

**PREPARING THE WAY**  
**4) "The House That God Built"**

**2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16  
Luke 1: 26-38**

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David must have been feeling pretty good about himself. After all, he had just become the king of a united Israel. Jerusalem had become the new capital of this kingdom and the ark, the most holy of Israel's relics, had been brought to reside within its walls. And, if you will recall, that moment of the ark's arrival in Jerusalem had become a moment frozen in time, a moment etched forever within the collective memory of Israel. For in that happy and holy moment, David, the new king of Israel, had danced before the ark as it was paraded down the narrow streets of the city.

Yes, it had been an unforgettable moment and David, still basking in its after glow, was feeling pretty good about himself and the future that stretched out before him. In fact, he was feeling so good about himself and his new life as a king living in palatial splendor, that he decided that it would only be appropriate to do a little something for God as an expression of his gratitude.

So King David summoned the prophet, Nathan and announced his intention. It didn't seem right, suggested the king, that he should be living in a house of splendor while the Ark of the Covenant should reside in a tent. David wanted to build God a more appropriate residence, something more befitting the glory and splendor of the God of Israel.

Nathan initially encouraged David to proceed. But that night, the prophet heard a second opinion—this one coming from none other than God...

**"Go and tell my servant David: Are you the one to build me a house to live 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 and a tabernacle." (2 Sam. 7: 5-6)**

God then raises the question, "Did I ever ask why you have not built me a house of cedar?" The message, by this point, is becoming clear: God has a different plan in mind. To further underscore that plan, God then proceeds to remind the youthful David of all that God has done to make possible his kingship possible and all that God will yet do to ensure a glorious legacy. Then, as if in summary, God offers this succinct instruction...

**"Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."**

I can imagine that David, so full of himself and all the power of his office, must have reddened a little in the ears when he heard the prophet's instruction from God. I can imagine that he felt a little embarrassed as Nathan reminded him of a reality that he had quite simply forgotten—God was God and he was not! God would be the one to decide what God wanted or needed—not some youthful shepherd still wet behind the ears!

It would not be mighty King David who would build the house God wanted. No, it would be God who would build a house for David—not a literal house of course, but the lineage that would become known as the “House of David.” Suffice it to say, that David had received his “comeuppance.”

And suffice it to say that this ancient story of David’s “comeuppance” has a bit of a contemporary ring. Living as we do in a “take charge world” that emphasizes the importance of pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and taking the bull by the horns—to reference a couple of popular expressions—it very easy and certainly, natural for us to think in terms of taking the initiative and making it happen. And while this approach does have certain positive benefits, it also can create a rather dangerous liability—the liability of thinking and acting as if, ultimately, we are in control and that the only initiative that matters is our own.

Like David, we can become so swept up with our prominence and power that we decide that we might even decide to “do a little something for God,” as if God were somehow dependent upon us and our wisdom and generosity. Do you see the danger? It is the danger human pride creates whenever and wherever we attempt elevate our role at the expense of God’s role.

The prophet, Nathan, however, informs David that while that might have been his plan, it was not going to be God’s plan. God had a different plan in mind for the king.

In the film, “Crocodile Dundee,” the Australian Dundee travels to New York City. One day, as he is walking down the street with his girl friend, he is accosted by a young man who brandishes a knife as he demands Dundee’s valuables. Calmly, the Australian looks at this New York thug and with some disdain, replies, “That’s not a knife...**this** is a knife!” And he proceeds to pull out a huge machete like blade that makes the attackers weapon look like a penknife. The scene ends with the thugs fleeing for their lives.

In reading our lesson from 2 Samuel, it is almost as if God is looking at the blueprints that David had drawn up for God’s “house,” and then saying, “That’s not a house...**this** is a house! Look at these blueprints that I have for the house of David that I will build for you.

David was reminded—and so are we—that wisdom, wealth and power can be misleading. They can give the false impression that it is “all about us,” when in fact,

it is “all about God” and the initiative that God has taken, is taking and will continue to take in our lives.

It would be hard to imagine a greater contrast of the human spirit than the one that exists between David in our lesson from 2 Samuel and Mary in our lesson from Luke’s gospel. Where David is so full of himself, Mary is so empty.

Where David is so confident in his speech, Mary is so tentative and unsure. Where David is eager to do something for God, Mary is simply open to allowing God to do something for her and through her.

In Luke’s story of the annunciation, Mary offers a humble counterpoint to the arrogance of David. Her witness is not one of “**doing something**,” **for God**, but “**being something**” **for God**. She responds to the angel’s announcement with those incredible words, “**Let it be with me according to your word.**”

We have before us then, the witness of two very different people; one a king, the other a peasant. We have before us two very different responses; one full of self, the other empty of self. Which of these witnesses, would you most closely identify with?

It is intriguing and significant to consider that while David offered to build a house for God, the “house” that God ultimately chose was not that of gold and cedar, but that of flesh and blood, not a temple of mighty splendor, but a woman of humble spirit. There is a lesson here for those who have the humility to hear it. The question is, “Do you? Do we have that humility?”

Writing in the Christian Century, Ronald Goetz, helps to clarify the confusion that often occurs during discussions that pit God’s initiative against our own. “**Certainly**,” he writes, “**we are not to remain passive recipients. We are graced so as to be active and creative. But at the root of everything is God’s initiative and grace. We cannot create ourselves, we cannot redeem ourselves...Everything that is comes from God.**”

Reflecting on the witness of Mary, he then adds, “**Without acknowledging that we are, in our virgin beginnings, the humble, barefooted recipients of a grace and a call that are the foundation of all that we ever hope to accomplish, our civilization loses all perspective and our power inevitably corrupts us. We could do worse than to proclaim Mary as our patron saint, she who was the simple and pure recipient of the grace of the Holy Spirit.**”

In a world that clearly is inclined to follow the example of David, we would do well to consider instead, the witness of Mary. Instead of believing that it is up to us do “do a little something for God,” out of our prominence and power, we can simply realize that God has already done something for us. God has made God’s home in the flesh of a baby born not in a splendid temple, but in a cattle stall—of all places.

Go figure. That is certainly a different approach—one that we would hardly expect from the Creator of the universe! But, in case you didn't know, our God is a God of surprises—One whose home can be found not among the powerful and prominent, but among the humble and the lowly.

Imagine, for a moment, what our world would be like if we if it was filled with more Mary's and less King David's. Can you imagine that? Now, I grant you that it is hard to imagine such a possibility given the King David mindset that so many seem to have. But it seems to me that if we would take Mary's witness to heart, we would be less filled with ourselves and more receptive to the will and way of God.

We would take ourselves a little less seriously and take God much more thoughtfully.

We would be more concerned with allowing God to use us rather than the ways we might use God.

David, in all of his glory, wanted to build a home for God. Mary, in all of her humility, was willing to be that home.

Do you see the difference? It's the difference between night and day...the difference between pride and humility...the difference between being closed and being open.

It's the difference between being an obstacle or an instrument in God's unfolding plan of salvation.

Which are you? Which approach are you inclined to take?

If you're not sure, allow me to recommend a simple prayer that will make your choice much easier. It is not a complicated prayer, but rather easy prayer to remember. It goes something like this: **"Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word."**

**Amen!**