

Fourth Sunday of Advent December 24

The Collect: Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, & 16 read from The New International Version Bible

After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.”

Nathan replied to the king, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.”

But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:

“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’”

“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

The Word of the Lord

Canticle 3 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; * for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: * the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him * in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm, * he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, * and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, * and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, * for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

The promise he made to our fathers, * to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: * as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. **Amen.**

Epistle: Romans 16: 25-27 read from The New Living Translation Bible

Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38 read from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name

was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The Word of the Lord

Closing Prayer: On December 31 we remember Samuel Ajayi Crowther Bishop in the Niger Territories read from A Great Cloud of Witnesses.

In Canterbury Cathedral, on St. Peter's Day, June 29 1864, Samuel Ajayi Crowther was ordained the first African bishop in Nigeria for "the countries of Western Africa beyond the limits of the Queen's domains."

Crowther's gifts to the Church were many. A skilled linguist, he helped translate the Bible and Book of Common Prayer into Yoruba and other West African languages. He founded schools and training colleges, where he encouraged the study of the gospel, traditional subjects, and farming methods that allowed students to raise basic crops and cotton as sources of income.

As a child, Crowther had been captured in 1822, during a Nigerian civil war, and sold to Portuguese slave traders. Intercepted by a British anti-slavery patrol, the ship and its human cargo were taken to Freetown, Sierra Leone, a haven for freed captives after the British

Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1807. There, Crowther was educated at a Church Missionary Society (CMS) school, was baptized in 1825, and became a teacher in Sierra Leone, an active center of African Christian ministry that sent indigenous lay and ordained ministers throughout West Africa.

Crowther's leadership skills were soon evident, and in 1842, the Church Missionary Society sent him to their Islington, England, training college. He was ordained a year later, returned to Sierra Leone, and then moved on to Yoruba territory. He also made extended mission journeys to the interior of Nigeria, where, in encounters with Muslims, he was known as a humble, patient listener and a thoughtful, non-combative partner in dialogue.

At the time of his ordination as bishop, the British tried to keep missionary activity solely under the control of white British clerics, some of whom set about subverting Crowther's authority, something he patiently endured, while actively continuing his expansive work among Africans. Despite the difficulties, Crowther's achievements were considerable, and he has been called the most widely known African Christian of the nineteenth century. He created a solid base from which a much later generation of indigenous African leadership emerged to chart their own political and ecclesial futures.

In 2015, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby officially apologized on behalf of the Church of England for its treatment of Crowther. Crowther died of a stroke, in Lagos, on December 31st, 1891 and was buried at Ajele Cemetery in Lagos.

Let us pray: Almighty God, you rescued Samuel Ajayi Crowther from slavery, sent him to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to his people in Nigeria, and made him the first bishop from the people of West Africa: Grant that those who follow in his steps may reap what he has sown and find abundant help for the harvest; through him who took upon himself the form of a slave that we might be free, the same Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**