**2 Samuel 7:8-16 (esp.11b-13)** December 20, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Advent 4

 *2 Samuel 7:8 “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. 9I 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. 10And 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 11and 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: 12When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. 15But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**“Of the House and Line of David”**

 *“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David”* (Lk 2:4). I just love to hear that. Every Christmas for my entire life I have heard that. It’s like a cup of warm eggnog – comfort food for the ears. *“To the house and line of David…”* As much a part of Christmas as cut-out cookies with frosting hardened just enough to have a thin crispy coat on top of gooey stuff with candy sprinkles.

 If you have ever been to a Christmas Eve service you have heard that line. I’d guarantee it. So, here’s the question: What’s the big deal about David? *“Town of David… house and line of David…”* Why make a point of him? By the time Joseph and Mary come along, David has been dead, in the grave, *kaput*, for a thousand years. Is “David” just a nice print on the wallpaper of the Christmas story? Is the name just one of those sentimental phrases that adds warmth to the occasion, like a sweater in winter? What’s up with David and the Christmas story?

 And that isn’t the only place it comes up. In our Gospel reading the angel proclaimed to Mary about the child she would bear, “*The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David…”* (Lk 1:32) Again, when Jesus had grown up and walked the land of Israel, more than once the troubled and diseased shouted out to him, *“Son of David, have mercy on me!”* (Mt 9:27; 15:22; et al.). On Palm Sunday the crowds shouted, *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”* (Matthew 21:9). Back at the Christmas story, when the angel made that magnificent announcement to the shepherds by their flocks at night, he made a point of saying, *“Today, in the town of \_\_\_,”* you guessed it, *“David, a Savior has been born to you”* (Luke 2:11) David, David, David. I won’t tire you by giving you half a dozen more, but if you look, they’re there. What’s up with David?

 You might wonder why just a couple days before Christmas we are grubbing around in the Old Testament. Well, this reading is at the core, it is the core, of all those many many times you hear about David in the New Testament. The only minor problem is that our reading is taken out of context. It’s not taken out of context in a dishonest way, but it is taken out of context in a way that makes us say, “What’s going on? Who’s talking to whom?”

 So here it is: One morning, right when King David’s office opened for business, his court preacher, the prophet Nathan, showed up and got the secretary to let him in to see the king. He said to the king, “Your majesty, that advice I gave you yesterday, remember? Well, throw it out the window. I told you ‘Yes,’ but I should have said ‘No.’”

 You see, the day before, David had had a grand idea. The Lord’s place of worship for the last 400 years had been in a tent, an elaborate tent, but still a tent. That special tent was called the Tabernacle. David had thought, “This just isn’t right. I’m in a palace, and God’s house of worship is a tent. I’m going to do something about that.” And Nathan the prophet, like any preacher, pastor or prophet would have said when the king had it in his mind to build a brand spanking new, beautiful church, Nathan said, *“Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you”* (2 Sam. 7:3)

 But Nathan forgot to ask God. In the middle of the night the Lord came to the prophet Nathan and told him—and here I am going to summarize—“Tell David that I’m glad he wants to build a proper church, but I don’t want him to do it. And I want to tell him something else…” That is where our reading comes in. Our reading is the “something else.”

 So Nathan comes to David and says, “Those plans that I told you to go ahead and do, well, God says, ‘Don’t do it.’” And then the Lord completely turned things around. Instead of David building a house of worship for God, God talked about what he is going to do for David and his house. God is going to build a house for David. Now the part of our reading that dealt with what the Lord had done for David, we are going to pass by so that we can focus on what the Lord would do for David.

 Starting in verse 11, the Lord starts talking about David’s future, about how he will build up a house for David. ***“The Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”***

 So here we have a prophecy. God is talking about the future. But it isn’t a straightforward prophecy. It is a sort of confusing kind of prophecy that we often find in the Bible. Essentially, the prophecy is a multi-level prophecy. Let’s walk this through.

