

**Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**Cycle B RCL**  
**Revised**

**2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16**

In context, this passage explains why the mighty David was nevertheless unable to build a temple for the Lord. It is also the classical statement in the Bible of the so-called “Davidic Theology,” the belief that God established David as the first of an eternal dynasty of divine rulers in Jerusalem. The king upon his accession to the throne will, like the Egyptian pharaoh, become the divine Son of God (7:14), but unlike the pharaoh, he can expect to die and sleep with his forebears just like any other human being (7:12). The end of the Davidic dynasty in 586 BCE left Jews with the expectation that God would redeem the promise made to David in the person of a new king in David’s line, who would restore the national fortunes of Israel. Christians applied that expectation to Jesus.

**Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26**

H.-J. Kraus believes that Psalm 89 may have been a composite of a hymn (verses 1-18), a prophecy concerning David’s dynasty (19-37) and a lament over the decline of the Davidic kingdom (38-52). The result of this combination is a hymn that celebrates God’s covenant with David (see 2 Samuel 7) within the context of God’s cosmic power and faithfulness. Yet the psalm also envisages the possibility of the loss of the Davidic covenant and the cessation of the royal line, suggesting the final form of the psalm may not date before 586 BCE. The “Great Sea” is the Mediterranean, and “the River” is the Euphrates.

or

**Canticle 3** [= Canticle 15] Luke 1:46-55: *Magnificat*

Notice that this poem says nothing about Mary, her virginity, Jesus or the prospect of Messiah’s birth. The Magnificat represents an inclusion within Luke’s text of an older Hebrew psalm otherwise unknown to us but translated into Greek in time for the author to put it upon the lips of Mary. The Psalm Scroll from Qumran’s 11th cave informs us that David composed 4050 psalms. That implies that 150-psalm Psalter contains only a few of the psalms Jews ascribed to David in the first century CE. The Qumran document suggests that in the time of Jesus, many hymns like the Magnificat were known to Palestinian Jews and were available to the Third Evangelist as a way of expressing Mary’s response to the news brought by the angel.

**Romans 16:25-27**

This benediction is found in one New Testament Greek manuscript (P<sup>46</sup>) at the end of chapter 15 and in several other such manuscripts at the end of chapter 14, leading some researchers to the conclusion that Romans 16 may be an addition to the epistle. This benediction expresses the apocalyptic belief that the truth of the scriptures had been hidden until the time of the end, in which the nations would join with Israel in obedience to God. Whatever the decision about the placement of this benediction in Romans, its themes are vintage Paul and are echoed in several of his other epistles.

**Luke 1:26-38**

By the first century, the heavenly hosts had begun to receive names in the tradition and to be assigned functions. Thus Michael (Hebrew: “Who is like God?”) became the angel of war; Rafael (“God’s physician”), the angel of healing; *etc.* The angel Gabriel (Hebrew: “God’s hero”) had become the messenger of heaven to earthly beings. The miraculous conception of Jesus

according to Luke took place by the action of the Holy Spirit (1:35). This conception has been misunderstood by some as a *hieros gamos* or “divine marriage” in which Mary became impregnated by the God’s Spirit. Since the word “spirit” in Hebrew and Aramaic is feminine and is neuter in Greek, this is an impossible understanding. Instead, Mary’s remarkable pregnancy is a sign of the return to Israel of the Holy Spirit, a return that in Jewish tradition would occur only in the Messianic age.

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