

Don't Box Me In

Anyone who has experienced moving to a new place and shopping for a new home will notice changes in home design over time. Homes built in the 1950's often had one bath and the closets were small. Today, many homes have at least two full baths and the closets, if not "walk ins", are still many times larger than those of older homes. Somehow, we have become people with many more things requiring much more storage space than previous generations. There are even stores dedicated solely to selling various kinds of containers for our stuff, and storage unit parks offer us extra space apart from our homes in which to store things.

The scripture selections for the Fourth Sunday of Advent are, in a sense, about containers.

In the reading from the second book of Samuel, David reflects on his palace of cedar and compares it to the simple tent that houses the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence among the people of Israel. He believes that the Ark certainly deserves a better place to reside and the prophet Nathan does not object to his building plan. However, God speaks to Nathan later and reminds him, in so many words, that no building can ever fully express what God has done, or will do, for the people of Israel. In a later passage, not included in the Sunday reading, David sits before the Ark and, in his humility, acknowledges that God's work can never be fully represented in human design.

The gospel passage from Luke tells the story of the Annunciation – Mary's realization that she would carry Jesus into the world. Those familiar with the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary will recall that among the many titles given to her is, Ark of the Covenant. This makes the strong connection between the symbol of God's presence among the people of Israel, and Mary as bearer of God into the world in a new way. Among the prayers in the Great Compline of the Annunciation in the Byzantine Catholic tradition is the following: "God is come among us; he who cannot be contained is contained in a womb. The timeless enters time." Unlike David in his initial conceit, Mary has no sense that she is worthy to carry such a presence within her, but consents nonetheless.

As we approach the celebration of the Incarnation during the fourth week of Advent, these scriptures present us with the question: *Who carries the presence of God into the world now?*

We believe that Jesus commissioned us as people and as Church to be bearers of his Good News. Like Mary, we recognize how broken we can sometimes be as people and as Church, how unable we are to fully or adequately contain and communicate the depth of God's love for humanity. And yet, we consent nonetheless.

As people engaged in the particular ministry of health care within the Church, this week of Advent renews our sense of purpose as bearers of God's healing presence to those who need it. We know we are not perfect. We know we cannot fully contain the depth of God's healing love, but we consent nonetheless.