 The question is this: Who is this prophecy talking about? Here’s what God said to David through Nathan: ***“When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you [as king.]”*** First of all, it is obviously about somebody in the future. But it is someone very specific in David’s future. God says he will give David a successor from his own family. And we think, “Isn’t that how it usually works? Kings have sons who are princes and then become kings when their father passes away?” Not really. In the ancient Middle East when a king died, there was a fierce power struggle. What often happened in that power struggle was that, as often as not, whoever finally emerged from the struggle as king then went on to massacre the dead king’s entire family just to be sure that none of them could come back and claim the throne. So just hearing God’s promise that his own son would succeed him had to be a tremendous relief for David.

 Then God prophesied, ***“He [your successor son] is the one who will build a house for my Name.”*** Remember the temple that David had been hoping to build for the Lord to replace the tent? Well, God says that a biological son of David would become king and build the first temple for the nation of Israel. (We that Solomon, David’s son, would do this.) So David has another level of relief in knowing that someone, and not just anyone, but his own son will build a temple to the Lord. Anyway, it sounds like we have identified the fulfillment of the prophecy. It must be Solomon.

 But then things get a little strange. God goes on, ***“I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”*** This prophecy starts looking farther into the future than Solomon. Solomon will establish an unending dynasty. Except that Solomon isn’t the one who establishes it. God does. But here’s the problem. While it looked for a while like it might happen, David’s dynasty did not, in fact, last literally ***“forever.”*** The dynasty of David and Solomon did last a long time, over 400 years. After about a 50 year interruption, it did come back. For a while. And then it pretty much disappeared for good. That’s not ***“forever.”*** But God promised a ***“forever”*** dynasty. What happened to God’s promise?

 The Jews were asking themselves how this square was going to be rounded. God had promised that David’s house would rule forever, but it wasn’t. But they still remembered. God promised… David’s house… They were obsessed with this.

 And that is why the angel could say to Mary, *“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”* The angel could say this and not be speaking complete gobbledy-gook to Mary, like it would have been to us. The angel was making all kinds of connections with well-known Old Testament prophecies. He was announcing the completion of prophecy that Mary herself had heard, not something completely new and strange. In telling Mary that she was part of the completion of what God had planned for centuries, she realized that God was just dotting his i's and crossing his t’s. It had already been prophesied, and now the almighty, all-knowing God was just finishing his work. It was as good as done, and it would be completed in Mary of Nazareth.

 And after this somewhat academic study of 2 Samuel 7 and a little bit of ancient history, etc. you are saying, “So what?! What does it matter to me? Where does it direct me?”

 Don’t you see?

 What do you think of someone who doesn’t get you a present? Compare that to someone who gets you a present last minute, coming home from work on Christmas Eve? Compare that to someone who gets you a present a week beforehand and wraps it nicely? Compare that to someone who knows better than you do what you not only want but also need, and gets it weeks ahead of time? And what if they can’t find it on the internet but they have to scour actual stores to find it? And what if it isn’t cheap, but is a unique one-of-a-kind masterpiece that costs them dearly? And what if in the weeks and months beforehand they leave you all kinds of clues, some playful, some serious, some sentimental and mushy, some very clever? With that kind of gift, you know you are loved.

 And now you are starting to understand what is so special about *“the house and line of David.”* It is one of the more prominent of the hundreds of Old Testament prophecies spoken through the thousands of years before the first Christmas. God didn’t just go out and get us a last-minute-before-the-stores-close solution to our sin problem. Every single prophecy was itself a gift. It was an assurance to the people who were looking forward to the day when their Savior would finally step onto the world stage. They had not been forgotten. No, they were loved.

 And to us who live afterward it is all that and more. Every prophecy is another point of proof that our faith is not in vain, but that it is built on our faithful God. It is a reminder of how God specially planned, prepared and bought our redemption from sin through his Son.

 And so, every time you hear about Jesus as the Son of David, who was born in the town of David, to descendants of the house and line of David, every time you hear those things you are hearing God saying, “Fear not. Just remember how much time, thoughht, care and expense went into my plans for you.” And then you hear an echo, God’s people replying, “Yes, thank you for reminding us that you are faithful to your loving promises, always and forever.” Amen.