

Fourth Sunday of Advent Sunday, December 20, 2020

The Collect: Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 read from the New International Version Bible

7 After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

3 Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you."

4 But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:

5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling.

7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

8 "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. 9 I 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 on earth. 10 And 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 11 and 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:

16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

Hear what the spirit is saying to God's people

Psalm: Canticle 3 or Psalm 89: 1-4 & 19-26 both will be read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

Canticle 3

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; *

for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: *

the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him *
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm, *
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, *
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

The promise he made to our fathers, *
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

1 Your love, O Lord, for ever will I sing; *
from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.

2 For I am persuaded that your love is established for ever; *
you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.

3 "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; *
I have sworn an oath to David my servant:

4 'I will establish your line for ever, *
and preserve your throne for all generations.'"

19 You spoke once in a vision and said to your faithful people: *

"I have set the crown upon a warrior
and have exalted one chosen out of the people.

20 I have found David my servant; *

with my holy oil have I anointed him.

21 My hand will hold him fast *

and my arm will make him strong.

22 No enemy shall deceive him, *

nor any wicked man bring him down.

23 I will crush his foes before him *

and strike down those who hate him.

24 My faithfulness and love shall be with him, *

and he shall be victorious through my Name.

25 I shall make his dominion extend *

from the Great Sea to the River.

26 He will say to me, 'You are my Father, *

my God, and the rock of my salvation.'

Epistle: Romans 16: 25-27 read from the New Living Translation Bible

25 Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. 26 But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. 27 All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen.

Hear what the spirit is saying to God's people

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38 read from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

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.

The Gospel of the Lord

The Closing Prayer: On December 22nd we celebrate the life of Charlotte Diggs (Lottie) Moon Missionary in China. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

Born in Virginia in 1840, Charlotte Diggs (Lottie) Moon was the child of pious and affluent Baptist parents. Precocious in schooling, she received an MA in Classics, thereby earning one of the first graduate degrees awarded a woman in the South. She had a gift for languages, learning first the biblical and Romance languages—and then later, and famously, Mandarin.

Lottie Moon's piety lagged behind her learning, and through her teens she remained indifferent to her Baptist heritage. During a revival at age eighteen, she experienced a powerful conversion and devoted the rest of her life to Christ.

After college, Moon taught school in Alabama, Kentucky, and Georgia, one of the few occupations open to educated women in the South. Another vocation became available to her when Southern Baptists began to appoint women as foreign missionaries in 1872, and the following year, at age 33, Moon accepted an appointment in China.

Moon settled in Northern China and continued her work of education for girls. She soon became restless in teaching, and she began evangelizing among adults, particularly women. Her supervisors disapproved of her initiative, but Moon quickly gained credibility because of her ease in relating, woman-to-woman.

Lottie Moon's ceaseless correspondence with Baptist women in the United States, seeking their support and encouraging would-be missionaries, was instrumental in the denomination's burgeoning missionary movement. She appealed to women for a special offering for missionaries at Christmastime in 1887. Her influence led to the formation of the Women's Missionary Union in 1888, which continues the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering as a hallmark of Southern Baptist practice.

On arriving in China, Moon remained aloof from the Chinese, thinking them her cultural inferiors. Over time, however, she found a deep respect for Chinese culture, adopting not only their language but their dress and customs. As she wrote, "It is comparatively easy to give oneself to mission work, but it is not easy to give oneself to an alien people. Yet the latter is much better and truer work than the former." Lottie Moon died on Christmas Eve, 1912.

Let us pray: O God, in Christ Jesus you have brought Good News to those who are far off and to those who are near: We praise you for awakening in your servant Lottie Moon a zeal for your mission and for her faithful witness among the peoples of China. Stir up in us the same desire for your work throughout the world, and give us the grace and means to accomplish it; through the same Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**