

First Presbyterian Church  
Cheyenne, Wyoming  
December 18, 2011  
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: God's Plan Revealed  
Psalm 89: 1–4, 19–26, Luke 1:26-38, Luke 1:47–55

A question that we often ask each other in this season is: What are your plans for Christmas, or New Year's Eve or both? Some of us have made definite plans and others may be more "laissez faire." "Let's just see what comes up."

Well, God certainly had a plan we celebrate this time of year. It is revealed in today's passages. Like our plans for Christmas and New Year's, God's plan for his chosen people was filled with a great deal of anticipation. In these days so close to Christmas, children and even some of us adults are bursting with anticipation over what will soon be celebrated. So it was some two thousand years ago. "The people of God came to understand that God was about to do a new and marvelous thing. The saving power of Israel's Redeemer, proclaimed by prophet and priest alike, was about to break forth in dimensions that confounded normal human understanding and that pointed beyond themselves to a new era in God's relationship with all creation." Texts For Preaching-Year B, pg. 39

God's plan "to do a new and marvelous thing" was first revealed some 3000 years ago to King David in 2 Samuel 7, which is the basis for today's reading from Psalm 89.

The revelation of God's plan "to do a new and marvelous thing" began with some conversations among Yahweh, a prophet named Nathan, and a small time tribal chief who had just been anointed King by God of a fledgling nation called Israel. David was the chief's name. King David was done fighting wars for a while and was lounging around his house lined with cedar wood in Jerusalem. Only the wealthy and powerful had cedar wood lined houses at that time. It came to King David that it did not seem right for him to live in such a luxurious house when the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence of God, was kept in a simple tent. So King David consulted with the prophet, Nathan, about building a real nice house of worship for God. Nathan told David, "Hey, you are the king, do whatever your heart desires, for God is with you."

It was to David's benefit that God was with him for Yahweh was listening in and told the prophet Nathan what to tell David. Here is an expanded version of God's message to David. "David, about that house, you have a nice idea in mind, but you have jumped the gun on the process. You are not the one I had in mind to build me a house. The fact is, I have not asked for a house and do not need a house. I cannot be tied down, owned by anyone or kept in a place. **I am not a God of place, David, but the God of living grace.** To illustrate what I mean by this, I will remind you, David, of what my living grace has done for you in the past. 'I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people, Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you.' In the future, David, this is what my living grace will do for you. 'I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 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... and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, I declare to you that I will make YOU, as a person, into a living house, a dynasty, a lineage or an ancestry. Your house, or you and your family, and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.' **David, I am not a God of place, but the God of living grace.**"

All that Yahweh said here led to the Jewish expectation of a Messiah, a Savior King, who would be anointed and appointed by God. This Savior King was to fulfill God's promises of living grace to David of an everlasting kingdom and relationship to God. God began to reveal his plan for saving humanity in the scripture passage from 2 Samuel 7. It is the source of the expectation of a Messiah the Jews have had for 3,000 years and the basis for Psalm 89 read today. [TNIBC](#), Vol.II, pg. 1254.

A thousand years after this conversation, this expectation of a Messiah and salvation was still very much alive in the hearts and minds of the Jews. In today's passages from Luke, more of God's plan to provide a Messiah King is revealed. We also gain a greater understanding of how **Yahweh took the idea of a place and turned it into an everlasting relationship of grace with him**. But, this time it does not involve any famous kings, prophets, houses of cedar or anyone who had any power whatsoever. The characters in this next part of God's revelation were just a lowly handmaid of no political or economic consequence who just happened to be a descendent of King David: And an angel, who delivered a message from God that seemed preposterous, even impossible to the young woman. Yes, God sent an angel named, Gabriel, to the nowhere town of Nazareth, to speak a young woman or a virgin named Mary. Mary was most likely the age of our present day eighth or ninth grade girls. "Mary was not yet married, she was betrothed or engaged. According to ancient customs, the marriage would have been arranged by her father. She would live at home one year after her betrothal. Then the groom, Joseph, who was also of the House of David would come to take her to his home, and the wedding celebration would last for an entire week. Legally the marriage was sealed after the engagement or betrothal." What is more is that both Mary and Joseph were about to become part of God's revealed plan to fulfill a thousand year-old expectation of a Messiah ([TNIBC](#), Vol. IX, pg. 51)

