David (v. 32), the fulfillment of the prophecy that we saw in the first reading. Finally, Mary (and Joseph) were obedient to God in naming their Son Jesus, and Mary promised her obedience to God by calling herself "bondslave of the Lord" (v. 37). By the way, Jesus is from the Hebrew name "Jeshua," which means "the Lord is Salvation." Jesus is the salvation of the entire world, which is why we are so pleased to celebrate His birth on Christmas.

Noah, who came centuries before, was also called "blessed", and it was through the righteous and faithful acts of Noah that the world was saved from the flood. God said, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). Noah built an ark to save the people of the world from the wrath of God that was to literally be poured out through the Flood. The Blessed Mary on the other hand, bore the Son of God to be the ark of salvation for all who would believe. These similarities between Noah and Mary are important because they show how these two people were obedient to the difficult callings that God placed upon their lives. Although it's okay to ask questions when we discern the calling that God places upon **our** lives, it's also crucially important as believers to carry out His instructions.

While many of us are already familiar with the narrative concerning the birth of Jesus, this passage highlights important truths for our lives. First, Saint Luke brought out the fact that Jesus was born not through natural human relations but through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. This is important because since God is without sin this was the only means by which the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the second coming of the Lord will play out, how the world will be eventually unified under Jesus' earthly reign. Third, Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins. This is God's special invitation to counteract the destructive nature of sin in order to stand before a Holy God and not be rejected at the judgment. This is not only "a" plan for salvation, it is "the" plan. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

May you and your family have a very Merry Christmas.

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Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading, what began as a promise that David's son (we know as Solomon) would build a temple for God (v. 13a) expanded into a throne that would endure forever (v. 13b). The temple is a place where people gather to worship God, and in the Old Testament was a place inside of which God's Spirit dwelled. We know the ruler of the temple is Jesus forever, but how can the throne of the temple endure forever, when we know that it was destroyed in 586 BC and again in AD70?

2. In light of your answer to the first question, read what Saint Paul had to say in the Letters to the Corinthians. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1Corinthians 6:19). "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

How would you change your answer in light of the spiritual truth that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit on which Jesus is (and will) reign forever?

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-27-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **12-27-2015**. This week we open with 1 Samuel 1 where God gives a barren woman a son, whom she dedicates back to the Lord and His service. Then we move to Colossians 3 where we are told to live out the virtues of Christ in response to all He has done in and for us. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel of St. Luke 2 where Jesus begins to reveal His deity and many around him are amazed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Gender reveal parties have become a popular way for expecting couples to reveal the gender of their baby to family and friends. It is a fun excuse for a party but the truth is, in our society, most people are thrilled and thankful no matter what the gender is.

If the technology had been available, a gender reveal party would have made more sense in Old Testament times. It was important among the Hebrew people to have children. Barrenness was seen as a curse and children as a blessing from the Lord. It was an even greater blessing to have a boy because the family name, inheritance, and headship were passed down through the son.

Elkanah, a man who lived during the time of the Old Testament judges, had two wives—Peninnah and Hannah. There was a rivalry between the two, and Peninnah, who had several sons and daughters, would regularly provoke Hannah because she was barren. This caused Hannah great sorrow.

Yearly, Elkanah would go up to the temple in Shiloh to worship the Lord there. On one of these trips, Hannah poured out her sorrow in the form of a prayer and vow to God. She promised that if God would give her a son, she would in turn give him back to the Lord to serve Him all the days of his life. God heard her prayer and gave her a son whom she named Samuel.

In the First Reading, we see Hannah fulfilling her vow to God. How hard it must have been for her to relinquish her only son to the Lord. Once the child was weaned, she took him to Eli, the priest at Shiloh, and presented him for service to God. What a great demonstration of faith this was.

Sometime later, but while Samuel was still a young boy, God called him to be a prophet in Israel and used him in a powerful way to reveal God's direction and will to God's people. Samuel faithfully spoke the word of the Lord concerning Israel all the days of his life. At God's direction, he anointed David to rule as king over Israel. Eventually another king would come from the house and line of David who would save His people from their sins and reign in righteousness. This king is Jesus.

