

## Order of Worship for December 24, 2023

### Prelude:

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

**Opening Hymn:** *"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"* - Hymn #341

### Confession and Forgiveness

#### Old Testament Lesson: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

P: Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you." But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build Me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for My dwelling. In all places where I have 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?"' 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, 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. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over My people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. 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.'"

P: This is the Word of our Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

P: Christmas lights and sugar cookies, travel and wrapping presents, meeting deadlines and house cleaning, time off from school and dark afternoons.

**C: With all the distractions it is so hard for us to remember what Christmas is all about.**

P: We get to Christmas tonight, and then it life goes on as if Christmas did not matter.

**C: All our efforts to make Christmas special lacks something.**

P: All we do falls short.

**C: On our own we are just helpless sinners.**

**ALL: Lord God, like David we focus on what we can build, on what we can accomplish.**

P: But God did the building for David. He made David's house eternal through the coming of David's descendant, Christ Jesus. By the command of Jesus I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

### Service of the Word

#### **Entrance Psalm:**

P: Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,

**C: that the King of glory may come in.**

P: The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,

**C: the world and those who dwell therein,**

P: for He has founded it upon the seas

**C: and established it upon the rivers.**

P: Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

**C: And who shall stand in His holy place?**

P: He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

**C: who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.**

P: He will receive blessing from the LORD

**C: and righteousness from the God of his salvation.**

P: Such is the generation of those who seek Him,

**C: who seek the face of the God of Jacob.**

P: Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,

**C: that the King of glory may come in.**

P: Who is this King of glory?

**C: The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!**

P: Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors,

**C: that the King of glory may come in.**

P: Who is this King of glory?

**C: The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory!**

**All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,

**C: that the King of glory may come in.**

**All: Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

#### **Prayer of the Day:**

P: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

**Epistle Lesson: Romans 16:25-27**

P: Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Gradual Hymn: “The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came” - Hymn #356****Holy Gospel: Luke 1:26-38**

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the first chapter:

**C: Glory to You, O Lord.**

P: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, 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." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

**C: Praise to You, O Christ.**

**Sermon Hymn: “Hail to the Lord's Anointed” – Hymn #398****Sermon: “Made by God” - 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16**

Christmas is a time for building. It's a time of trying to get all the pieces that have to come together. Of course, I'm talking about assembling toys. Parents have stories of staying up 'til all hours of the night assembling those last Christmas gifts. And then kids spend hours assembling their Lego sets, families working on jigsaw puzzles, and working on projects with new tools.

Gifts aren't the only pieces that have to come together. The kitchen is full of moms and kids mixing up all of the ingredients to make delicious Christmas cookies and other desserts. Trees and houses have been decorated with care, with every ornament placed exactly where it needs to go.

A lot of pieces have to come together for gatherings, as well. Balancing out competing family obligations is a challenge for many, especially when long distances are involved. Who brings what needs to be coordinated so there's a balance of food. Lists are exchanged so that everyone knows what to get.

What we hear today is a reminder of all the pieces that had to come together to make that first Christmas happen. Especially, we hear how God made a promise to King David, and kept it, and all of the things that had to come together in just the right way for the promise to be kept.

This passage is one of the high points in the Old Testament, even if we don't always look at it that way. King David wants to build a house for God, since Jerusalem is secure and the people aren't traveling from place to place. Instead of a tent, even a fancy tent like the tabernacle, David wants to build a permanent temple, worth of God. Nathan the prophet gives him the go-ahead, but God comes later that night and says not so fast. God's got a different plan. God comes back with a promise to David. God will build David a house.

God starts with nothing. After all, with King David, he'd started with a shepherd boy who was so insignificant that his own father forgot about him. He'd started with a shepherd boy and his sling and used him to defeat the Philistine's mighty warrior, Goliath. God had taken a shepherd boy and made him king, given him victory, and now he was at peace. But God wasn't done with him yet.

God needed to build a house for David, because David's efforts would go astray. Just a few short chapters later, in 2 Samuel 11, David would almost destroy his house when he lies and murders to try to cover up what he'd done with Bathsheba. Just a couple chapters after that, David's son Absalom selfishly tries to take over the kingdom. David's later descendants would be a mix of good kings and bad kings, of sinners and saints. And so God would build the house that would last despite the sinfulness and imperfections of those in it. It couldn't happen by itself. It could only happen because it was made by God.

