

2 Sam 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Rom 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Year B – December 24, 2017

The Rev. Linda Spiers
Trinity Episcopal Church

I am a last minute shopper. That may not be a surprise to many of you. I really don't like getting out into the crowds in the mall and that is just where I was yesterday afternoon. I celebrated at the 2 p.m. Mass on the Grass—fortunately inside—where we had an eclectic service of Advent IV in the beginning and then moved to singing Christmas carols in the second half of the service. Guests were served a surprise treat of pizza and given a bag lunch and off we all went. The service was for me, as always, a wake up call to the yearnings of people for community and to the simple desire to worship God. A surprise in the service came at the end when the deacon opened a plastic bag of percussion instruments. We were to sing *Go Tell it On the Mountain* and to use tambourines, bells, and shakers. The surprise of instruments brought smiles to many faces, especially to a little boy of 4 or so—a little boy who can't wait for the instruments to return next Saturday. God surprises us continually.

I headed to West Farms Mall amid hundreds of others. Traffic was thick, roads were wet and messy, and store lines were long. I managed to find a few things and headed toward the opposite end of the mall for another item. As I rounded a corner, I literally and figuratively ran into my Goddaughter Erin whom I haven't seen for a long time. I have not been in touch because of my schedule and she has been busy with college and working a part time job. Seeing her made my

trip to the mall worth every minute. We hugged and hugged and caught up for a quick few minutes and promised each other to get together in the next week. God is full of surprises of all sorts. For this one I am so grateful—a reminder to make time for my Godchild!

The Prophet Nathan gets a surprise encounter with God in the night. Nathan understood King David's desire to build a temple for the Ark of the Covenant—the holy of holies. I wonder if God spoke directly to Nathan or whether an angel awoke him or how this encounter happened in the night. It must have been a little scary or perhaps Nathan had experienced other encounters with God. David wanted to build a house for God, and a message is given to Nathan that God declares, "...the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Sam 7:15-16). Now it must be a little unnerving for Nathan to go to David and tell him of God's plan vs. his own plan. God often surprises us when we make a plan. God is comfortable living in a tent. As human beings we often have a desire to build temples to honor power.

In Luke we hear about another surprise—the surprise of a young Mary being told by the angel Gabriel that she will give birth to the Son of God. God wanted to be living in a tent in David and Nathan's day. Many years later God came among us through a vulnerable young woman named Mary who was willing to say yes. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

(Luke 1:38). Her yes must have been laced with fear and trepidation. I believe these particular surprises invite us to be open to miracles—miracles that happen in profound ways beyond our understanding and in everyday little miracles. Mary and Elizabeth were both surprised by messengers of God. The unexpected and the unimaginable happened then and continue to happen now. Gabriel’s message meant the world was about to change, and Mary was willing to be part of that change. In turn we’re invited to be ready for the world to continue changing, for “nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37).