

**“Habitat for Humanity”**  
**2 Sam. 7:1-13, 16; Luke 1:26-38**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Greenlawn**  
**The Rev. Frederick H. Woodward      December 18, 2011**

**2 Sam. 7:1-13, 16 (NIV)**

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

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

*That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 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. 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?"'"*

*"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. 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 of the earth. 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 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. When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'"*

**Luke 1:26-38 (NIV)**

*In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David, or literally, from the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*

*The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."*

*"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.*

*For nothing is impossible with God."*

*"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.*

## **Habitat for Humanity**

All of you have heard of Habitat for Humanity, an ecumenical Christian organization dedicated to building simple, decent and affordable housing in partnership with those who are in need.<sup>1</sup> Today I want to talk about a different, but related, habitat for humanity, the one that God had promised David and the one that the angel Gabriel later promised Mary. We find that habitat for humanity in none other than in Jesus the Christ, our true home.

Although a lot has been lost in translation from the Hebrew and Greek, our readings from Second Samuel and the Gospel of Luke both concern the problem of homelessness, and its solution, the true habitat for humanity that we find in our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

In our short OT lesson from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel that June just read, the Hebrew word for house is used some ten times. In that passage, King David and God took very different views about the nature of the housing crisis besetting Israel.

You see, King David thought that the housing crisis had to do with God's not having a house or temple. But God took a quite different view. God reminded David that since God first began to journey with his people in the wilderness, God always been a God on the move. As a God on the move, one who tabernacles with his people, God didn't really need David's help at all. In fact, it was David who needed God's help. For although David had a fancy house or palace, God suggested that it was David who was really in need of a house, a house in the sense of a dynasty. And so what God promised David is that God himself would establish David's house or dynasty, and that David's throne and kingdom will endure forever.

That's a great promise, but how do you continue to believe in that promise when, as a people, you are uprooted from your homes by the Babylonians and sent into exile? How do you believe in that promise when, even after you return from exile, you remain under the thumb of a whole series of foreign oppressors, the Persians, the Seleucids, and then the Romans? How can that even count as a homecoming?

That leads us right to our reading today from Luke's Gospel where the housing theme is again prominent. We see that in the report that Mary's husband Joseph is from the house of David (Luke 1:27). We see that when the angel Gabriel promises Mary that this Jesus to whom she shall give birth shall reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:33).

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<sup>1</sup> See the home page for Habitat at Humanity at [www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org).

What's going on here, in other words, is that the angel Gabriel has picked up God's promise to David, and has assured Mary that that very promise has come true in Jesus, our true habitat for humanity. Gabriel tells Mary that God will make Jesus' name great and it is in and through Jesus that the house of Jacob and David shall go on forever. There shall be no end to his kingdom or dynasty.

So what difference does any of this make to you and me? Well, I think it makes all the difference in the world! For God has always been at work behind the scenes in the housing crisis facing his people, and that includes even us. For any of us who have ever longed for home, it is in Jesus Christ that we find our true habitat for humanity.

It may not always look that way, of course, from the outside, especially if we are physically homeless. It may not even have looked that way to the holy family when they found themselves homeless in Bethlehem at the very time Mary was to give birth to our Savior. It may not have looked that way after Jesus' birth when the holy family was uprooted from their home to flee political violence and found themselves illegal aliens in the foreign land of Egypt.

But Mary knew and trusted in the promises of God. She knew that she was to give birth to the one who would solve the problem of our homelessness, the one who would come to save us, the one who would gently dab and dry all our homesick tears. Mary knew and trusted that in Jesus the Christ, the houses of Jacob and David would continue forever. Mary knew and trusted that in Jesus, there really was a new habitat for humanity, a place for the homeless to find shelter and the homesick to find their rest and peace.

Mary, as one called to be a servant of the Lord, understood that nothing is impossible with God. She trusted God to use her to help solve the housing crisis for this homesick people of Israel, a people that has come to include all of us. Mary understood that she herself would become a habitat for humanity, a humanity perfectly conjoined with divinity in this very child that she herself would deliver. In her own body, Mary would provide a habitat for the one who came to give us spiritual shelter, the one who came to give us a home forever. In her own womb, Mary would provide lodging for the child who even now tabernacles among us (John 1:14).

My guess is that there are not many among us this morning who have ever lived in physical exile, but I think a great many of us know something about spiritual exile. My guess is that there are not many of us here this morning who have ever been homeless, but I think a great many of us know something about the homesickness of the human spirit.

You see, in all of us, God has created a longing for home, a longing that can only be satisfied in communion with his Son, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the one in whom we find a safe lodging, and he is the one who one day shall call every one of us home at last.

So believe the good news. In Jesus the Christ, of the house of Jacob and David, we have found our true habitat for humanity. Because of him we carry inside ourselves a vision of wholeness, a dream for the world as God has always intended it.

So wipe away all your homesick tears, and trust in the one in whom we find a home, home at last.

Alleluia and amen.