

Let's limit our consideration of these readings to three things: God made a covenant with David that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ; Paul celebrates that what was once only known to the prophets has been revealed to all mankind; and that Mary modeled for us the kind of response God hopes each of us can make, to accept the Word of God. Mary's example can lead us to open ourselves to God's will in our lives and agree to make Jesus Christ real in this world by allowing Him to work in and through each one of us.

In the first reading King David had an epiphany of sorts. He came to the sudden realization that there was no suitable home for God; no building; no temple. God however, even though He may have appreciated the sentiment, was not interested in buildings. God pointed out that there was/there is something more enduring than any building or temple, and that is the Kingdom of God to be established through David's descendants. It was in Jesus that this prophesy from the 2nd book of Samuel would be fulfilled. Christians have to overcome a similar misunderstanding even today - that it is the church, the building, that is important. It's the Church, with the capital "C", not the building, but the living, breathing, Body of Christ, the PEOPLE, you and me, that has been erected to accomplish God's work - by Jesus Christ Himself. After Jesus was executed, and before He returned to His Father, He established the Church to keep alive the covenant with David that said there would be no end to his kingdom. And there has been no end with Jesus Christ as David's heir. The Church, with Jesus Christ as its head, continues to build the kingdom of God here on earth; there will be no end; His house and kingdom shall endure forever; His throne shall stand firm forever.

The second reading is from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans. Part of the significance of this letter is that it was written to the church community at Rome, a community that Paul had never visited. Rome was considered the center of the world of that time. It was the central focus of the world because it was the center of government of the Roman Empire, and with that it had become the center of commerce. When the Gospel of Jesus Christ reached Rome, and was made available to Gentiles of all cultures who came to live there, conduct business there, and from there return to the far ends of the known world, it was as though the entire world was exposed to the Gospel. It is no wonder that Paul was excited and sang praise to God. He was enthusiastic to recognize what God had done, and is proud to have been part of it.

In the Gospel the first words to Mary were words of caution, to set aside her fear. Then the angel revealed God's plan to Mary. Mary accepted God's plan. As a result she became the human mother of the child who IS (not was), who is God. And God did not stop with Mary. He calls each one of us to similarly set aside our fear and allow His Son to be born into our hearts.

As we come to better understand the Incarnation, the Mystery of God setting aside His divinity to become fully human, we come to understand that this means that God is being born into our hearts every day, and that we, the bearers along with Mary of the Word of God, are included in the mission shared by Paul with those who had gone before him, like John the Baptist. The same Jesus who was once carried by Mary in her womb, is now carried by us, in our hearts. We join our efforts in this season of expectation to those of Mary; we wait patiently

for the birth into our personal existence of the Prince of Peace. Like Mary, we know very little: only that God is in charge; and that we are asked to cooperate with His plan. Like Mary, we do not know where it will lead us, under what circumstances we will serve Him, and what will be asked of us.

It's trite to summarize all of this as just a "mystery", because it is more, much more than what we usually mean when we say mystery. There is no solution to suss out. There are no clues to string together to reach a logical conclusion. There will be no clarification by a brilliant investigator using observations made only by the most gifted mind. This is a mystery of God. It's a mystery in the theological sense; a mystery that we have no hope of understanding **on our terms**.

How is it that God, the Creator, the Supreme Being who set the world in motion; who created everything from nothing, came to be child of Mary, a simple, humble servant of the Lord? Why did God set aside His divinity to become one with us? Why did He do this as the most vulnerable and powerless form of human life - a newborn baby?

The best we can do is to accept God's Wisdom in addition to His will. However, there are lessons we can extract from the Nativity of the Lord for which we continue to prepare to remember and to celebrate in seven days. We can look at the vulnerability of a newborn and ask what can we do to protect life? We can look at the difficulty of bearing a child in harsh circumstances and ask what can we do to care for expecting mothers with regards to nutrition and medical care, not just in distant lands but also close to home? We can look at the difficult circumstances of this family on the road away from home and ask what can we do

to shelter the homeless, console the lonely, and provide for the immigrant and refugee. We must look at our lives, our circumstances and ask how is God calling us in our small circle of influence, to serve Him by serving others?

**Such actions may not reveal the deep meaning of the Incarnation to us, but they will bring us closer to the God Who so loved the world that He sent His only Son.**

These readings today have a common thread that I did not see until I cobbled together these reflections. It's interesting how the Word of God and the Holy Spirit work together through Sacred Scripture. The common theme is that God is with us; He has been and He will continue to be with us. God influenced David by establishing a covenant that was active through his successors; God fulfilled that covenant through Jesus Christ born to Mary. Through Jesus Christ God spread knowledge of the covenant, knowledge of God's awesome power, and most of all God's mercy, forgiveness and love to the farthest ends of the world, using the disciples like Paul, Peter, Thomas and the others to carry the Good News. Through Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments, under the guidance of the Church, God continues to use **US** to carry on the work of love leading to reconciliation that was begun shortly after man was expelled from the Garden of Eden.

What we should remember at this time of the year in particular, is that it is up to us to continue to bring Jesus Christ into the world, into our world, by opening our hearts to Him, and by proclaiming to all those we encounter, in our words and in our actions, that Jesus Christ is Lord and to Him shall be all glory and honor forever.