First Reading:

1 Samuel 1:20-28 NAS95 20 It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD." 21 Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD and stay there forever." 23 Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD confirm His word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. 24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh, although the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli. 26 She said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD. 27 "For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him. 28 "So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

Like Samuel, our children are a gift from God. We don't have to turn them over to full-time service in the church in order to dedicate them to Him. Teach them to serve God whole-heartedly no matter what profession they choose, knowing that God can do much with a man or woman whose heart is fully devoted to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In many of the Apostle Paul's letters, he presents a tragic picture of us in our sinful, fallen state and contrasts us with Christ in his holiness and perfection. In addition, he recounts what God has done for us in His grace, when we deserved only wrath. Once we understand the depth of our sin and the riches of His grace toward us, only then does he ask us to live a life that properly honors God and reflects His glory.

In the book of Colossians, St. Paul tells us that we were enemies of God, alienated from Him and

living in spiritual and moral darkness (Col.1:13,21). Jesus on the other hand, is the perfect image of the invisible God and supreme over all creation (1: 15-18). By His death He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and reconciled us to God, presenting us free from blemish and accusation (1:13, 22). Because of this, St. Paul says we are to live a life displaying His virtues and being thankful.

Second Reading:

Colossians 3:12-21 NAS95 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

To display these virtues, we must cooperate with God's work of transformation. If you read all of Ch. 3, you will notice how this passage is interspersed with action verbs that indicate there is something God wants us to do. Col. 3: 2 tells us to *set* our mind on things above—that is, to think about what we possess in the spiritual realm—salvation from our sin, peace with God, and eternal life, to name a few. Verse 5 tells us to *consider* ourselves dead to evil desires. Verse 9 tells us we are to *put aside* the old self and *put on* the new self. That means to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with our old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of our new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit.

In the Second Reading, we are told to *put on* the virtues of compassion, forgiveness, peace, and love. We are to *let* the Word of Christ dwell in our hearts, living its wisdom and teaching its precepts to others. Wives are to *submit* to husbands, husbands are to *love t*heir wives, and children are to *obey* parents. God is transforming us into Christ's likeness and calling us to intentionally live out those virtues for the benefit of others and the glory of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The first 20 verses of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke are some of the most well known of the whole New Testament. This is the story of Jesus' birth in a humble stable and the angels' glorious announcement to the shepherds that a Savior has been born.

This Savior was God the Son who took on human flesh and was born as a baby—fully God and fully man. And just like other human babies, Jesus grew from an infant to a boy to a man, increasing in

physical stature but also in wisdom and favor with God and men (Luke 2:40,52).

While much of his growth was typical, Jesus also developed in ways that astounded those around Him. This Gospel Reading recounts an occasion when Jesus, as a twelve-year-old boy, amazed the seasoned teachers in the temple with the depth of His understanding of the things of God.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem in a caravan with his parents to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. A day into the return trip, Mary and Joseph discovered their son was not with them. They quickly returned to Jerusalem, and after an anxious three-day search, found Jesus in the temple, interacting with the Jewish teachers.

Mothers everywhere can identify with Mary's response which was likely a mixture of relief and consternation: *"Why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."* Jesus' response must have sounded impudent to those who didn't fully understand who He was. He asked, *"Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know I had to be in My Father's house?*

No, Mary didn't know. It seems neither she nor Joseph fully understood the implications of the statement their son had made to them. They didn't understand that Jesus was under the authority of another Father, a Heavenly One, and Jesus would soon follow that Father's will all the way to the cross. All would be revealed in the fullness of time. Until then, Jesus continued to live in subjection to His earthly parents, and Mary treasured all these things in her heart.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:41-52 NAS95 41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; 43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, 44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. 46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. 48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." 49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. 51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Mary tried to make sense out of the events as they unfolded. We, on the other hand, have the whole written record of Jesus in the Bible. We know the rest of His story: He entered into ministry, performed miracles, claimed to be Son of God, and proclaimed that He was (and is) the way, the

truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Him (Gospel of St John 14:6). He purchased our salvation through His death and resurrection, and someday He is coming again to rule and reign in righteousness. This Christmas season we can celebrate our Savior's birth and share the rest of this glorious story with all who come to celebrate with us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What can you do this week to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with your old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of your new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit?