Before we get to this revelation and message that Gabriel was about to deliver, let's consider how upsetting, no terrifying, the appearance of an angel had to be to young Mary. You see, there was a story going around the Jerusalem area at that time that "a jealous angel appeared on a particular bride's wedding night each time she married and killed her bridegroom." Did the startled young Mary fear this, too? When Holly and I were in Italy in 2008, we saw innumerable paintings of Mary with the baby Jesus. There were a few of the annunciation or Gabriel coming to talk with Mary. The most accurate one to me was by a little known artist who painted Mary standing in the corner of a room with her hands up to protect her face, a face with a terrified look on it. [TNIBC](#), Vol. IX, pg. 51

Fortunately, Gabriel was very patient with the most upset Mary because he had news of God's plan of salvation to reveal to her that was truly over-the-top. God in his grace had chosen or appointed Mary to be the young woman to bear a son, and name him Jesus. Furthermore, this child would be the long expected Messiah, God's living

grace, who would be God's fulfillment of his promise to King David. "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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." It was just like what God had promised David a thousand years before. The now startled beyond belief Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Gabriel revealed more hard to believe news of God's plan. Mary was to be made pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit so that she could indeed bear the Son of God. Gabriel ended his part of this stunning conversation with "Nothing is impossible with God." How true, how true!

Let's stop and consider all this for a moment. We have all lived with great expectations of us in some way or another, have we not? Some expectations have been thrust upon or appointed to us in unexpected ways. How have we handled them? We have all lived with expectations of someone else fulfilling something we have wanted and wondered when it would be delivered? I suspect that some children have been expecting certain Christmas presents all year long, and waiting for the next few days to pass will be agony. But to be an unknown teenager in an insignificant village in Palestine, and to suddenly become God's chosen or appointed servant who was to give birth to his living grace; and to be a vital part of a fulfillment of a promise the Jewish people had been anxiously awaiting for one thousand years had to be overwhelming! Young Mary handled the news much better than I would have. With humility and grace she replied, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." What a relationship of living grace Mary had with God. And, so for the next nine months Mary housed, nurtured and loved this baby, the Son of God, the living grace of God, the King of Kings as he grew inside her. The Lord was with her, just like he was with King David so long before. What a great expectation God placed upon Mary.

If you are still traveling with me in these stories, great! If not, it is time to pay close attention! For God has also placed expectations upon us. Ever since our baptisms, most likely as infants, as in today's baptism of Aleksandr James Walkey-Sims, the Holy Spirit came upon us, and God claimed you and me to be his servants like King David and the young Mary were. We also have been anointed and appointed by God into an **everlasting relationship of grace with him**. For all of our lives God has spoken to us about this relationship and his expectations of us. God has not only spoken through the words of the prophet, Nathan, and the angel, Gabriel, but also through every reading and hearing of the Bible we have experienced: Through our prayer times with God and our singing of Christian hymns and anthems: Through the presentations of the gospel by teachers and preachers: And through the Holy Spirit's making us aware that we have been saved by God's living grace in Jesus the Messiah. It is this Holy Spirit that came upon us in our baptism that causes us to confess Jesus the Messiah as Lord and Savior and live in obedience to him. We need to pay close attention to all of these times God has spoken to us, because, in them, God's plan for our lives and his expectations of us are being revealed. For we also have been anointed and appointed by God into an **everlasting relationship of grace with him**.

Like the expectations placed upon King David and Mary, we are to be a vital continuing part of the ancient promises of a Messiah, of an everlasting kingdom, and of the soon to be repeated Christmas story. We are to be the continuation of the dynasty God promised to King David. Like Mary we are to house and nurture the Son of God who lives in us. From these living houses of God, from our bodies, minds, hearts and souls we are to disperse God's living grace. We are to do this so every man, woman and child on the face of the earth might become part of the ancient Christmas story and God's promised kingdom. I ask again, does this have your attention? It had better because the God of the living grace is talking to us, revealing his plan to us that, again, he has anointed and appointed us to be his living houses, **his everlasting living relationship of grace in Jesus the Messiah**. God has placed expectations upon us.

After hearing all this, do you feel overwhelmed like Mary did at first as God revealed his plan "to do a new and marvelous thing" through her and "bring the saving power of Israel's Redeemer to the world." Do not worry as God reveals his plans to us. But, be at peace as Mary eventually was for "Nothing is impossible with God." The Lord be with you, forever!