

21 Dec 14 Fourth Sunday in Advent

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16

Psalm 89

Romans 16: 25-27

Luke 1:26-38

[21 Dec 14 Fourth Sunday in Advent Textweek](#)

The first reading from 2 Samuel seems very much chosen for setting the scene for us as we approach the Christmas narratives. It gives us a dialogue between king, prophet and God, a dialogue that concludes with the establishment of ‘the house of David’.

Psalm 89 then underlines with some repetition the “*covenant with my chosen one*” and also names David as the one that, in God’s words, “*with my holy oil I have anointed him*”.

Again it appears that the scene is being set so that we can all sing with integrity “Once in Royal David’s city” and nod with understanding as we hear of the birth of Jesus, from the line of, the house of, David.

In the second reading, the Divine acknowledgement that is Paul’s signing off to his letter to the Romans, includes a brief formula that joins the dots from the established Hebrew tradition to the emerging and developing Christian community.

It provides a seamless link from the “*only wise God*” through “*the prophetic writings*”, the tradition, to “*all the Gentiles*”, those beyond the tradition, via “*Jesus Christ*”.

Paul’s joining of these theological dots gives us an appreciation of how difficult it was to fully appreciate the ‘coming of light’ and break free from the tradition of the past. It is a sobering realisation, for over and over Jesus was providing a new vision, a new revelation, a new understanding and a new enlightenment that went beyond the very tradition that Paul hangs on to.

When we look at Luke’s gospel, we see that it also provides an insight into the process, and the struggle, of the early church, particularly when compared with the other gospels.

By way of example; John’s is the last, the latest of the four gospels; and it is of a different nature to the other three in that it explores the abstract, it seeks to reveal the unseen and so reflects a deeper appreciation, perhaps a more sophisticated theology, and understanding in relation to Christ’s revelation.

The opening verses of John’s gospel serve as a clear indication that this is new ground compared to the other three. John begins without any historical reference point; Matthew starts

with a genealogy of Jesus taking the reader back into the tradition, Luke does the same with the birth narrative and all its allusions to prophets and Old Testament icons; and Mark historically grounds his text in the narrative of the baptism of Jesus.

John is very different; *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God”*.

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John’s gospel is not confined by either history or tradition; that said, he still has an audience to consider and he still has to ground, make real his insights for his listeners to appreciate and understand. The other three gospels seem more obvious, less abstract and narrate in a story-like fashion the life and events of Jesus and so can more readily be seen as literal accounts, which of course they were never intended to be.

So as we read Luke’s account today, we can do so, having already been awakened by John’s gospel to be looking for something more than the story.

Luke’s announcing of the ‘coming of light’ is very much grounded in history, and employs the familiar, traditional, figure of an angel to convey God’s message, all very acceptable to an old Testament audience.

The dialogue again prepares us for the Christmas narratives; and again Luke is drawn into joining the dots for his listeners to comfort them with their entrenched and established tradition. Luke makes the point right from the outset that *“the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.”*

Just the mention of David, gives some authority and legitimacy to the dialogue that follows.

However, the glimpse of enlightenment is there in the same dialogue; there is a clear break with tradition, a new order and a new orientation for the faithful that invites them beyond their tradition; Luke asks them to leave the “house of David”.

In verse 32 Gabriel speaks of the new birth, the child *“and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David”*.

This is a huge challenge to those early listeners; in their understanding, and according to 2 Samuel *“the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you [David] a house. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.”*

Now Luke is reassigning that covenant to the new born Christ; and so the penny drops, that's why it was so important for the gospel writers to ensure that Jesus was of the lineage of David. And that's why we still sing today, 'Once in royal David's city'.

The gospel writers and the early church, and the church today, saw, and still sees all that Jesus revealed within the context and confines of the Old Testament tradition; and yet at the same time, we glimpse and want to believe that Jesus reveals a new creation, a different worldview that goes beyond that primitive tradition.

The process of Christmas is to realise a new creation, to acknowledge 'divine Birth, to actually discover the "Word made flesh"; the narratives invite such a movement, and yet the very writers of those narratives could not let go of their established tradition.

And for us as we approach Christmas, we probably will find exactly the same degree of difficulty....

We are in the place of Mary as we approach Christmas:

"The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 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 ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

We too have within us the birth of new creation; we have within us, waiting for birth, "The Body of Christ".

And we have fear, that which will keep us rerunning our past instead of creating a future, Mary had fear, our fear and so the assurance of the angel: *"Do not be afraid"*

Mary's initial response, like ours: *"How can this be"*

And no matter how you want to frame your virginity we all respond the same way:

How can I change the world

How can I create a new future

How can I stop watching 97 hours of TV each month

How can I stop hanging on to all I've got

How can any of this be/

Mary encountered Christmas and changed her response; “*let it be with me according to your word*”.

Pray that we can do the same this Christmas