2. On Christmas a Savior was born. What can you do to help others around you know Jesus as their Savior?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122715.cfm

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-21-2014

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The first reading is from the Book of Second Samuel. This is the second Book following First Samuel, and was originally one Book until the separation made by the translators of the Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint. First and Second Samuel were written by an unknown author and chronicled the events from the birth of the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-28) until the last words of King David (2 Samuel 23:1-7). First Samuel opens with a description of the corruption of the Levitical priesthood (1 Samuel 2:12-17) and the threats from Israel's main enemy the Philistines who captured the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4). One of the main things that happened in these two Books was the pronouncement by God of the Davidic Covenant. This is the Covenant which is God's promises to David made through Nathan and found in 2 Samuel 7, the text of today's reading.

Note: The intervening verses that were skipped in the reading were included below in order to provide the full context and meaning.

> *1 Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you." 4 But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, 5 "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? 6 For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have*

> *been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'" 8 "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 ruler over My people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. 10 I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, 11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. 12 When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."'" (2 Samuel 7:1-16).*

According the rules given the Moses the Lord's dwelling place was in the tabernacle, but King David desired to build a temple for God (v. 2). Nathan the Prophet told David instead that the Lord would make a house for him (v. 11) and that his descendent (whom we know was his son Solomon) would be the one to build the temple of God (vv. 12-13). The promises from God to David as relayed by the Prophet Nathan included first, that David would have rest from his enemies (v. 11), that his descendent would build a temple of God (vv. 12-13), and finally that the "throne of David" would be established forever (v. 13 b). We understand that after God later revealed the mystery (as we will see in the second reading), the One who would sit upon the throne wasn't King David's son Solomon, but the Lord Jesus Himself. Verse 14 is a description of Jesus' Second Advent, the coming rulership of Jesus during his coming earthly reign as we see confirmed by Revelation 12:5, "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." Israel is the one who gave birth to Jesus, and at His First Advent He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). Jesus is the One that will sit on the Throne of David. Although Mary was the earthly host of Jesus, He was born as a child of the Nation of Israel, "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, and through the mystery of the church the Messiah of the Gentiles as well.

As you were reading the verses from 2 Samuel, it can be confusing as to whether the author was speaking about King David or the coming Messiah, the Son of David. The people in King David's era hearing about Samuel's prophecies may have desired to see David's greater son and believed that somehow Solomon would reign forever. However, Jesus is the One called the Son of David. In the

opening of Matthew's Gospel Jesus is called the Son of David (Matthew 1:1). Later in Matthew Chapter 9 two blind men called out, "Have mercy on us Son of David" (Matthew 9:27). Even those that doubted knew Jesus' identity. At one point after Jesus had performed great miracles the crowd called out, "this man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" (Matthew 12:23b). When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the crowd cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus had a messianic title, and was the One to whom was promised His reign would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:13).

As we celebrate Christmas just four days from today, this is the Royal Person that we commemorate being born in the manger, where all ceremonial lambs are born. After Jesus' resurrection, He "sat down at the right hand of the Father" (Hebrews 10:12), "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (ibid). He is "waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET" (Hebrews 10:13). "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:13). Paul said that salvation is a free gift that comes through faith. "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). No matter how hard we try, Jesus' work is still finished for us. We walk in the strength of God's power for His purposes as we see in the very next verse of Ephesians. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). As believers we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, as Paul said in Chapter 1 of Ephesians. "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). These are the spiritual truths that we are celebrating during Christmas.

As we move onto the second reading from the closing version of the Paul's Letter to the Romans, we see that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of a great mystery that wasn't understood until after He came. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was something that was hidden in the former times, but is now understood, a mystery revealed by God through Jesus Christ.

