

King David wants to build a more permanent home to house the Ark of the covenant. This should sound familiar for our reading on December 24th is the very same first reading that we had on the 4th Sunday of Advent. The Lord is not pleased with King David's plan. For 40 years in the desert, a tent was good enough. Now that the Ark of the covenant is in Jerusalem and the Israelites are no longer wandering through the desert, David thought a more permanent structure would be fitting. The Lord does not want this at this time. (Later King Solomon will build a Temple in Jerusalem for both worship and to house the Ark of the covenant.)

As we approach the Feast of the Nativity, we know the infant Jesus came into the world quite humbly. Mary and Joseph had traveled to Bethlehem for the census. There was no room at the inn, but they found shelter in a manger. They did not have a crib for the newborn Christ child, so they placed the infant in a feeding trough hewn out of the rock. King David sat on a throne in Jerusalem. His descendant, the Son of David, was quite content with the humblest of places.

Simplicity, humility, poverty. It is good to follow the example of Jesus as we contemplate Christmas. Like David's plans for something more elaborate for the Ark, the world has strayed far from the meaning of Christmas with its secular emphasis on consumerism. One might even say, "Consumerism has stolen Christmas."<sup>i</sup> Contrasting the "yes" of Mary to the "no" of the world, Pope Francis explained:

Let us do something for someone who has less: not the umpteenth gift for ourselves and our friends, but for a person in need whom no-one thinks of! And another piece of advice: in order for Jesus to be born in us, let us prepare our hearts, let us go to pray, let us not let ourselves be swept up by consumerism. "Ah, I have to buy presents, I must do this and that". That frenzy of doing things, more and more. It is Jesus that is important. Consumerism is not found in the manger in Bethlehem: there is reality, poverty, love. Let us prepare our hearts to be like Mary's: free from evil, welcoming, ready to receive God. Pope Francis spoke about the true meaning of Christmas in conjunction with the Angelus prayer he offered this past Sunday afternoon. In the prayer, we echo the words of Mary at the Annunciation: "'Let your word be fulfilled in me:' May Our Lady help us to say it with our lives, with our approach to these last days in which to prepare ourselves well for Christmas."

On another thought, King David's mistake about a more permanent home for the Ark of the covenant was not held against him. The Lord forgave him and moved on. In fact, David made more than one mistake, but with contrition in his heart, he turned to the Lord and received mercy and forgiveness for all his transgressions. The Lord continued to support David over a span of 40 years and promised much, much more. "Your house and your Kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever" (2 Sam 7:16).

We live in a society that often lacks mercy. We live in a divided world where it is hard to reconcile and to offer the olive branch of peace. God sent his Son into the world as the Prince of Peace to reconcile us to the Father. Let us welcome the Prince of Peace in our hearts and rejoice in extending God's mercy to others.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://angelusnews.com/news/vatican/pope-francis-consumerism-has-stolen-christmas/>