

Christmas 2

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January 5, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Imighty God, you have filled us with the new light of the Word who became flesh and lived among us. Let the light of our faith shine in all that we do; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jeremiah 31:7-14

{7} For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel." {8} See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. {9} With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become 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 a flock." {11} For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. {12} They 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 become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. {13} Then 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. {14} I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 30-33 is frequently called "The Book of Consolation" because of the hopeful nature of the sayings in these chapters.

The poems "in vss. 7-9 and 10-14 are both in style and thought closely akin to certain prophecies in the latter part of Isaiah. They seem to represent an adaptation and application of Jeremiah's prophecies to the situation of the exiles. It is, however, possible that the first of them contains in vs. 9b, and perhaps in vs. 7, a nucleus of Jeremic words originally addressed to northern Israel." ¹

7. *Jacob...remnant of Israel... 9. I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn...11. Jacob...* Like the verses which precede and follow the lection these verses seem to have been first addressed to the people in northern Israel, and later directed also to the exiles of Judah ("the height of Zion" 31:12).

8. *the land of the north: Assyria.* The metaphor is also used in Isaiah 43:6.

blind...lame...with child...in labor: Various kinds of unclean people; not "bad" people, but not appropriate to be in the presence of a holy and perfect God.

12. *Zion:* "Originally the fortified hill of pre-Israelite Jerusalem.... Subsequently extended to the temple area itself.... In the poetic books and the prophetic writings, Zion becomes an equivalent of Jerusalem considered as the religious capital, or as being the object of God's favor or punishment." ² "In Christian usage, the name of Zion became attached to the SW hill of Jerusalem as early as the fourth century. The reason for this transfer is probably the common belief that the house in which the apostles were gathered together on the day of Pentecost was located in these parts of the city. Thus the Christian Zion, where the preaching of the gospel had begun, was contrasted with the Mountain of Zion, the center of OT worship." ³

Yahweh promises to gather and restore the people of Jacob, of Israel and Ephraim, all names for the northern tribes. Yahweh will ransom Jacob and they will come to Zion (Jerusalem). There will be a cultic unification of the two nations. The people will sing and dance and rejoice because of the goodness of Yahweh.

Or Sirach 24:1-12

¹ Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people. ² In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory: ³ "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the

earth like a mist. ⁴ I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. ⁵ Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss. ⁶ Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway. ⁷ Among all these I sought a resting place; in whose territory should I abide? ⁸ "Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent. He said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.' ⁹ Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be. ¹⁰ In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion. ¹¹ Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting place, and in Jerusalem was my domain. ¹² I took root in an honored people, in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.

Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sirach (50:27) was a teacher in Jerusalem between 200 and 180 b.c. His book, also known as Ecclesiasticus, "was eagerly read and widely used as a handbook for study and instruction in educational settings." ⁴

These verses begin the second major division of the book. It is a long poem in praise of wisdom (24:1-33). 1-2: introductory stanza states the theme of the poem, wisdom praises herself; 3-7 in images that show God and God's wisdom were thought of as one and the same; second stanza, wisdom's origin from God; 8-12: third stanza, God commands wisdom to make her home with Israel. Four further stanzas complete the poem: verses 13-15; 16-17, 19-22; 23, 25-29; 30-33.

Psalm 147:12-20

{12} Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! {13} For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. {14} He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat. {15} He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. {16} He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. {17} He hurls down hail like crumbs-- who can stand before his cold? {18} He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow. {19} He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. {20} He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances. Praise the LORD!

12. O Jerusalem...O Zion: In Jeremiah 31:12 Jacob sings on the heights of Zion. Now, Jerusalem praises Yahweh because of his blessings.

16-18: Yahweh shows his power in snow, frost, hail, cold, and a thawing breeze.

19. He declares his word to Jacob...to Israel: He only deals with his people with such blessing, not the nations who do not know his law.

The Psalm recognizes Yahweh's mercy and praises him for his word, his statutes and ordinances which he has given Israel and not other nation, just as the first lesson promises Yahweh's saving acts for his people.

Or Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21

¹⁵ A holy people and blameless race wisdom delivered from a nation of oppressors. ¹⁶ She entered the soul of a servant of the Lord, and withstood dread kings with wonders and signs. ¹⁷ She gave to holy people the reward of their labors; she guided them along a marvelous way, and became a shelter to them by day, and a starry flame through the night. ¹⁸ She brought them over the Red Sea, and led them through deep waters; ¹⁹ but she drowned their enemies, and cast them up from the depth of the sea. ²⁰ Therefore the righteous plundered the ungodly; they sang hymns, O Lord, to your holy name, and praised with one accord your defending hand; ²¹ for wisdom opened the mouths of those who were mute, and made the tongues of infants speak clearly.

"Wisdom's saving and punishing power is here illustrated by the enumeration of seven righteous heroes and their wicked counterparts.... We have Adam-Cain; Noah-generation of the Flood; Abraham-the nations confounded in their wickedness; Lot-Sodomites; Jacob-Esau; Joseph-his critics; Israel under Moses-the Egyptian oppressors under Pharaoh." ⁵

15. a holy people and blameless race: The people of Israel. In Genesis 17:1 Abraham is admonished to be blameless.

16: Wisdom enters Moses, the servant of the Lord, as the spirit does in Isaiah 63:11.

17-20: Wisdom leads the people in the Exodus and brings them over the Red Sea when she drowned their enemies. They plundered the Egyptians of their gold, and sang a hymn at the Sea, Exodus 15.

