

**Fourth Sunday of Advent – Cycle B**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – December 24, 2017**  
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There is a lot of waiting this time of the year. Yes, theoretically, the waiting called for in the season of Advent, but waiting in many other ways as well. Waiting in traffic – especially here in midtown, I’ve discovered; waiting for a parking space reasonably near the store you want to visit; waiting in the check-out line behind the person who wants to write a check without ID while he exchanges something he bought last week and asks for a price check on the three little items in his basket. Waiting is so much a part of our experience in these last few weeks that you would think that we would be better at it – yet, alas, we are not. It is a never-ending cycle: the longer we wait, the more impatient we become.

Impatience is increasingly common in our society. Once upon a time, we used to write letters to one another and then send them by mail. When that was deemed to be too slow, we discovered FedEx, which assured us that our parcel would be on their doorstep absolutely, positively overnight. Now, of course, unless what we are sending is a package, we communicate electronically – email or Facebook or Twitter or text. Why wait for a well-composed document when you can send a few characters in a matter of seconds? LOL.

In our readings today, we hear the Lord’s communication to King David through Nathan the prophet. The Lord invites David to build him a house – the Temple of Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant. And God makes a covenant with the king – the Davidic covenant, as Scripture scholars now call it. The Lord promises David that he will raise up an heir, sprung from his loins, and that he will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him and he shall be a son to me, God says. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before me and your throne shall stand firm forever. What a promise! I’m sure David thought that the heir that the Lord spoke of was his son Solomon. Surely Solomon would rule an enduring kingdom, surely Solomon’s throne would stand firm forever. Of course, history would show that Solomon held things together during his own lifetime, but in the very next generation, things fell apart. The kingdom was divided, and eventually both thrones would fall. Yes, the Lord God made a covenant with the House of David – but it looked like he went back on his word.

Like us, you see, David and his successors were a little impatient. They expected to rule forever, that the Lord’s promise would be fulfilled in the first generation or in the second – in twenty or thirty or fifty years. Of course, as we heard in our gospel passage today, the Lord God fully intended to honor his

covenant with David, to raise up an heir who would inherit the throne of David his father. It just took a little longer than they expected. Between Nathan's prophecy and the angel Gabriel's announcement of its fulfillment, one thousand years passed. How's that for patience! We label the post office "snail mail." We have grown impatient with a slow wi-fi or – heaven forbid – with a dial-up connection or with anything less than instantaneous news. Are we patient enough to wait one thousand years for a prophecy to be fulfilled? Are we patient enough to wait a thousand minutes or a thousand seconds?

The Lord waited one thousand years between the proclamation of the prophecy and its fulfillment because he knew that the people of Israel were not yet ready for the Messiah. That thousand-year time period was critical – the Israelites would endure great prosperity and great suffering. They would celebrate many great victories and endure many defeats – even a long exile in Babylon. And each step on that journey would prepare them for the Messiah, for the fulfillment of the prophecy, for the fullness of time, as St. Paul calls it, when the eternal Son of God would take on human flesh. But just as that message from an angel to the Virgin Mary went largely unnoticed in Nazareth, so the arrival of the Messiah went largely unnoticed by the people of Israel. Yes, it was the fullness of time. Yes, the Messiah had been conceived in the womb of the virgin as the prophet Isaiah had foretold – but the news didn't make the paper. No one posted it on Facebook or tweeted it. A thousand years of preparation went largely unnoticed. Even after Jesus began his public ministry, his presence caused barely a ripple in the Roman Empire. Even now – two thousand years after Gabriel's announcement, three thousand years after Nathan's prophecy – even now, the message of salvation is widely heard, but rarely taken to heart. People the world over are celebrating Christmas with trees and gifts and shopping and parties – but, I suspect, not with contrite hearts and humble spirits, not as people who are actually changed by the good news of Jesus Christ. Too often, we are just using the holiday as an excuse to celebrate rather than focusing on the one whose birth in time gave Christmas its meaning. Even now, we still need to prepare – not the decorations, not the packages, not the food. Even now, we still need to prepare our hearts to receive the Savior once again. That kind of preparation takes time – a thousand years, a lifetime. Rather than growing impatient with the process, may we rejoice in the journey. May we give thanks for the opportunity to grow closer to the Lord, step by step, day by day. And may we spend at least a portion of this Fourth Sunday of Advent patiently preparing our hearts.