

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.

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