

Advent 4 2020 (20th December) & S Thomas's Day (21st).

20 th December Advent 4	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	II Samuels 7 vv 1-17 p310 Romans 16 vv 25-27 p1143 Luke 1 vv 26-38 p1026
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O LORD, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

A LMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Now to him that is of power to stablish you...To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

King David decided to build a palace for God. He had already built a palace for himself and thought that God should have nothing less. In Hebrew, the same word means both palace and temple - הֵיכָל. We tend to say that kings live in palaces but that the House of God is a temple. The underlying idea is the same, however, a magnificent dwelling for the King. David was right to want to glorify God and to think that he should not spend more on himself than he was prepared to offer to God.

At first, the prophet Nathan agreed with David. A palace for the LORD seemed like a brilliant idea. But God spoke to Nathan and gave him a message for David. God doesn't dwell in a house made by human hands. God cannot be confined in a building. God needs nothing from us because all good things come from Him. Everything that David had was the gift of God. Everything that David had accomplished, he had achieved because the LORD was with him.

God does, however, promise to bless the house of David. David will have a son who will build a temple for the LORD. David couldn't do it himself because he was a warrior, a man defiled by the shedding of human blood. The temple would be built by Solomon, a man of peace. Even so, when the temple is built and Solomon presides at its consecration, he himself acknowledges the simple truth (I Kings 8²⁷): *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded.*

Before Solomon became King of Israel, David and all the people brought all the materials that would be needed to build the temple and offered them to the LORD: (I Chronicles 29)
⁹ *Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.* ¹⁰ *Wherefore*

David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. ¹¹ Thine, O Lord is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.

¹² Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. ¹³ Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. ¹⁴ But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

God promises David that the house of David will reign forever. *And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth. To a virgin espoused to man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.* A little later, the angel of the Lord explained to Joseph in a dream that the prophecy is fulfilled: *Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.* David's Son is the eternal King. God is not confined to dwell in a temple made with human hands. He dwells among us. He dwells in Jesus. He dwells in us.

In many Churches, the keeping of S Thomas the Apostle has been moved from midwinter's day to July 3rd in order to avoid a day of celebration in the solemn season of Advent, but we are still allowed to keep it tomorrow and there is more than one good reason for doing so. Just as the Annunciation (the story we heard into today's Gospel) comes on 25th March around Easter, so Thomas (with his Gospel of the Resurrection) is celebrated just before Christmas. It is all one story, the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ: His Birth, life on earth, Death & Resurrection, Ascension and the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

S Thomas' Day is about counting us all in. The apostles and all those people in the Holy Land who saw Jesus between His Birth and His Death & Resurrection 33 years later were very privileged. They were witnesses to the Truth of God. They saw for themselves the eternal Son of David, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. They experienced that, in human form, God is with us. John the apostle writes (I John 1¹): *That which was from the beginning, we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life.*

Thomas had, for some reason, missed out on seeing Jesus that first Easter Day. He couldn't, he said, or wouldn't believe that Jesus was risen from the dead until he saw for himself and even touched His wounds. Thomas was allowed to see and touch and recognised Jesus. *My Lord and my God*, he said. And then Jesus uttered these wonderful words: *Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* That's us. We're all included. Through faith, we are the household of God. We are living stones, built up into His holy Temple, a temple not made with hands, but *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*

The stones which comprise any building are themselves strong and they support one another. The whole building rests on the foundation and relies for its structural integrity on the cornerstone. This is us, if we believe in Him. We are all stones, living stones, in the Temple of the Holy Spirit. It is God Who establishes us. It is He Who chooses us, appoints a place for us, and strengthens us so that we can perform the role He has assigned to each one of us. We are surrounded and supported by a whole host of other stones, other Christians. The first apostles (including Thomas) are our foundation. Christ is the cornerstone.

Now to him that is of power to stablish you...To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

Saint Thomas the Apostle.

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reprov'd. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

The Epistle. Ephes. 2. 19.

NOW therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The Gospel. St. John 20. 24.

THOMAS, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.