

THE COMING OF GOD IN PERSON

(A Christmas Day Reflection by Fr Galadima Bitrus, OSA, 25.12.20)

Finally, Christmas is here! We are celebrating the birth of Jesus, a name which means, salvation. Therefore, salvation is here!

The theme of our reflection today is, “The Coming of God in Person.” At Christmas, we celebrate the fact that God in his mission to rescue humanity from the captivity of sin and death, did not stop at anything; rather, having sent prophetic figures across ages to preach repentance and conversion, he finally came in person, assuming human nature. In other words, at Christmas, we celebrate the culmination of God’s intervention in solidarity with humanity.

In the 1st Reading (Isaiah 52:7-10), Isaiah captures the joy of Judeans as they were finally returning to the worship of God on the Holy Mount Zion, in the Holy city of Jerusalem. The passage reflects the period after some Judeans had returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity, as they looked forward to the fuller restoration that Deutero-Isaiah had preached about, a restoration understood as the return of God to Zion the holy mountain, and to Jerusalem the holy city. This returning God is described as bringer of good news (Hebrew, *mābaśśer*), the one who proclaims peace (*mašmīa’ šālôm*), the bringer of the good news of wellbeing (*mābaśśer tōv*) and the one who proclaims salvation (*mašmīa’ yešūā*) (v.7).

The watchmen and the ruins of Jerusalem are exhorted to welcome the return of God with shouts of joy; for God is coming to comfort his people and redeem Jerusalem (vv.8-9), thus revealing his holy might to the nations and showing his salvation to the ends of the earth (v.10). As the Psalmist also proclaims, “all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Psalm 98:3).

In the 2nd Reading (Hebrews 1:1-6), the author of this anonymous letter emphasizes the fact that in Christ, we have the highest point of God’s revelation, the superior manifestation of God’s being and glory. Having spoken in the past through prophets, now in Jesus he speaks to us through the son, through whom he created all things, the heir to everything that is God’s, the exact imprint of God’s being (vv. 1-3).

The title of Christ as Son of God encapsulates Jesus’ unique relationship with the Father (cf. Luke 20:13-14), his superiority, not only to prophets who communicated God’s word and will in the past, but even to Angels who are God’s ministers and messengers; for even they worship him (vv. 4-6).

In being the reflection of God’s glory (Greek, *doxa*, Hebrew *Kavod*) and the exact imprint of God’s being, Jesus represents God in the most exalted and personal way possible: he represents God’s nature without any distortion or flaw.

The Gospel Reading (John 1:1-18) is the beginning of the Gospel of St. John. It is a hymn to the Logos (the Divine Word). It reflects the wisdom tradition of the Old Testament, especially the praise of the Wisdom of God in Proverbs 8:22-26 and Sirach 24:1-11.

Together with pointing out its eternal origins (“in the beginning was the Word”, cf. Gen 1:1) and its intimacy and identification with God (“and the word was with God and the word was God”), the hymn underlines the functions of the word (the life and the light of all people), themes that will become central in the development of the Gospel of John: Jesus as life of the

world and light to the world. The hymn also underlines the fact that the word took flesh and dwelt among us, which summarizes the sense of the mystery of Christmas: God's radical solidarity with men, coming to live with us and like us, thus making us not only see his glory but also his truth and grace.

As we celebrate Christmas, like the Judeans we are called upon to welcome God into our lives with joy, knowing that he is coming not to rob us of anything but to rescue us, offering us the path of the good tidings of genuine peace, wellbeing, and salvation, as antidote to the depressing news of chaos, woes and wars that characterize our world. Let us also contemplate and allow ourselves to be guided by his light and be transformed by his truth and grace.