

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 24

The Collect and Psalms will be read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer
The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel will be read from the New Revised Standard
Version Bible

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

7 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.”

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Psalm: Canticle 3 or Canticle 15 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

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.

or

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

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.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

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

On December 29 we celebrate the life of Thomas Becket. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

Thomas Becket was born in London in 1118, of a wealthy Norman family, and educated in England and in France. He then became an administrator for Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury. Later, he was sent to study law in Italy and France and, after being ordained deacon, he was appointed Archdeacon of Canterbury. His administrative skills eventually brought him to the notice of King Henry II, who, to Thomas's surprise, appointed him Chancellor of England. He and the King became intimate friends, and because of Becket's unquestioning loyalty and support of the King's interests in both Church and State, Henry secured Thomas's election as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. Becket, foreseeing a break with his Royal Master, was reluctant to accept. As Archbishop he changed, as he tells us, "from a patron of play actors and a follower of hounds, to being a shepherd of souls." He also defended the interests of the Church against those of his former friend and patron, the King. The struggle between the two became so bitter that Thomas sought exile at an abbey in France.

When he returned to England six years later, the fragile reconciliation between Henry and the Archbishop broke down. In a fit of rage the King is alleged to have asked his courtiers, "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" Four barons, taking Henry's words as an order, made their way to Canterbury, and, upon finding the Archbishop in the cathedral on December 29, 1170, struck him down with their swords. Later, when the monks of Canterbury undressed Thomas's body to wash it and prepare it for burial, they discovered that under his episcopal robes their worldly and determined Archbishop was wearing a hair shirt. While such a garment hardly proves that a person is a saint, it clearly indicates that Thomas was motivated in the exercise of his office by far more than political considerations. His final words to the four barons before receiving the fatal blow were, "Willingly I die for the name of Jesus and in the defense of the Church."

Let us pray: O God, our strength and our salvation, you called your servant Thomas Becket to be a shepherd of your people and a defender of your Church: Keep your household from all evil and raise up among us faithful pastors and leaders who are wise in the ways of the gospel; through Jesus Christ, the shepherd of our souls, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**