

Food for the Journey

Advent Week 3

Saints this Week

13th December

St Lucy, Virgin, Martyr

St Lucy (died c.304) is thought to have been born in Syracuse, in Sicily, and martyred under the Emperor Diocletian. She was probably the daughter of a wealthy Christian family but martyred after refusing a pagan suitor. St Lucy is mentioned in the Roman Canon and, because her name means 'light', her feast is on one of the darkest days of winter.

Collect

MAY THE glorious intercession of the Virgin and Martyr Saint Lucy give us new heart, we pray, O God, so that we may celebrate her heavenly birthday in this present age and so behold things eternal. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

14th December

St John of the Cross, Religious, Doctor

St John of the Cross (1542-1591) was born in Spain and entered the Carmelites. A friend of St Teresa of Avila, he led the reform of the order, despite many trials and tribulations from his brethren. His spiritual writing is famous for his reflections on the mystery of the Cross and he is remembered for the phrase 'the dark night of the soul'.

Collect

O GOD, who gave the priest St John an outstanding dedication to perfect self-denial and love of the Cross, grant that, by imitating him closely at all times, we may come to contemplate eternally your glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Monday in the Third Week of Advent

Reading

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17

A star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a sceptre out of Israel

And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and saw Israel encamping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, ³ and he took up his discourse, and said,

- 'The oracle of Balaam the son of Be'or,
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
⁴ the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down, but having his eyes uncovered:
⁵ How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
your encampments, O Israel!
⁶ Like valleys that stretch afar,
like gardens beside a river,
like aloes that the LORD has planted,
like cedar trees beside the waters.
⁷ Water shall flow from his buckets,

and his seed shall be in many waters,
his king shall be higher than Agag,
and his kingdom shall be exalted.....

¹⁵ And he took up his discourse, and said,

‘The oracle of Balaam the son of Be’or,
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
¹⁶ the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
and knows the knowledge of the Most High,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down, but having his eyes uncovered:
¹⁷ I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not nigh:
a star shall come forth out of Jacob,
and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel.

REFLECTION

HAVING spent much of Advent with Isaiah’s prophecies featuring as the Old Testament reading, today we begin to explore material in other books relevant to the coming Kingdom of the Messiah. We begin with the Book of Numbers and the strange and primitive story of Balaam (Numbers 22-24). Balaam is a gentile prophet from pre-history: the story of Balaam and his talking donkey is told as a fable in chapter 22. We are now in chapter 24 and back to a more historical mode. Balak the King of Moab is warned by Balaam the prophet that a future ruler of Israel will crush the Moabites. This prophecy will true in the tenth century BC when King David vanquishes Moab and makes it a vassal state. Early Christian writers saw in Balaam’s prophecy to Balak a reference to the coming of Christ, especially pertinent because Jesus is seen as King in David’s house and lineage.

Tuesday in the Third Week of Advent

Reading

Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13

The Wickedness of Jerusalem

Woe to her that is rebellious and defiled,
the oppressing city!
² She listens to no voice,
she accepts no correction.
She does not trust in the LORD,
she does not draw near to her God....

9 'Yes, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples
to a pure speech,
that all of them may call on the name of the LORD
and serve him with one accord.
10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed ones,
shall bring my offering.
11 'On that day you shall not be put to shame
because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me;
for then I will remove from your midst
your proudly exultant ones,
and you shall no longer be haughty
in my holy mountain.
12 For I will leave in the midst of you
a people humble and lowly.
They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD,
13 those who are left in Israel;
they shall do no wrong
and utter no lies,
nor shall there be found in their mouth
a deceitful tongue.
For they shall pasture and lie down,
and none shall make them afraid.'

Reflection

ZEPHANIAH, like other prophets, was preaching before the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity – so before 587 BC. He is linked with the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC) and at the time the Assyrians were the dominant power in the region, though their power was declining. Zephaniah's proclamations are full of metaphors and similes and his reproaches in chapter 3 are directed towards Judah and the wickedness of Jerusalem. The prophet concludes by suggesting that in the end there will be a faithful remnant, a holy people. This notion of a faithful remnant is a strong theme in the prophetic literature and it is later seen by Christians in terms of the Kingdom of God. Those who respond to the call to repentance and the life of the baptised belong to and pray and work for the coming Kingdom, inaugurated by the Messiah.

