

Wednesday, December 14, 2022 – Midweek Advent III

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 (ESV) – “Waiting with Worship”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.’ Nathan replied to the king, ‘Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you.’ That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: ‘Go and tell my servant David, “This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’” Now then, tell my servant David, “This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. ”“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you:” Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”” Thus far our text.

Isn't it hard to wait for something that you know is coming soon? When my family and I are about to embark upon a big road trip (for two or three weeks or so), the night before is usually close to sleepless for me with anticipation. I know that it would be best for me to get a good night's sleep, but all of the preparation and planning and details just muddle together in my mind, and I can't get any rest. And, the anticipation and joy at having this time to explore the country on a road trip is just so exciting! Sometimes the planning is even more exciting than taking the trip itself. It seems as if the days spent on the trip are so short, and the days leading up to it are so long! I also see this difficulty in waiting through the eyes of children – they just can't WAIT for the day of Christmas to come, because then and only then will they be able to open the presents that are just waiting for them under the tree on Christmas morning. Children aren't good at delayed gratification – they want what they want, right away!

Today, as we explore our third Midweek Advent service, we think about the fact that we've been in Advent now for quite some time. We've been preparing for Jesus' coming for over three weeks; 18 days, to be exact. We're ready for the time to be here already; we can't wait until we can actually celebrate the birth of our Savior in the manger at Bethlehem. Unlike the world around us, which usually anticipates things and celebrates them early, this isn't the way of the church. We don't "jump the gun" and forget about the season of Advent, or marginalize it; rather, we embrace it. We light the candles of the Advent wreath; we read the prophecies about Jesus' coming; we sing the glorious Advent hymns that talk about the Savior of the World deigning to come and dwell with us on earth. We join together for special worship services, even though we are extremely busy preparing for the more secular aspects of the Christmas season. We emphasize Christ more at this time of the year than any other; we wait, and while we wait, we worship.

But, why are we worshipping more during Advent? What's so special about a baby being born in a manger? Our text for today's consideration tells we join together for worship services more often because we have been given gifts beyond even our ability to measure. We are given this message which

was recounted from the life of David – that God gave David, a sinful man, the right to be His man, His king, His servant. God provided the Israelites under David’s reign the ability to have their own land as a gift from His gracious hand. He took care of His people and blessed them with abundance. Rather than destroying them, which He would have been justified in doing, He prospered them, and gave them more than they had a right to expect from His abundance. Furthermore, He blessed them by giving them deliverance from their enemies; by His power, their enemies wouldn’t bother them anymore, at least not this set of enemies. Now of course, we know that David was a completely sinful and unclean man; he sinned against God and the people with his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. However, we also can see through his example that God doesn’t abandon His people because of their sinfulness; if He had, then He would have given up on the Israelites and David in one fell swoop.

God takes care of His people, and nowhere is this more evident in Scripture than through the narrative of the Israelites. Even though they sinned against Him in thought, word and deed, He urged them to confess their sins to Him. Think of the grumbling in the desert for those forty years; think of the worship of the golden calf WHILE Moses was up on Mount Sinai getting the Ten Commandments from God Himself. Once they had confessed their sins, and expressed regret for having committed them, then God forgave them, and blessed them with His presence and tender mercy once again.

This cycle throughout the Old Testament reminds us that no matter how awful our sins are, God forgives us when we confess them. He sent Jesus to come to earth to bear these sins upon Himself when He was crucified and rose again for our benefit. He became the sacrificial Lamb that was slain for the sins of the entire world. That’s why this coming of the Savior, Jesus, merits its own season apart from the celebration of the actual day of His coming. Actually, if you want to think about it from the big picture, there are three overarching seasons to the church year. There is the great season of Christmas, which extends from Advent all the way until the end of the Epiphany season, the Sunday of Transfiguration. There is the great season of Easter, which stretches from Lent through Easter Day up

until just before the Day of Pentecost. And there is the great season of Pentecost, which goes from the Day of Pentecost until the Last Sunday of the Church Year, the Sunday of the Fulfillment, when we start all over once again.

Now, I recount this for you not just because it makes for an interesting history lesson, because it does in and of itself. But, I mention this calendar scheme because it shows just how important this great season of Christmas really is. It is one of the three “biggies” in the church year, alongside Easter and Pentecost, that is major enough to be the same as the name of the great season in which it stands. The Day of Christmas marks the day when God came to us when we could not come to Him. It marks the day when He came to us and forgave us our sins and fulfilled the most basic human need – the need for a Savior. All of our human, earthly needs pale in comparison with our need to be saved from our many sins. Without this, nothing else matters – without salvation, when our earthly life is over, we are condemned already to the fires of hell – no questions asked! But because of this coming into our midst that Christ does on our behalf, we have the hope of heaven, which leads us to the greatest joy that we can even imagine! We will be in heaven with Him, where there is no more pain, sorrow or difficulty. We can’t even fathom what that will be like; thanks be to God that He gives us the trust to believe that it is there for us, even though we can’t see it just yet.

And just in case the Israelites and King David were apt to try to take some credit for the graciousness and mercy that was shown to them by God, Nathan the prophet keeps them humble. He reminds them by inspiration that as they were trying to build God a bigger house once they became settled in one place, in order that worldly renown would come their way, the Lord reminds them that He was perfectly content to dwell in a tent, rather than a house of cedar, provided the motivations were right. He didn’t want to have the people think that they could count building Him a better house as counting toward their righteous acts; rather, He was just fine with a tent, provided it was filled with worship. Now, this doesn’t mean today that we should neglect the things of God and put the emphasis

on our own selfish motives. But what it does mean is that we shouldn't count worshipping in a fine cathedral as being any more righteous than being in more humble circumstances. God is concerned with the attitude of the heart, not the balance in the bank account. Thanks be to God that He keeps us humble and focused upon Himself, because He is the fount and source of everything good that proceeds from us and is present in this sinful world.

Even though we are in the midst of a hectic time right now, God promises us peace. He promises to be with us, to give us everything that we need to survive in this world, and to bless us beyond our worthiness to receive anything from Him. He takes care of us, even though we sin against Him every day and with our every thought, word and deed. He gives us what we truly need, salvation from our sins, and helps us to put the other things into perspective. That's why special worship services at this time of year are so important. We are especially apt to forget about Jesus during this Christmas season and focus on all of the externals and secularisms that are all around us. We think that we don't have time for one more thing, much less an increased focus on the church and the things of God. But thanks be to God that He guides us to take time to worship Him, and by so doing, receive His gifts. We hear His Word, whereby He reminds us that because of Christ, we have hope for the future, beyond this current world, which will not last forever. He came to us at the manger of Bethlehem, in the perfect way, as an innocent and sweet child, to remind us that He operates differently than we think that He should. He urges us to worship Him, not because He needs anything, but because WE need the increased emphasis on Him this time of year. Thanks be to God that He comes to us at Christmas, and throughout the year, totally out of His love for us and all of His children. Because we know why He came, and what He came to do, we can truly understand the reason for the joyous Christmas season – Jesus' coming and dying and rising again on the third day, Easter. Thanks be to God for all that He has done in our lives and hearts. He has truly done it all for our salvation. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ

Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.