

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
24th December 2023 - 4th Sunday of Advent

Readings (Year B): 1st: 2 Samuel 7:1-5,8-12,14,16. 2nd: Romans 16:25-27. **Gospel:** Luke 1:26-38.

We are all aware I'm sure that many countries and societies around the world are suffering from a crisis of trust. We just do not believe those people we used to trust in the past.

We have become suspicious of leaders, politicians, doctors, the clergy, teachers, the police, and many of the institutions and professions which are central to any ordered society.

This is corrosive because democratic society needs trust to function well or else it falls apart. Then worse, people lose confidence and are afraid to take risks and to reach out to others because they have become cynical. They see in their fellow humans not virtues but their failings and vices.

Our 1st reading is about trust, not so much about our trust in God but God's trust in us. We are told of a political leader, King David, who wants to build a house for God. God gently puts David in his place.

It is God who is the source of all blessings and will do the building. But it won't be a house in the physical sense, but rather a dynasty: David's heirs will inherit his throne.

It is amazing that the Lord can show such trust in the very human beings who let him down.

David was chosen by God, and in many ways did God's will, but after he had become king he abused his power by committing adultery with Bathsheba and then murdering her husband Uriah.

It is the ruthless behaviour that we recognise still going on, and much more in our own times. And yet God goes on trusting us.

In the gospel we have another story of trust.

The Lord entrusts himself to his own creation: God takes on our human flesh. Mary, betrothed to Joseph who is of David's house, is told by Gabriel that she is greatly favoured by God.

Mary is deeply disturbed. She is, no doubt, fearful of the demands to be made upon her, as anyone would be. Mary's life will indeed be disturbed, but so in a sense will God's.

The Lord God makes himself vulnerable in his Son, taking the risk of trusting one of his creatures. The salvation of the world depends upon it.

Mary's yes overturns Eve's no. God be praised. For Mary provides light in the darkness. She had experienced the fear of upheaval and change and family pressure.

But like us she had the scriptures and prayer to turn to. She knew the story of the Lord who would not let his people be destroyed by their fear and suspicions, but kept rescuing them and trusting them.

He could be relied upon.

Now the Lord had placed his trust in her, and Mary, had returned that trust.

As we approach this feast full of wonder and light, a mystery kept secret for endless ages, we can welcome her Son and put our trust in him.