

Advent 1, Year A

What is God's House Made of?

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When God builds a house, what do you think it's made of?

In the reading that Olive shared with us so well this morning, God's house is on a high mountain so everyone can find it and make a home there with God. But I wonder, what's it made of?

We know about houses that we make for God -- churches and cathedrals and temples and synagogues and mosques. They are made of stone, and wood and brick and concrete. They are made of study stuff with windows to let the light in and big doors to keep certain things out.

But what about the house that God builds?

So to explore that question I want to share with you a parable -- not one from the bible, though those are great. But one from a Greek writer named Eugene Trivizas. A good parable turns familiar things on their head. And that's what he does with this story, about building houses.¹

Once upon a time there were three little wolves who lived with their mother. One day their mother called them together and said . "It's time for you to head out and make your way in the world, and to build yourselves a house" she said. " But whatever you do beware of the big, bad pig. He's a bully and he's rough and you don't want to get in his way."

The three little wolves said that they would be careful and they headed out into the big, wide world. Pretty soon they saw a gentleman with a huge cart full of bricks. "Please sir, can you give us some bricks so that we can build us a house?" they asked. Certainly said the guy, take all you want.

So the three little wolves built themselves a lovely and sturdy house of bricks. They were just settling down for tea when down the road came the Big Bad Pig.

"Little wolves, little wolves, let me come in," shouted the Big Bad Pig.

"No no no," cried the little wolves. "Not by the hair of our chinny chinny chins, or all the tea in our china teapot."

"Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in!"

But the big bad pig could not blow their house down because it was made of sturdy brick. But they didn't call the pig big and bad for nothing. He went and got himself a sledge hammer. And he sledge hammered that house to pieces, so that the three little wolves barely got away with their teapot intact.

"Well!" said the wolves. "We'll just have to build ourselves a stronger house."

Just then they saw a lady driving a cement mixer full of poured concrete. Please mam, they said, can you give us some of that poured concrete so we can build ourselves a house? The woman said sure, take all you want. So the three little wolves built themselves a fine house out of poured concrete. And when

¹ A retelling follows of *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* by Eugene Trivizas. See the book illustrated by Helen Oxenbury, Margaret K. McElderry Books; Reprint edition (April 1, 1997).

they were done and they were playing badminton out on the back court, who came down the road but....

The Big Bad Pig.

“Little wolves, little wolves, let me come in,” he shouted.

“No no no,” cried the little wolves. “Not by the hair of our chinny chinny chins, or all feathers on our shuttlecock.”

“Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house in!”

But the big bad pig could not blow their house down because it was made of poured concrete. But they didn’t call the pig big and bad for nothing. He went and got himself a jack hammer. And he jack hammered that house to pieces, so that the three little wolves barely got away with their shuttlecock intact.

“Well!” said the wolves. “We’ll just have to build ourselves a stronger house.”

Just then they saw a fellow driving a truck full of sheet metal, barbed wire and security devices.

Please sir, said the wolves, would you give us some of your sheet metal, barbed wire and security devices, so we can build us a house?

Certainly said the fellow, help yourself. And the three little wolves built themselves a fortress that surely no one could destroy.

But of course pretty soon who came by?

And he said...

And they said .. Not by the hair of our chinny chinny chins...

Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff, and I’ll blow your house in, which of course didn’t work. So the Big Bad Pig went off and got himself some explosives and Kaboom!

The three little wolves barely made it out with the hair still on their chinny chin chins.

“Perhaps we need to go about this a whole different way,” they agreed.

Just then they spied a girl with a wheelbarrow full of flowers. Please miss, can you give us some flowers so we can build us a house. “Sure take all you want.”

And the three little wolves built themselves a beautiful house out of flowers. It swayed gently with every breeze. It smelled like a summer garden. And they had just settled themselves in have a nice pitcher of lemonade when who came down the road, but the Big Bad Pig.

“Little wolves, little wolves, let me come in,” the Big Bad Pig demanded.

“No no no,” cried the little wolves. “Not by the hair of our chinny chinny chins, or all lemons in our lemonade!

“Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house in!”

Huff. Puff... Aaaaah! The smell of the flowers was so beautiful, that it completely softened the heart of that big bad pig. And he began to dance the Tarantella! The three little wolves watched in amazement at the change in the pig. And they offered him a glass of lemonade.

And after a while the pig said, "Please little wolves. I am no longer the pig that I was before. Won't you let me stay with you in your house made of flowers?"

It wasn't an easy decision, given all that had happened before. But the three little wolves were good hearted and generous and eventually, after a very honest conversation with the pig and many glasses of lemonade, they agreed.

And they all lived happily ever after.

What is God's house made of?

When God decided to come and live among us, God built that dwelling in an entirely different way. And while God didn't make a house of flowers, God did make a house out of something just as fragile, and beautiful and vulnerable – God made it out of us, out of humanity.

We call that the incarnation – which sounds like a flower, when you think of it. But it really means that God lives in us, not in flowers but in flesh. That's who Jesus is. God living in humanity, making a home not only with us, but within us.

God built that home not to keep people out but to let people in, when they are looking for things like hope and love and care and friendship. The kind of home that is risky for God and for us, because it's fragile, made as it is of our feelings, and our dreams, and our fears, our experiences – tender stuff.. It's the kind of house that could easily be blown down, as Jesus found out at the end of his life. But God's dwelling among us is also strong enough and lasting enough to return again and again – sometimes when we least expect it, as our Gospel told us.

This is the first Sunday of Advent – the four weeks that we followers of Jesus set aside to make room for Jesus to be born among us in new and exciting ways. And we decorate our houses, don't we, and we move the furniture around to make spaces for Christmas trees, and manger scenes and cards and gifts. But the most important thing we make room for in Advent is Jesus himself, and we make room for him inside our hearts. And sometimes that can take a little work.

We can help each other out with that over these next four weeks. St Peter's we'll help each other make that space for God to dwell in us even bigger with prayers said by the flames of our Advent wreaths. And we'll expand our room for others by making cookies and bringing gifts for people who need our care. We'll stretch our hearts all the way to Guatemala in a few weeks, as we hear from friends there who are dear to our St. Peter's community. And when we gather in this house, to pray and sing songs and tell stories of God, we'll bring Jesus with us.

Because we are what God's house is made of.

Amen.