Ephesians 1:3-14

{3} Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, {4} just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. {5} He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, {6} to the praise

of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. {7} In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace {8} that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight {9} he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, {10} as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. {11} In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, {12} so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. {13} In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; {14} this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

"Eph 1:3-14 is a digest of the whole epistle and replete with key terms and topics that anticipate the contents of what follows.... Best described by the Jewish term 'benediction' (*b^erakah*). It is an exclamation of praise and prayer, resembling those pronounced in Jewish synagogues and homes.... The contents of the benediction are primarily the grace, the action, the revelation of God." ⁶

3. *spiritual blessing*: "It is probable that in Eph 1:3 by 'spiritual blessing' is meant that decision, action, and revelation of God which has culminated and been 'sealed' when the 'Holy Spirit' was given to both Gentiles and Jews (1:13-14; 4:30)... 'Spiritual blessings,' therefore, does not mean a timeless, otherworldly, abstract blessing. Rather it describes changes effected upon and among people of flesh and blood. It means a history, that is, decisions, actions, testimonies, suffering which have been set in motion and are as yet unfinished." ⁷

6, 12, 14. *praise of his glory*: "The author of the benediction... wanted to make clear that not only the root and means of God's decision and work are located in God himself but also their purpose." ⁸

11-13: "Verses 11-13 appear to explain in terms of subjective experience why the bold statement on possession was made in vs. 7.... Because God is by no means a stingy or begrudging father, men are simply overwhelmed by his deeds. And yet the overwhelming grace does not condemn man to simple passivity.... The election by God does not wipe out man's history. Following Eph 1:11-13 it makes and shapes *our* and *your* history." ⁹

John 1:[1-9] 10-18

{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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being {4} in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. {5} The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. {6} There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. {7} He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. {8} He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. {9} The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.] {10} He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. {11} He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. {12} But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, {13} who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. {14} And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. {15} (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") {16} From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. {17} The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. {18} No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John 1:1-14 is the Gospel for Christmas Day. By marking verses 1-9 as secondary attention is directed to Jesus' presence in the world (10-14), and his gifts to us (16-18), with an aside from John the Baptist (verse 15). Even if verses 1-9 are read, the emphasis should be focused on the latter verses.

10-11: When Jesus was in the world he was not known, even by his own people.

12: He is known and believed in by those who have been empowered by God, not by human wisdom or power.

14: The Word through whom all was created; the Word which was God; became flesh and we have seen his glory, like the glory of the Father.

15: John identifies the Word become flesh as the one to whom John witnessed. John 1:30.

16. *No one has ever seen God*: Not even Moses was allowed to see God's face (Exodus 33:20-23). God is not of this world. He cannot be perceived with the senses of the world. Communication is all from one direction. The Son, the Word of God become flesh, reveals God. That is the only way we could know God. Now, everything is qualified by the revelation of God in the Word become flesh. Jesus makes this clear in his definition of eternal life, life with God in John 17:3, "this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Reflection

At the end of the season of Christmas we are reminded again that the Incarnation of God in Christ is not a thing of snowy nights and candle-light. It is God's self-revelation in Word and flesh, a thing incomprehensible and incredible. It is not something past to be reflected on, but it is present with spiritual blessing here and now for those who have received him. And that spiritual blessing has meaning and power for our lives on this day. All that has been is God's creation; now God is with us in his Word, in the power of his Word, in his Word made flesh. We dance and sing for joy for the light of God has enlightened our darkness and we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father. The mystery we have encountered is now the direction and the energy for the life we live.

Hymns [10](#)

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), Hymnal Supplement 1991 (e.g. 725s) and LBW (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

776s --E/G--Word of God,
(716v) 198 --D--Let All Mortal
14 --I--Listen! You Nations
701v --I--What Feast of Love
474 --P--Children of the

396 --II--O God, O Lord
693v --II--Baptized in Water
(759s) 659 --G--The Word of God
57, 83, 271, 42, 45

Prayers of the People [11](#)

A: The revealed Word has made us rich beyond telling. As heirs of life, let us pray, "Gather up all in Christ," and respond, C: Amen.

A: O God who makes all things new, refurbish the hearts of those who serve the church in other lands, strengthen the churches abroad and continue to call faithful gospel workers. Gather up all in Christ. C: Amen.

A: O God who understands what is near and what is far, let those in Government Customs and Duties work with integrity to facilitate properly the gospel's advance. Gather up all in Christ. C: Amen.

A: O God who embraces the families of the world, where there is the failure of love, give birth to caring; where there is brokenness, bring healing. Gather up all in Christ. C: Amen.

A: God of love, lift the burdens of women who live in poverty, hunger, and without dignity. Gather up all in Christ. C: Amen.

When the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness is not used, the following may be said:

A: God who searches all hearts and minds, have mercy upon us, weighed down by abundance in a world that still longs for necessities. Gather up all in Christ. C: Amen.

P: Grant faith to move mountains with hearts that are true. C: Amen.

OR [12](#)

Presider or deacon

As we celebrate with joy the birth of Jesus to Jews, let us offer prayers to God who gathers his sons and daughters in a holy family.

Deacon or other leader

By the birth of the timeless Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For all believers who put their trust in the incarnate Son of God. For the leaders of the nations and all in authority, and for peace and justice.

For the conversion of the whole human race to our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, for those in prison, and for the dying and the dead.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

God of all families and peoples, accept the prayers we offer in this joyful season. As we welcome this mystery of your love, may we delight in our joy as children and heirs of your kingdom. Glory to you for ever.

Notes

- [1] John Bright, *Jeremiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965, p. 286.
- [2] *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962, vol. 4, p. 959.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p. 960.
- [4] *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1993, p. 1530.
- [5] David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979, p. 211.
- [6] Marcus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974, pp. 97-98.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- [9] *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99
- [10] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclb9900.txt>
- [11] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_b1.txt
- [12] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>