

Sunday 5th January 2020

The Second Sunday of Christmas

White



Collect

Almighty God, in the birth of your Son you have poured on us the new light of your incarnate Word, and shown us the fullness of your love: help us to walk in his light and dwell in his love that we may know the fullness of his joy; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Jeremiah 31:7-14 English Standard Version (ESV)

The LORD Will Turn Mourning to Joy

31 ⁷For thus says the LORD: “Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’” ⁸Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labour, together; a great company, they shall return here. ⁹With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. ¹⁰“Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’” ¹¹For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. ¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. ¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. ¹⁴I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the LORD.”

COMMENT: The promise of a joyful celebration of exiles returning home from Babylon, and from many other lands as well, rings through this passage. But there is a note of sadness too in their singing, for the historical reality was that only a remnant of Israel would actually return, and the return came in waves – the original edict by Cyrus was in 538 BC, with a rebuilt Temple by 515 BC, and then such as Nehemiah returning in 445 BC. The main emphasis, however, is on the faith that it is God who will bring about this homecoming. As in many other prophetic oracles, the theological tradition that the LORD is the Sovereign of history resonates through this poem. The Babylonian exile was a well-documented historical event, not only in the Hebrew Scriptures, but also in relevant discoveries by archeologists from other sources. The Hebrew faith tradition interpreted this catastrophic event as initiated by the LORD, not by the political and military forces arrayed against them. Similarly, the Hebrew prophets of the exile voiced unequivocally their trust that the LORD would bring back to their homeland at least some of those who had been forcefully transported to Babylon or scattered far and wide across the ancient Middle East. This passage utters the sacred promise of the LORD to bring the dispersed people of Israel home. Jeremiah paid dearly for his constant faith that the LORD's promise would be fulfilled. Verse 8b presents an especially hopeful element of the promise. The naming of pregnant women and those already giving birth represents divine assurance that the holy people of God would continue. History has shown how decisive it has been that women - even those who have been raped in violent pogroms - not only survive, but bring forth a new generation of faithful Israelites. Traditionally, Jews trace their ancestry through their mothers, due to the historic reality that their biological fathers may not have been Jewish. The idea of being Jewish emanating from the mother was promoted by the Pharisees in talmudic times (2nd to 6th century AD), but may reflect earlier traditions. Verse 12 not only proclaims that the LORD would rescue the remnant of Israel from captivity, prosperity would accompany their return. The LORD alone would be the source of this continuing beneficence. The returning people would respond in joy and the priesthood would be restored (verses 13-14). In such prophetic passages we too may find hope for a new year. Despite all the destructive belligerence that confronts us, centred to a considerable extent in the ancient biblical lands of the Middle East, the Lord of history still reigns over the events of our time.

John 1:[1-9] 10-18 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Word Became Flesh

[1] ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, ^[a] and the life was the light of

men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.]

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own,^[b] and his own people^[c] did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.^[d] ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God,^[e] who is at the Father's side,^[f] he has made him known.

Footnotes: a. or *was not any thing made. That which has been made was life in him.* b. Greek *to his own things*; that is, to his own domain, or to his own people. c. *People* is implied in Greek. d. or *grace in place of grace.* e. or *the only One, who is God*; some manuscripts *the only Son.* f. Greek *in the bosom of the Father*

COMMENT: Looking at Jesus from the perspective of perhaps sixty years after his death on the cross, John assessed what the coming of Jesus into the world really meant. For those who believed in him and accepted the grace and truth now available through him, it meant a new life of spiritual power as the children of God. So also it may be for us as we begin a new year of living in God's grace.

Psalm 147.12-21 *Laudate Dominum*

℟ Praise the Lord for he is good

¹² O praise the Lord, Jerusalem!
Zion praise your God! **℟**

¹³ He has strengthened the bars of your gates
he has blessed the children within you.

¹⁴ He established peace on your borders,
he feeds you with finest wheat. **℟**

¹⁵ He sends out his word to the earth
and swiftly runs his command.

¹⁶ He showers down snow white as wool,
he scatters hoar-frost like ashes. **℟**

¹⁷ He hurls down hailstones like crumbs.
The waters are frozen at his touch;

¹⁸ he sends forth his word and it melts them:
at the breath of his mouth the waters flow. **℟**

¹⁹ He makes his word known to Jacob,
to Israel his laws and decrees.

²⁰ He has not dealt thus with other nations;
he has not taught them his decrees.

Alleluia! **℟**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This is the second of five Alleluia psalms which close the Psalter celebrates the special relationship Israel had with God. Its message is summed up in the words of verse 20: “He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances.”

Post Communion

All praise to you, almighty God and heavenly king, who sent your Son into the world to take our nature upon him and to be born of a pure virgin: grant that, as we are born again in him, so he may continually dwell in us and reign on earth as he reigns in heaven, now and for ever. **Amen**

Blessing

God the Father, who has given to his Son the name above every name, strengthen you to proclaim Christ as Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**