

ADVENT: A TIME OF HOPEFUL EXPECTATION

**Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 18, 2011**

**2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 or Luke 1:46b-55
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38**

“The Lord has greatly blessed you!”

A young woman in Nazareth is greeted by an angel of the Lord who tells her she has been chosen by God to bear God’s Son. Startling and unexpected news, to be sure. This week’s Gospel text introduces us to Mary, the one whom the Lord has blessed.

Blessed? A young unmarried woman facing an unplanned pregnancy? An interruption to the plans she and Joseph have been making? In the Gospel according to Matthew, we learn that Joseph, to whom Mary is engaged, considered breaking their engagement privately so as not to disgrace her publicly (1:19). According to the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 22:20, 21), Mary’s pregnancy put her at risk for being put to death by stoning. Yet, the angel tells Mary that the Lord is with her and has greatly blessed her.

The angel reassures Joseph in a dream that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife since “it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived” (Matthew 1:20, *GNT*). In the Gospel according to Luke, the angel tells Mary that the Holy Spirit will come upon her. The child she is to bear will be called “the Son of the Most High God” and will be a king, “as his ancestor David was” (1:32, *GNT*). We hear in the angel’s announcement to Mary echoes of this week’s Old Testament lesson. The covenant that God made with David (1 Samuel 7:16) is about to be fulfilled. The child Mary is to bear will be a king whose “kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33, *GNT*).

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary says (Luke 1:38, *GNT*). Mary’s decision to say “yes” to God exhibits her willingness to trust in God who, the angel says, has been gracious to her (1:30).

As we enter these final days of the Advent season and prepare for the birth of our Savior, may our hearts be like Mary’s – open to God’s “interruptions” and willing to receive the blessing of God’s precious gift to us. In the midst of our troubled world, God comes to us gently and humbly. In the words of the apostle Paul, “Let us give glory to God!” (Romans 16:25a, *GNT*) and respond with thankfulness for God’s gift of salvation.

God is indeed gracious to us and has blessed us.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel who served, until retirement, on the staff of American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship. Barbara continues as a valued consultant to ABS.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Denmark – with thanks to God for the successful *Good Samaritan* program in Africa and for the ongoing work in **Greenland** and the **Faroe Islands**; and with prayers for success in recruiting new donors for international Bible work; that the Society will make the Bible high-profile and relevant at the national level; that Danish schools embrace the Christian educational material; and that the online Bible continues to be successful; **Netherlands** – with thanks to God for Bible work in this region; and with prayers for God’s blessing on all efforts to fight indifference in our society towards Bible engagement, and on the special partnership with Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo in West Africa; also pray for children and young people; for the dedicated involvement of volunteers and churches; and for the translation of the Bible into common language; **Iceland** with thanks to God for Bible work in this region; and with prayers that this year, when the Society celebrates 195 years of service, will be fruitful and bring opportunities to reach out to those who do not know the Word of God; also pray that the economic crisis that hit the country two years ago may be a new start, helping people to learn to value the treasure of the Gospels and the Bible as a whole.

Activity Corner: Advent Mobile

Supplies needed: Bible; wire coat hanger; heart pattern (about 3” wide and 3” high); red construction paper); scissor; pencils/pens; marker; hole puncher; yarn, narrow ribbon, or string.

The fourth Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of Love. Trace and cut out seven hearts; on four of them write the letters **L O V E** (the other three hearts will remain blank). Punch a hole at the top of each heart. Each day, throughout the week, a heart will be added to the wire hanger to create a *mobile. Use various lengths of string for each heart to create a mobile effect. Read the Scripture passage indicated for each day of the week, and then add a heart to the mobile. On the back of each heart, write the Scripture citation. Conclude with a prayer and invite everyone to respond at the end, “AMEN! COME LORD JESUS!” (If you are using an Advent Wreath during family devotional time, light all four candles prior to the Scripture reading for the day.)

Scripture Readings for the Fourth Week of Advent:

Sunday	Luke 1:39-56
Monday	Luke 1:57-80
Tuesday	1 John 4:7-21
Wednesday	Luke 2:1-20
Thursday	John 1:1-18
Friday	John 3:16-21
Saturday	Titus 2:11-14

*At the end of the Advent season, the mobile symbols can be removed from the wire hangers and used as Christmas tree decorations.