

A change of plan

Heather Smith *reflects on* 2 Samuel 7:1-11. 16 and Luke 1:26-38

God's timing is important and it is not always our timing and God's methods of achieving plans are not always our methods.

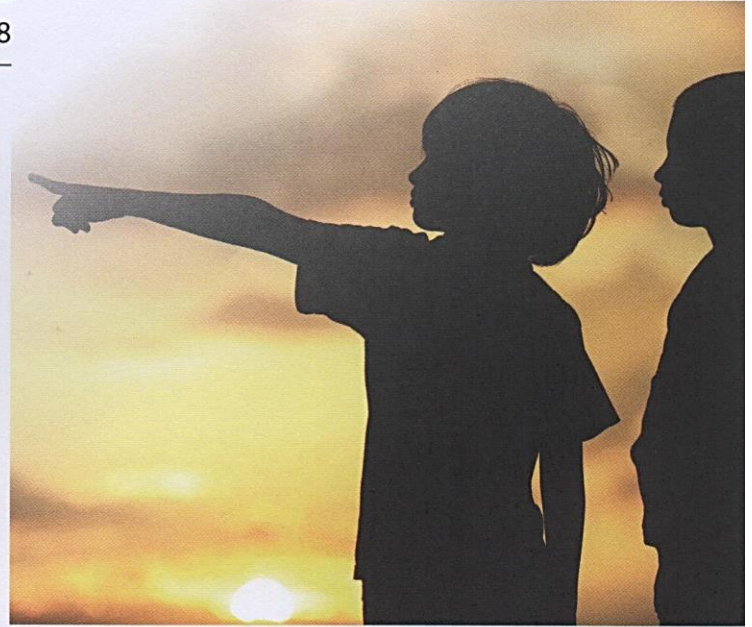
David wants to build a permanent place for God to reside: a temple. He recognises that he is living in a house of cedar, but God still "lives" in a tent. It seems a noble wish. We can identify with it. Think of the fabulous cathedrals built in the Middle Ages and later, to provide places in which to worship God. It seems only fitting that God's home should be greater than the homes of each of us.

Mary has no plans to have a baby, and having God's Son has never entered her head. She is

quite the wrong person. If anyone had considered it, they would surely have expected him to be born of a noble woman – a queen perhaps.

In both cases God has other ideas. There will be a temple, but it will not be David who builds it. And the expected Messiah will, unexpectedly, be God's Son, born of a young woman who is not ready to bring any baby into the world, let alone the one that Gabriel tells her to expect.

Our lives often turn out differently from our plans and expectations. But God does not abandon us to deal with the unexpected alone. God may have other plans, but remains with us to support us. ☺



Lord, help us to sit lightly with our own plans and be willing to carry out yours instead. May we embrace them with joy, even if they seem challenging or make us uncomfortable. Amen.

Gift wrapping and Christmas decorations

Tree of Blessings

by Julia McGuinness

Christmas tree decorating started in sixteenth-century Germany with wafers, candles and pastries in the shapes of angels, flowers, hearts and stars. These days there seems to be no limit to what you can put on the tree. One store boasts a quirky line of decorations, from

chameleons to caravans, showgirls to sloths. Rising sales of novelty baubles indicate the desire to make one's tree personally unique.

Another way to make decorating the tree special could be to use it to give thanks, with each decoration representing a particular blessing over the past year. What have been your year's star moments, lightened your days, as sweet as wrapped chocolate or sparkling like tinsel? You may want to create your own decorations to add.

You could also take time to write down a Christmas list of these blessings. Year by year, this list will grow. Your tree stands as a unique celebration and signpost to God's good gifts. ☺

“Let's approach Christmas with an expectant hush, rather than a last-minute rush.”

Anonymous

Advent hymns

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (John Mason Neale)

by Caroline Hodgson

This carol's origins stretch back into Christianity's roots. Neale based the words on the “Great O Antiphons”, traditionally sung in Latin during the last week of Advent, and which hark back to the awesome and mysterious prophecy in Isaiah 7:14: “Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel!”

As we grow up we learn that Advent isn't all about

chocolate calendars and anticipating presents. Indeed, there's something decidedly unsettling about it. In this season of penitence, our childish excitement is tempered by a trembling anticipation of Christ's coming again – and this carol perfectly encapsulates it. There's something about the dark tune which suggests that we're fearful of what we're invoking as we sing. The words slide into one other in a hasty mumble – are we quite sure we want to see Jesus? But by the chorus we burst into the jubilant “Rejoice!” there's no question, we're ready to greet Emmanuel – “God with us.” ☺