

December 21, 2016

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Scripture

Isaiah 29:9-24

⁹ Stupefy yourselves and be in a stupor,
blind yourselves and be blind!

Be drunk, but not from wine;
stagger, but not from strong drink!

¹⁰ For the LORD has poured out upon you
a spirit of deep sleep;
he has closed your eyes, you prophets,
and covered your heads, you seers.

¹¹The vision of all this has become for you like the words of a sealed document. If it is given to those who can read, with the command, "Read this," they say, "We cannot, for it is sealed." ¹²And if it is given to those who cannot read, saying, "Read this," they say, "We cannot read."

¹³ The Lord said:

Because these people draw near with their mouths
and honor me with their lips,
while their hearts are far from me,
and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote;

¹⁴ so I will again do
amazing things with this people,
shocking and amazing.

The wisdom of their wise shall perish,
and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden.

¹⁵ Ha! You who hide a plan too deep for the LORD,
whose deeds are in the dark,
and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"

¹⁶ You turn things upside down!
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?
Shall the thing made say of its maker,
"He did not make me";
or the thing formed say of the one who formed it,
"He has no understanding"?

¹⁷ Shall not Lebanon in a very little while
become a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field be regarded as a forest?

¹⁸ On that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a scroll,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.

¹⁹ The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

²⁰ For the tyrant shall be no more,
and the scoffer shall cease to be;

all those alert to do evil shall be cut off —
²¹ those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit,
who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate,
and without grounds deny justice to the one in the right.

²²Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham,
concerning the house of Jacob:

No longer shall Jacob be ashamed,
no longer shall his face grow pale.

²³ For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob,
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

²⁴ And those who err in spirit will come to understanding,
and those who grumble will accept instruction.

Devotional

We are taught to experience life's events as a predictable chain of cause and effect. The stock market goes up and we rejoice, we lose an election and we feel depressed, we see empty pews and we feel deflated.

Today's readings offer a completely different take on history. Eyes are closed or opened, ears are covered or made to see, the meek are lifted up and tyrants are no more—not by the inevitable forces of history, but by the surprising, contingent, sovereign acts of God.

That's what Advent wants to prepare us for. Babies are born out of virgins, salvation comes from crucifixion, and the resurrecting One breaks open the grave. "You turn things upside down!" says the prophet (v. 16) in an amazement that echoes through the ages (see Acts 17:6!).

So fear not, for nothing will be impossible with God (Lk 1:37).

Prayer

Lord our God,
You who cast down and lift up, you who close and open
according to your sovereign will,
help us to rest safely
in the assurance that only you
are history's Lord,
leading us to the glory and peace
of your Kingdom.
Amen.