> *25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)*

The Good News (or Gospel) is appointed as a light to all the nations (v. 26d) which leads to the obedience of faith (v. 26e). Although this was a mystery in the ages past (v. 25b) it was manifested both by the many prophetic verses in the Scriptures and through the voice of the Prophets as we saw in the first reading. Paul said more about this mystery Ephesians:

> *2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;*

> *3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:2-5)*

The salvation of the Gentiles through Jesus' sacrifice and the church age was a mystery that wasn't revealed until after Jesus came. Although the prophecies were there concerning the in-grafting of the Gentiles into God's kingdom (see for example Isaiah 56:6-8 "foreigners," the salvation of the Gentile Rahab in Joshua 2:9-11, the salvation of the Ninevites in the Book of Jonah). Isaiah was more explicit about this coming salvation for the Gentiles. He said about Jesus, the Root of Jesse, "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10). Again, these are the spiritual truths that we celebrate during Christmas

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Luke and records the miraculous event of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary.

> *26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 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 father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)*

Many points arise from the reading. First, Mary is called the "favored one" in verse 28. She said about herself later in this chapter, "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed" (Luke 1:48). One can hardly imaging the calling which God placed her to be the bearer of the Son of God. In the reading, God called Mary who found favor with God who was to be the bearer of God's Son Jesus who would through the "ark" (see below) of His bodily sacrifice save the world from their sin. Jesus was conceived not through normal human means but through the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 34). Mary, was obviously very perplexed at all that was happening and called out to the Angel to explain these things (v. 34), who was more than glad to do so. Second, Mary's Son would be

called "the Son of God" (v. 35) and the Lord would give to him the throne of David (v. 32), the fulfillment of the prophecy that we saw in the first reading. Finally, Mary (and Joseph) were obedient to God in naming their Son Jesus, and Mary promised her obedience to God by calling herself "bondslave of the Lord" (v. 37). By the way, Jesus is from the Hebrew name "Jeshua," which means "the Lord is Salvation." Jesus is the salvation of the entire world, which is why we are so pleased to celebrate His birth on Christmas.

Noah, who came centuries before, was also called "blessed", and it was through the righteous and faithful acts of Noah that the world was saved from the flood. God said, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). Noah built an ark to save the people of the world from the wrath of God that was to literally be poured out through the Flood. The Blessed Mary on the other hand, bore the Son of God to be the ark of salvation for all who would believe. These similarities between Noah and Mary are important because they show how these two people were obedient to the difficult callings that God placed upon their lives. Although it's okay to ask questions when we discern the calling that God places upon **our** lives, it's also crucially important as believers to carry out His instructions.

While many of us are already familiar with the narrative concerning the birth of Jesus, this passage highlights important truths for our lives. First, Saint Luke brought out the fact that Jesus was born not through natural human relations but through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. This is important because since God is without sin this was the only means by which the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the second coming of the Lord will play out, how the world will be eventually unified under Jesus' earthly reign. Third, Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins. This is God's special invitation to counteract the destructive nature of sin in order to stand before a Holy God and not be rejected at the judgment. This is not only "a" plan for salvation, it is "the" plan. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

May you and your family have a very Merry Christmas.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading, what began as a promise that David's son (we know as Solomon) would build a temple for God (v. 13a) expanded into a throne that would endure forever (v. 13b). The temple is a place where people gather to worship God, and in the Old Testament was a place inside of which God's Spirit dwelled. We know the ruler of the temple is Jesus forever, but how can the throne of the temple endure forever, when we know that it was destroyed in 586 BC and again in AD70?

2. In light of your answer to the first question, read what Saint Paul had to say in the Letters to the Corinthians. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1Corinthians 6:19). "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). "And what

agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

How would you change your answer in light of the spiritual truth that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit on which Jesus is (and will) reign forever?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122114.cfm

First Reading 2 SM 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16

Second Reading ROM 16:25-27

Gospel Reading LK 1:26-38

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB