

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Week of December 18

Reading I: 2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

Reading II: Romans 16: 25-27

Gospel: Luke 1: 26-38

Dear Friends in Christ:

This could become a habit. Last week in this blurb I recalled something from the readings of the preceding week's Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Today I would like to recall a passage from last Thursday's readings that really stood out to me. It was from the Book of Isaiah, a promise of the Lord to the people of the day who were in exile, and to people today who feel in any way exiled from or afraid of God. The Lord says to them and to us: *I have sworn not to be angry with you, or to rebuke you. Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken, My love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the LORD, who has mercy on you.* I think it is so important for us to be crystal clear about God's words here, because so many good, religious people still do fear that "God is watching" and just waiting to catch us doing wrong or slipping up, and will punish us for our failings and imperfections. Blessed are those who know measure of this kind of fear or anxiousness toward God, but in my now nearly 60 years in religion, and 35 in ordained ministry, I don't know that I've ever met anyone who really believes and feels that God really means it when he says *I have sworn not to be angry with you, or to rebuke you.* We have all grown up with way too much experience of the anger and rebuke of others to really or easily believe this. But it's true. As we near the celebration of Christmas, may we put at the top of our wish list the gift of knowing deeply the truth of this oath of God spoken through the Prophet Isaiah this past week, and forever.

Fr. Dan