



## Advent 4

# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**What God wants is collaborators**

**We collaborate with God through living our “yes”.**

### *Yahweh declares to you: God who is making you a house*

One of the extraordinary things about David as king was his arrogance. Whilst he could rise to great heights of covenant faithfulness, he seemed to presume that all he did came with a divine blessing. All in all, though, he was a holy man, a righteous king with clay feet. It was God who was expected to fit with David’s understanding of religion, of what was right and wrong. Hence the significance of today’s reading from Samuel.

David wants Yahweh to have a house, just as all of the other gods of the nations around Israel had their own temples. But as God points out: *why would I want a house made by human hands?* The God who created the heavens and the earth hardly needs some physical dwelling place on the magnificent earth He Himself created!

For the authors of 1 Samuel, it was more that David wanted to build a house for God, a house that would bring both Jews and Gentiles to a state of amazement at its beauty. It would be the king who received the glory. And what better way to tie God in behind the political activities of the court than to have God living in the neighbourhood. God becomes “my God” rather than the other way: I am God’s servant.

### *God dwells within His children*

One of the features of chapter seven of 1 Samuel is the way it is God who dominates. The personal pronoun “I” is used twenty times in the first half! That is a typical Hebraic way of reminding us of a central theme – it really is all about God and not David. God is in control. It is God’s saving history and not simply the meaningless unfolding of human history and events. God is rebuking David for his arrogant presumption that there were parts of life beyond divine interest, grace, judgment and love.

But there is even more. The use of the divine pronoun highlights what it is God has been doing for Israel and what the divine plans are for the future. God has always been *Immanuel* – *God-with* His people – within, alongside, in-front of, behind, etc. This is again why God does not need a Temple, for God’s home is here. With us.

Of course, Israel missed this point, over and over again, devising all kinds of places, rituals, customs and laws wherein they could lock God away to be used and honoured when needed. When the Babylonians destroyed the Temple, they wondered if there could be a people of God without it. What was needed (and is still needed) is to discover the living God within before resorting to the God-out-there. As Paul reminds us... *your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you*. Find God there, or find God nowhere.

**Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -**

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## ***Mary: the model of collaboration between God and human beings***

The starting point in today's Gospel is God. It is God who initiates and Mary who responds. Her reply was more than just yes... she replied: *I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me.* That is not a modern response as a handmaid is attendant on another, they live to serve and are always subservient, subordinate to their boss. Her first response was one of obedience. Her starting point was what God wanted. Everything unfolds from that God-first option. There were no questions about whether it was proper or not, whether it would create problems in her life and the ways in which it would change her life direction. She did not consider how the world around her might react. God first. Mary second.

But she did have a question. It was no like that of Zechariah who was asking for proof that God could do what was being promised. Mary's question was *but how can this come about, since I am a virgin?*" She was more interested in asking about the way forward, *show me the way to go.* There is no doubt here that God could do what was promised. This explains why Luke, (unlike Matthew), makes no mention of Joseph here. His focus is on God and the fact that the child born to her was not of human conception. It was something God was enabling.

### ***God even invited Mary to be a collaborator***

Of all the ways God could have provided us with a Saviour, He chose to act via an invitation. What God sought in Mary is what God seeks in all things – our *fiat* – *let it be done.* Mary's *yes* led to a reversal of the sin brought about by Eve's *no* and God has not changed in the way He works with us. We are not automatons programmed to obey. We have choice, just as the two women here had a choice. A "yes" to God brings life and salvation, a transformed world. A "no" to God brings about death, suffering, isolation and despair, and our world today is filled with examples of the painful consequences of "no".

One of the "problems" with the ways of God, ways into which we are invited as participants, is that it does not always make for easy living. We are unable to be "like that other nations around us" for we are collaborating with what God is doing and not asking God to collaborate with what we want to be doing. Our "yes" to God will mean disruptions to our life and to alienation by others. God will appear to be burdening our lives with all kinds of inconsiderate ways, teachings and demands, because *unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!* (Romans 11:33). The problem is not God's. We just struggle to be *handmaidens.*

God sent Gabriel to interrupt Mary's life from its fixed and predictable pathway. God came to Mary and that seemed to be enough for her even though it must have been unsettling. Understanding the truth of Immanuel was all she needed to cast concerns for the future to one side and leave the rest in the hands of the One calling.

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