

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT – A December 9, 2007

Throughout Advent the Scripture readings give us a view of the OT as promises that are fulfilled in the NT. Even St. Augustine said that the NT is hidden in the OT, and the OT is fulfilled and completed by the NT.

One of the major Advent characters is the prophet Isaiah, who proclaimed his prophecies in Jerusalem in the late 8th century BC. He gave spiritual direction and even political advice to kings and leaders and to the people in general. Like most prophets, he was not very popular because he gave a message no one wanted to hear. A prophet's main job was to tell the people what they were doing wrong and how to reform their lives. Well, who wants to hear that?

But even though most of Isaiah's advice was rejected, he still remained faithful to his responsibility as a prophet. He proclaimed the message God gave him and did not flinch in his duty.

Today's reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah is a good example of why he is a great Advent character. He looks forward to a future ruler in Israel who would be the perfect ruler, one who would be a descendent of King David. This is important, because the reign of King David, which was around 1000 BC, was considered to be the high point of Israel's experiment with a monarchy.

Experiment? Yes, indeed. You see, Israel had been ruled by a panel of judges for many years, since in their belief only God could be king. But they wanted to be a *kingdom* like other nations, with a real king, so they could be taken seriously by other lands. So, they had kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. But we know from the OT that this didn't work out so well, because their kings were like any other kings: human and flawed. They had terrible problems, they got carried away with their power, and made what we might call king-sized mistakes.

So Isaiah hoped for an even better version of King David: a wise ruler, one who would combine wisdom and fear of the Lord, one who would not only teach God's laws but live by them. Isaiah hoped for a king who would begin an era of peace not only among his people but also between nations.

Listen to what he says in his prophecy: The wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors and the lion shall eat hay like the ox. This is all pretty amazing, huh? The baby shall play by the cobra's den—right, what parent would allow *that*? The point, of course, is that everybody and everything will get along perfectly. No more conflict of any kind!

Unfortunately poor Isaiah did not live to see his vision fulfilled. But much later, in fact about 8 centuries later, after Jesus had been born and died and resurrected,

the early Christians became convinced that those hopes of Isaiah had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

On the surface this might seem far-fetched, but Jesus was actually a blood descendent of King David (Son of David), and was led by the Holy Spirit and was gifted with great wisdom and justice and mercy. He defended the poor and the oppressed, and promoted peace among all people regardless of their nationality.

With all this in mind, even from a non-religious point of view we could say that Jesus was the most important person who ever walked the earth.

Another main Advent figure is John the Baptist, who was even less popular than Isaiah, if that's possible. He was a pretty scary guy, this John the Baptist. Not only did he wear clothing made of camel's hair, but he ate things like locusts and wild honey. Well, the honey doesn't sound too bad, but the locusts? I think I'll pass.

His message wasn't very popular either. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Well, just like with Isaiah: Who wants to hear *that*? But even more than Isaiah, John the Baptist was a reminder of yet another OT prophet: Elijah. This was a more attractive idea for the people because it was Elijah, who, if you remember, had disappeared in a fiery chariot, and it was believed he would return to signal the coming of the Messiah at the end of time. This would certainly be a good reason to repent!

Today we are already just about halfway through Advent, and our readings give us the urgent message that the NT really is hidden in the OT, and the OT really is fulfilled in the NT. So we continue to have hope in the Lord's promise that one day the magnificent vision of the prophet Isaiah and the joyful exhortations of John the Baptist will at last fill our heart's deepest desires. Until that time, we try very hard to follow their instructions and trust in God's goodness.