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St. Paul's, Batesville
December 18, 2011
Advent 4, Year B
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:26-38

+In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Some of you know that I'm a great fan of *The Simpsons*. Perhaps it's because I was forbidden from watching it when it first came out; though tame by contemporary standards, I suppose broadcast television was much less risqué back in 1989. In all events, it's been hailed as one of the most religious programs on mainstream television, and (of particular note to Anglicans) it is the favorite television show of the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams.

Anyway, one of my favorite moments in the program's 23 seasons is in an episode where Lisa, the precocious eight-year-old of the family, is given a look into the future by a gypsy fortune-teller at the local Renaissance fair. In the climax of this "flash-forward", Lisa's wedding is

ruined when she realizes that her fiancée thinks her family is contemptuous. She finally runs away from the altar, as it were. I say “as it were” because the wedding is taking place outdoors in a garden and, of course, there is no literal altar. As the wedding falls apart, Reverend Lovejoy, the Simpson's dreary pastor, is heard complaining, "[this] would never have happened if the wedding had been inside the church with God instead of out here in the cheap showiness of nature."

Now I for one have done plenty of outdoor weddings, and while I tend to make the Reverend Lovejoy joke when I do them, I don't mind them too much. The idea that God's presence is somehow localized is of course rather silly. Now, I would personally argue that God *is* very specially, physically present in some specific regards—particularly in the Sacrament—but to suggest that there is a place outside the reach of God's perpetual presence is to misunderstand the nature of God.

I say all this as a sort of entrée into this morning's Old Testament lesson.