God starts with nothing because then we can see that it only happened because of what God did, not because of what anyone else did. If we look back to Genesis, we see the people of the world trying to build their way up to God with the tower of Babel. But instead, God scattered the people and confused their languages. And then he calls Abraham, a childless old man with a slightly younger but still past child bearing years wife, and promises to make a great nation out of them.

The promise to build the house would continue with God using the unexpected. God sends an angel to Mary, who is engaged to be married to Joseph, of the house of David.

Of all the people in the world who have ever lived, of all the places in the world people have ever lived, it's in backwater, small town, culturally challenged Nazareth where an angel appears to announce the conception of the Son of God. The angel Gabriel appears not to a princess in disguise, or a girl who has distinguished herself in any way whatsoever, but to a girl who seemed to still be a child herself, not someone old enough or established enough to have any

child, let alone this child. God doesn't send the angel to someone who is already great. God promises to make Mary great.

Why does God work this way? It seems that God always works this way. God doesn't take the great and make them greater. God takes the insignificant and makes them great.

When Jesus came to earth, he didn't come with great fanfare. He wasn't born into a palace, in a big city. He was born in a small, insignificant town, that the prophet Micah reminds us was "too little to be among the clans of Judah." The birth wasn't announced in Rome or Athens or Alexandria. Angels appeared to shepherds out in the fields. A few obscure scholars came from the East. Few in Bethlehem would remember the events of that first Christmas as a pivotal moment in the history of the world. But it was just the same. That village, those shepherds, those wise men were made great by the little baby born there.

When that baby grew up and went to the cross, it didn't look like anything special, either. Another would-be Messiah crucified along with a couple of thieves. Rome again asserting its power and reminding its people not to rebel. Yet it was there that the most pivotal event in the history of the world occurred. It is there that we see our salvation. It is there, at the cross, that we see God's grace. It is there we see what God has done for us.

God likes to make things out of nothing. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

As we get ever closer to Christmas, it's easy to try and make things great. We want to make sure that our families have a great time gathering together. We want to make sure that our kids have great presents. We want to make our house look the greatest on the block. In the midst of all of those attempts to make Christmas great, remember what made that first Christmas great. It wasn't the angels or the shepherds. It wasn't the wise men. It wasn't even Mary or Joseph. It was God, who makes greatness out of nothing. God, who doesn't care how economically depressed or culturally challenged we may or not be. God, who chooses the small things of the world to make great. That's not just good news. That's great news.

### **Responsive Reading on the Song of Mary: Luke 1:46-55:**

P: "And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,"

C: "**Jesus said, 'In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.'**" (Matthew 5:16)

P: “and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,”

**C: “Jesus said, ‘When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.’” (John 16:21)**

P: “for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant.”

**C: “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” (1 Peter 5:5)**

P: “For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;”

**C: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” (Romans 4:7-8)**

P: “for He who is mighty has done great things for me,”

**C: “But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’” (Matthew 19:26)**

P: “and holy is His name.”

**C: “Hallowed be Thy name.” (Matthew 6:9)**

P: “And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation.”

**C: “God made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel.” (Psalm 103:17)**

P: “He has shown strength with His arm;”

**C: “Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done marvelous things! His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him.” (Psalm 98:1)**

P: “He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;”

**C: “Behold, all who are incensed against you, Israel, shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish.” (Isaiah 41:11)**

P: “He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;”

**C: “Jesus said, ‘For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.’” (Luke 18:14)**

P: “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.”

P: “He has helped His servant Israel,”

**C: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)**

P: “in remembrance of His mercy,”

**C: “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is God’s steadfast mercy toward those who fear Him.” (Psalm 103:11)**

P: “as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham”

**C: “God said to Abraham, ‘I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” (Genesis 12:3)**

**P: “and to his offspring forever.”**

**C: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:23)**

**Prayer of the Church:**

**P: Lord in Your mercy . . .**

**C: Hear our prayer.**

**Service of the Sacrament**

**Invitation to Communion:**

**P: Christ Jesus came into this as we have remembered that promise from the Father through this Advent season. As we prepare to celebrate His coming on Christmas and anticipate when He will come again on the Last Day, we are invited to share with Him in a way like no other as He comes to us in His Supper to offer us His true body and blood in this Sacrament. We hear His invitation and come!**

**The Word of Our Lord:**

**Lord’s Prayer:**

**Distribution**

**Dismissal**

**Closing Prayer:**

**All: Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee. Israel’s hope and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art, dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart. Amen.**

**Blessing: (Pastor)**

**C: Amen.**

**Magnificat (Song of Mary) Hymn: “Tell Out, My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord” - Hymn #935**

**Postlude:**