

Since 1979 when Bob Vila began to host the television show *This Old House* right up until the present day, TV audiences for decades have been fascinated by home improvement and interior design shows, probably because it speaks to an essential human need: a place to live. In English, we are accustomed to making the distinction that a *house is not a home* as each word has its own connotation. The house is the physical dwelling; the home is the people who fill it with their common life. Interestingly, in many other languages, there tend not to be distinct words for house and home. The same word implies either, depending on the context. Hebrew happens to be one such language.

The Hebrew word 'bayit' most frequently refers to a private dwelling for an individual or family but can even be used to describe where animals live from everything to a donkey's stable to a spider's web. However, there is also a figurative use for the same word which implies the people who belong to one household. This is actually quite a fitting interplay when you consider that a house is rather meaningless if it does not become a home- where a family dwell- while one of the gravest misfortunes for a family would be not to have a place to call their home. The unity of house and home are essential.

In our first reading, we cannot catch the play on words which would have been implied in the original Hebrew text. King David is distressed by the fact that he resides in a luxurious palace while the Ark of the Covenant which was the true

presence of God on Earth was stored under a portable tent. For this reason, David declares that he would undertake to build a fitting palace for the Ark.

Through the prophet Nathan, David is instructed that he was not to build this dwelling for the Lord as it had always been the Lord who took care of David. He was certainly in no need of David's care now. Instead- and here is our play on words- the Lord declares through Nathan that *He is going to MAKE a 'bayit' for David*. However, it was not a physical dwelling that God planned to build for him; rather, it was a household- a family- that He planned to establish and make to carry on David's name. From that day forward, this is precisely what God had done. For the remainder of Jewish history as it is recorded in the Scriptures, the lineage of David's descendants is continuously referred to. A spiritual *bayit* or household of the line of David was yet another sign of God keeping His promise.

In that line were included men and women; rich and poor; powerful and weak; sinful and faithful; but David himself could never have foreseen what would become of his *bayit*. Over the course of time, prophecy after prophecy made clear that from within his line the Messiah- the anointed one of God- would descend. This Messiah would not merely be for the political liberation of Israel, however; this Messiah would be the very incarnation of God Himself: Emmanuel; *God-with-us*; a man of flesh and blood born of a virgin. The crown and

culmination of King David's household was contained in a swaddled infant born in Bethlehem of the house- *bayit*- of David.

God did more than keep good on His word; His word became flesh and dwelt among us. This is the incredible mystery which we have spent these last few weeks preparing to celebrate. We find within this long unfolding of an elaborate plan, the mercy of our Father who, despite our best efforts to build *houses* for Him, is always the One to make *households* for us. He incorporates us into the life of His Son in order that we, too, share in the household of God and become members of His living *bayit*. This is beautifully symbolized by what is inscribed on the sign as you enter our church: *St. Albert the Great church, dedicated to glory of God*. This building is the home of our parish household.

House and home; the unity of these realities is what is captured by this ancient Hebrew word, *bayit*, to which we keep referring. The play on words between King David and the prophet Nathan is a powerful reminder of what we offer to God and what He builds for us in return. Yet, this play on words and images doesn't end there. The Church has a definite purpose in assigning this first reading to the gospel passage from which we just heard. It is a passage with which we are all so familiar: the Annunciation of the archangel Gabriel to Mary.

Our familiarity, however, might conceal from us the exquisite fulfillment of what God began with David. Three times during Gabriel's announcement he

makes reference to the fact that this child to be born of her would reign over the household of David. In the Messiah, all would be brought together in the formulation of one family, with Christ as its Head. But as we have seen repeatedly, the *bayit* of a household is not a home without the *bayit* of a dwelling. To that end, God fashioned a definitive dwelling for the royal descendant of David when He fashioned the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was she who would become the dwelling place of God for nine months, and once God has taken flesh within you, could He ever really be said to leave?

David's *bayit* went through a lot over the course of its history. But with the advent of Emmanuel- God-with-us- Jesus holds everyone together. And for the remainder of time, this family will always make its home in the Immaculate Heart of our Blessed Mother Mary; the perfect earthly dwelling which God Himself fashioned, first for His Son, and afterwards, for every one of His adopted sons and daughters to follow. As our Advent season draws to a close, let us spend these remaining days as a family of faith nestled in the arms of our Lady; our house and home; our strong shelter; the true place where we will find her Son.