

Happy New Year! Today is the first/second day of the Church's New Year! So Happy New Year! This is also the first Sunday of the 4 week season that leads up to Christmas. We call it Advent.

Advent means the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. So it is only appropriate that we call the season that is the first season of the Christian church year, the season that heralds the arrival of Jesus on earth among us, as Advent.

So it's only fitting that for our first Sunday of Advent we should have readings that prophesy the coming of Jesus. Prophets often prophesied, but remember, they were also known for telling the truth, for often painful honesty.

Our first reading today is from Jeremiah. It is a prophecy of the fulfillment of God's promise to the houses of Israel and Judah. God had promised that a righteous judge would be born to them out of the house of David and that he would execute justice and cause them to live in safety. What an extraordinary promise! "You will live in safety." Think what that meant to the average Israelite. "I will be allowed to live in peace.

This was also an extraordinary promise because all Jeremiah himself ever saw, until he escaped to Egypt, was destruction. Israel had deviated from the ways of Jehovah and followed the God Baal. Jeremiah was instructed to urge them to return. He is often depicted as weeping for his people, in mourning for them. He despaired for his people. In his image on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel he is shown with his face hidden in his hand.

But yet he foresaw and wrote of future joy, of the birth of the righteous branch of the house of David, the Messiah, Jesus.

The people of Israel were a little "nothing" nation, constantly overrun by other nations. And yet they had a different, wonderful God. Their God wasn't only about sacrifices. They had a God who *loved* them, who cared about them. No other God of the ancient world cared about human beings. Much less actually loved us! People were a collection of toys for them to play with, like children with a doll house. But here was a God who cared, who they could trust, who loved them like a parent, who walked beside them, as God did with Abraham.

The psalmist could make the remarkable request and pray, "Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions: *remember me according to your love...*" The people could believe God loved them. Remember me according to your love. They could trust that God — this great God who was so far above them — they could trust that God *loved* them.

And Paul emulates God when he declares his love for the people of his church in Thessalonika. "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?" He asks God for strength for their hearts so that they can "increase and abound in love for one another."

But Jesus goes even further when he speaks of prophecy. He prophesies his own second coming. Other people will faint from fear, but he tells his disciples to stand up and raise their heads. He tells them and us to be courageous in our faith, so we don't get caught up in the worries of life and be caught unexpectedly before God.

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. The light of the world. Jesus was a prophecy who was a promise.

He still is.

We can still believe in his truth.