

When children can't wait, parents make promises. They buy a little time. "If you'll just be patient," parents say, "I promise we'll see that movie. I promise we'll visit grandma. I promise we'll get a new game." It may happen; it may not. And if it doesn't happen, kids have a well-rehearsed response. They lift up an unhappy face, and they say three words that are hard to hear: "But you promised."

It is hard for children to understand that sometimes you cannot deliver on a promise. You make the promise with the best information and the best intentions. But situations change. It isn't always possible.

Today's responsorial psalm tells about a promise. God promised to take care of Israel from one generation to the next, but by the end of the psalm, the people are still suffering, they turn to God and say, "But you promised. You promised we would have a strong leader. You promised our nation would be safe. You promised you would always be with us. It hasn't quite worked out that way."

The psalm opens with these words: "The promises of the LORD I will sing forever. For you have said, 'My kindness is established forever. I have sworn to David my servant: forever will I confirm your posterity and establish your throne for all generations.'" God promised to be kind forever. God promised that David would have descendants, and that they would rule forever. Those promises comforted the people. Ordinary human leadership was inadequate. They needed the leadership that God alone could give.

But it wasn't working. David's descendants did not rule as well as David did.

We have similar complaints. God promised to be kind from one generation to the next. That should include our generation. But we lose friends we thought would be our companions for life. We grow older and less able to do what we used to do. Winter makes life harder. So we tell God what we've heard: that God is faithful forever. We tell God about what's going on all around us, and we say, "But you promised."

Still, this psalm is filled with hope, and that is why we sing it on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. In the psalm God says there will be another descendant of David. Someone else would come to take over the throne. And that person would say to God, "You are my father, my God, the Rock, my Savior." God says, "Forever I will maintain my kindness toward that descendant, and my covenant with him stands firm."

Who is that descendant? It is Jesus, Son of God, Son of David, Son of Mary. We await his coming. We know it draws near. We believe with all our hearts that his coming, even his coming into our homes this Christmas, will reaffirm for us the promise of God. God will be faithful to us from one generation to the next. God will deliver on those promises – if we'll just be patient.