Wednesday in the Third Week of Advent

Reading

Isaiah 45:6b-8, 18, 21-25

*Showers, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness*

- I am the LORD, and there is no other.
⁷ I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe,
I am the LORD, who do all these things.
⁸ Showers, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth,
and let it cause righteousness to spring up also;
I the LORD have created it...
¹⁸ For thus says the LORD,
who created the heavens
(he is God!),
who formed the earth and made it
(he established it;
he did not create it a chaos,
he formed it to be inhabited!):
'I am the LORD, and there is no other.'...
²¹ Declare and present your case;
let them take counsel together!
Who told this long ago?
Who declared it of old?
Was it not I, the LORD?
And there is no other god besides me,
a righteous God and a Saviour;
there is none besides me.
²² 'Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.
²³ By myself I have sworn,
from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
'To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear.'
²⁴ 'Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me,
are righteousness and strength;
to him shall come and be ashamed,
all who were incensed against him.
²⁵ In the LORD all the offspring of Israel
shall triumph and glory.'

Reflection

THE PHRASE *Rorate caeli de super* is hard to render in English. In the translation we use for the Advent Prose it comes out as 'Drop down ye heavens from above'. In today's reading the verse is:

**⁸ Shower, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth,
and let it cause righteousness to spring up also. (v8)**

A Messianic prophecy which talks about rainfall is a less accessible metaphor for us nowadays, perhaps, than the idea of salvation 'sprouting forth'. In context, whatever the metaphor, the salvation and the righteousness are the consequence of Cyrus King of Persia defeating the Babylonians and restoring God's people to Jerusalem. And yet, even within the limits of that one historical event, here prophesied, is a much more momentous event, the coming of the Messiah. It's a bit like a prophecy that a child might go on to be Captain of the School only for the child to develop into being winner of a Nobel prize. To be fair, the prophet glimpses the bigger picture and its possibilities because he is envisaging God being worshipped as God throughout the earth, a Saviour for all who turn to him. This is the vocation of Israel to be a light to the nations (Is 42:6; Is 49:6), a theme taken up by Simeon when Jesus is presented in the Temple (Lk 2:32). The Messiah as the glory of Israel and the light to lighten the gentiles is a favourite theme of St Luke who makes reference to the same idea in Acts 13:47 and Acts 26:33. We are looking for a Saviour, a Saviour to whom every knee will bow. (v.23).

Thursday in the Third Week of Advent

Reading

Isaiah 54:1-10

The Eternal Covenant of Peace

54 Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;
break forth into singing and cry aloud,
you who have not been in travail!

For the children of the desolate one will be more
than the children of her that is married, says the LORD.

² Enlarge the place of your tent,

and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
hold not back, lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.

³ For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will possess the nations
and will people the desolate cities.

⁴ Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

⁵ For your Maker is your husband,
the LORD of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.

⁶ For the LORD has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God.

⁷ For a brief moment I forsook you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.

⁸ In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
says the LORD, your Redeemer.

⁹ For this is like the days of Noah to me:
as I swore that the waters of Noah
should no more go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you
and will not rebuke you.

¹⁰ For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

Advent Antiphons

Sung before and after the Magnificat at Evening Prayer and used as Alleluia verses at Mass

17th December – *O Sapientia*

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence. *Sir 24:3; Wis 8:1*

18th December – *O Adonai*

O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm. *cf Ex 3:2, 24:12*

19th December – *O Radix Jesse*

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: Come and deliver us, and delay no longer. *cf Is 11:10, 45:14, 52:15; Rom 15:12*

20th December – *O Clavis David*

O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. *cf Is 22:22, 42:7*

21st December – *O Oriens*

O Morning Star, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness: Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. *cf Mal 4:2*

22nd December – **O Rex Gentium**

O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay. *cf Is 28:16; Eph 2:14*

23rd December – *O Emmanuel*

O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Saviour: Come and save us, O Lord our God. *cf Is 7:14*

*The first letters of the Latin titles taken backwards (E-R-O-C-R-A-S) form a Latin acrostic - **Ero Cras** which translates as 'Tomorrow, I will be [there]', mirroring the theme of the antiphons.*

