

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

^{7:1} Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³ Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." ⁴ But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵ Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶ 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 and a tabernacle. ⁷ Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸ 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 to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ 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. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Commentary

For Israel, this passage explained why Solomon, not David, built the Temple. It clarified that God's presence was not dependent on a tabernacle or a temple. It legitimized the succession of kings by making it God's will. It emphasized that God's promise to David would endure, even when strong divine judgment was called for. God's promise to David was very important for the Judahites who received the version of this story about 500 years after David's reign. It gave them hope that even though no descendant of David was on the throne, a king/messiah would eventually rise to restore the dynasty God had promised. For Christians, verse 16 is key because Joseph was a descendant of David. Jesus could then lay claim to the Davidic throne, a hope that his followers held in a time when Judea was ruled by Rome.

Reflection

What does the promise to David mean for the modern state of Israel? What promises did God make to the Palestinians who are also descendants of Abraham?

Luke 1:46b-55

1:46b "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Commentary

Mary's song, traditionally called "The Magnificat," opens by praising God, who has made her the mother of the Savior, Jesus. She sings of God's redeeming work as if it has already occurred. This reversal she speaks of has come about, not through a rebellious uprising of the afflicted, but through God's arrival in human history as a tiny baby. This passage is historic, beautiful, and controversial in some Christian circles, for Luke almost makes Mary a prophet.

Reflection

What about the Magnificat is moving to you? Which of Mary's words speak into experiences of your own life?

Romans 16:25-27

16:25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith -- ²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Commentary

Early Christian worship evolved into something radically different from Jewish worship. The word worship still meant "bow down" but had also gained a Greek emphasis on service and

piety. No sacrifices were performed in Christian worship, since Christ's death was believed to constitute the perfect sacrifice. Only three early Christian liturgical observances are known: baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the laying on of hands. Above all, early Christian worship was filled with joy and praise to God. Thus, a hymn of praise, these closing verses of Romans hint at early liturgical practices. Even today it gives us a biblical basis for benedictions we use in worship.

Reflection

Early Christian worship is full of praise to God. What are you praising God for in your life and your church today?

Luke 1:26-38

^{1:26} In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

³² 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 ancestor David.

³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God.

³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is

the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.