

2 Advent 2003  
"God Delivers His People"  
The Rev. Thomas W. Simmons IV

Of all the characters in the Bible, I think Prophets are the most interesting. Just think of John the Baptist. He is the "super-model" of Biblical prophets.

He was about 30 years old, and he was a wild man. Many probably thought he was a raving lunatic, secluded out there in the wilderness, with his strange clothes and diet. He probably smelled bad. He appeared in public only to shout at the crowd **to repent and prepare** for the coming of Messiah.

That's what Prophets do. It's their job. Our Collect says that God sent his messengers the prophets "to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation."

**The season of Advent is the season of the Prophet.** In Advent we hear prophets shouting their messages to us across the centuries, calling us to repent and prepare for the coming of One who will shake the world and bring us safely through.

Though they often seem strange to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they're supposed to touch our lives as they touched their original hearers. That's why we pray in this morning's Collect, "give us grace to *heed their words* and forsake our sins."

Their message is *for us* and Advent is the season in which we listen and respond to it. So, what's the message of the prophets this morning? It is simple: **God delivers his people.**

One image dominates the preaching of Baruch and John the Baptist in our texts. We see a vision of mountains being leveled and valleys graded over, **a picture of stupendous power and majesty.** God is coming to rescue his people and NOTHING will get in the way.

Its kind of like what they've been doing in Loudoun County in the last bunch of years, the steam roller of development. The earthmovers and steamrollers have been knocking down and filling in and making everything nice and smooth for roads, houses, businesses, schools. **Prepare ye the way for suburbs!**

In Baruch, God is clearing a way for Israel, held captive in Babylon. Just as he came and saved them from slavery in Egypt, God will once again lead them out of captivity, through the wilderness into the Promised Land. In Seminary, this is called "Exodus imagery."

**God is coming to his people and meeting them where they are,** in the sorrow and affliction of the Babylonian captivity. The people of God had been led away

in chains by the Babylonians and for seventy years they have lived in exile. It's as though they had ceased to exist. That is where God meets them, in the depth of their confusion, despair, regret, bitterness and lost faith.

**He comes to raise the dead to new life.** Look how beautifully Baruch describes it. He bids Jerusalem to trade one outfit for another. They are to "take off the garment of sorrow and affliction," and trade it in for "the beauty of the glory from God...the robe of righteousness from God...and the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting." That's quite an outfit. Isn't it beautiful?

Though Israel was led away in chains by their enemies, God himself will bring them back on a royal sedan chair, the conveyance of kings. They will ride "in the light of his glory," in the celestial grandeur of light and cloud that surrounds God when he shows up in the world. We've seen it on Mt Sinai and at the Transfiguration. The hills and valleys are being leveled to allow their safe passage as God escorts them to the land he promised them.

The people of Israel did indeed return from captivity to the Holy Land. When the Babylonian empire fell to the Persians, Israel was set free to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.

The message is simple: **God comes to deliver his people.**

Luke proclaims the same message. Luke quotes the famous passage from Baruch and Isaiah, which promised deliverance from Babylonian captivity. But Luke sees in that prophecy **an even greater deliverance** that was about to break upon the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

He was coming as "a light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel." **With him, the Kingdom comes and it's changing the world.** People are delivered from illness, demonic oppression, the power of sin and the depredations of tyrants.

God's will is being done on earth as it is in heaven, he is destroying the work of the devil. People's broken lives are put back together and their scars are healed. Whole societies and cultures are renewed as more and more people embrace Christ. It's just amazing to think of all that Jesus has brought to the world over the last 2000 years.

The Son of God leaves his throne in heaven to become incarnate, to live and die as one of us. He "became man." **In Christ, God truly meets us where we are** in all the dimensions of our humanity. We are made in the very image of God in our love and curiosity, our aspirations and reason, our capacity to grow in knowledge and to live in community.

But there are also demons in our nature. People show pitiless anger and self-absorption, and are all too willing to lie, steal, slander and murder. We serve ourselves instead of God and others. **Humans are cunning and dangerous creatures.**

We do evil to others and others do evil to us and we all bear the wounds and scars. We all have our stories and memories of the evil we've done and the evil that's been done to us and we all are concerned to some degree of the bad things that might happen in the future. It's dangerous out there - *and* in here.

Well, the good news proclaimed by the prophets this morning is that **this is where Christ came to meet us** when he was "born of the Virgin" or Christmas morn. As a Man, he's able *to identify* with us and have compassion on us for the things we suffer. He's been here with us and suffered it, too.

**As God he is able to do something about it.** He came to take our sin and to give us his righteousness, to trade our alienation from God for his right standing before God, to take our suffering and fear and give us his joy and peace, to take our weakness and give his strength. To bear our death on the cross so we can experience the life of his resurrection.

The message is simple: **He came to deliver us.**

So the question that confronts us is how is God delivering us today? What threats, sorrows, losses, disappointments, tragedies, sins, intractable problems, what enemies are you facing? What things in your life have you feeling anxious, angry, guilty or desperate? What's driving you to distraction?

**These are the places in your life where God's deliverance is coming**, where the mountains are being leveled and the valleys graded in, where God is leading you out in safety. This is where the words of the prophets can be woven into the fabric of our lives.

God's deliverance is coming. "Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness of God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting; for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven."

AMEN