

## Building a House for the Lord

December 20, 2020, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Gospel of Luke 1:26-38

Fr. John

Our readings begin with David, now comfortably ensconced as king of Israel, and wanting to build a suitable temple to house the Arc of the Covenant. [The Arc, we recall, contained the stone tablets upon which were written the 10 commandments given to Moses by God on Mt. Sinai.] For the Hebrew people, it represented the presence of God in their midst. For generations it was kept in a tent - which was symbolic of a nomadic people whose God always travelled with them.

David, however, out of the best of intentions, desired a more fitting and elaborate house for the Arc. He would be the one to build a house for the Lord. David, like many of us, thought that he could confine God to some safe place similar to how we would store some precious family heirloom. He thought that he was doing God a favour. How pretentious was that! On a far lesser scale, it would be like me offering golf lessons to Tiger Woods or instructing Wayne Gretzky on how to play hockey.

Yet - how often do we try to house God within the confines of our own limited thinking?

Fortunately, God, through the prophet Nathan straightened David out in no uncertain terms. 'Are you going to build *me* a house to live in? I took *you* from the pasture from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel'.

So instead, it would be God who would create a house for David and his line of descendants - a dynasty that would never end.

Centuries later this would lead to the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary that she would give birth to a son who would perpetuate that lineage of David forever.

Mary, of course, was initially overwhelmed by such a message but ultimately was graced to respond positively to God's plan despite its seeming improbability. But as the angel said, 'Nothing is impossible for God.'

The difference between David's initial attitude and Mary's response is that, in the first instance, David wanted to instigate what he thought was appropriate. While in Mary's case, it was cooperation to God's initiative ['Let it be done to me according to *your* word.']

Instigation implies that we are in charge of setting the agenda while cooperation means that we are willing to forego our plan in order to carry out someone else's.

Perhaps, in this year of the pandemic, we see this being played out in our compliance [or lack of it] regarding the guidelines of curbing a very infectious virus.

In the bigger picture, it is a question of how cooperative we are in allowing God's plan to unfold - and this in spite of how mysterious it might seem.

To illustrate this, there was an experiment that was carried out with a butterfly about to emerge from its cocoon. To speed up the process extra heat was applied to the cocoon. The butterfly did emerge as a result. However, it was too early, the butterfly was weak and was unable even to fly and eventually died. It's an illustration from the natural world that we need to follow God's plan and not our own.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the saviour, albeit in a different fashion this year, we need to adopt Mary's response as our own in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

'Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word.'

It's a reminder of other words from scripture: 'If the Lord does not build the house, then in vain do the builders labour.'