

The Fourth Sunday of Advent, Cycle B
2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16
Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27-29
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38
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Advent begins very distinctively. All our attention is focused on the lighting of a single candle, in a wreath of pine branches, in the stillness of Autumn. But nobody notices Advent when it's ending. Advent's simple melody, "Oh come, oh come Emmanuel," is drowned out by the blare of a thousand Christmas carols. The tiny flames of the Advent wreath are washed out by the glare of megawatt Christmas displays. And perhaps that is as it should be. Who spares a thought for the Baptist, when Christ is in their midst?

But before we rush to open the last few windows on our Advent Calendars, before we turn from the wreath to the tree, is there some message we can take with us from this self-effacing season? Just a few words that can equip us to celebrate Christmas well?

If we turn to our readings in search of such a message, we might settle upon some words spoken by Gabriel to Mary, the very same words spoken a thousand years earlier by Nathan to King David: "The Lord is with you." If we could just hold on to that thought, we would have something.

Whether you're searching desperately for a parking space at the mall, or being randomly breathalyzed on the way home from the office Christmas party: The Lord is with you.

Whether you're watching "It's a Wonderful Life," or listening to the

Charlie Brown Christmas Theme for the hundredth time: The Lord is with you.

Whether you're fetching your Christmas tree from the vacant lot down the street, or from the cardboard box in the closet under the stairs: The Lord is with you.

Whether you're trying to decide if this is the year that a puppy will be allowed across your threshold, or wondering if you can afford a can of cranberry sauce: The Lord is with you.

Whether you are taking a car load of screaming kids to the Santa Claus Disco, or a car load of moth-balled blankets to the night shelter: The Lord is with you.

When none of the nuts fit the bicycle wheel, and the directions were written by someone who apparently learned English by watching Rambo movies, and you've forgotten to buy batteries for anything: The Lord is with you.

Whether you can't get five minutes to yourself, or you spend hours alone in front of the television, waiting for a phone call that never comes: The Lord is with you.

Whether it's your first Christmas as a family, or your first Christmas without a loved one: The Lord is with you.

And what difference does it make? What does it matter that the Lord is with you? It means that there is a *reason* for the joy. There is *meaning* behind the chaos. There is *solace* for the pain. And it calls forth a response from us, the response of Mary: "I am yours Lord. Do with me what you will."

In a few days our Advent wreaths will lie unregarded in recycling bins, beneath an avalanche of wrapping paper. But if we have embraced their

simple message, the Advent wreaths, and the Advent season, will have served us well.