

Fr. Brad Neely

3rd Sunday Advent: Sts Peter & Paul: Dec 13, 2009

Zeph 3: 14-18a; Phil 4: 4-7; Lk 3: 10-18

We talk about prophets a lot
in the season of Advent.

Today---Zephaniah.

Is anyone planning to call their son Zephaniah?

I haven't heard of any.

Of course, I keep suggesting Bradley
as a possible boy's name,
but I haven't heard of any Bradley's recently either.

[*But I digress*].

Zephaniah was a prophet shortly *before*
the Babylonian Exile of the Jews.

He preaches during a time
of religious degradation and idolatry,
with Jews worshipping the sun, moon, and the stars.

They were conducting alien rites in Jerusalem.

Zephaniah announces the day
when the judgment against Israel will be removed.

Around this judgment,
and despite Israel's infidelities,

the Lord in his mercy
will spare a holy remnant---

a remnant who will finally enjoy peace.

Thus, we once more hear of the Messiah.

Israel, Zephaniah says, will "shout for joy!"

He continues on:

"The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;

he will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,

he will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals."

There is a nuance important to pick up,
about this prophecy---

and that is,
the directions it is pointed.

While we can understand the Israelites
rejoicing about the coming of the Messiah,

Zephaniah here,
says that it is the MESSIAH

"who rejoices over **us** with gladness,
renewing **us** in His love,

and singing joyfully because of **us**.

The truth here is that joy
is flowing in both directions.

--From the Israelites who will be saved--*to* God,
and joy *from* God *to* the Israelites,
whom he is saving.

There must be some of us
who have contemplated God's joy
at giving us His graces---
of giving the world His Son?

I, for one, probably think about the joy,
mainly in reverse---

of **us** having joy to have *received* the Son.

But actually, if God is *perfect everything*
[that is good],

it would be *imperfect* of Him

NOT to be joyful in the giving
of His own divine life to humanity.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church
has a couple of paragraphs

that are interesting in this respect:

[CCC30] "Although [we] can forget God or reject Him,
He never ceases to call every [person]---

to seek [them] so as to find life and happiness.

[CCC301] "With creation,

God does not abandon his creatures to themselves.

He not only gives them being and existence,

but also, and at every moment,
upholds and sustains them in being,

enables them to act

and brings them to their final end."

In the Book of Wisdom, we hear this:

[Wis 11: 24-26] "For you love all things that exist,
and detest none of the things that you have made;

for you would not have made anything
if you had hated it.

How would anything have endured,
if you had not willed it?

Or how would anything not called forth by you
have been preserved?

You spare all things, they are yours, O Lord,
you who love the living."

In a moment of history,

God was pleased to give us his Son.

At Christmas Midnight Mass,

and according to The Roman Martyrology
for Christmas day,

a formal announcement of the birth of Christ
is given in the style of a proclamation.

[*I sing this given I have a healthy voice at the time*].

"Today, the twenty fifth day of December,
unknown ages from the time when God created

the heavens and the earth,
and then formed man and woman in his own image,
several thousand years after the flood,
when God made the rainbow shine forth
as a sign of the covenant;
twenty-one centuries from the time of Abraham and
Sarah;
thirteen centuries after Moses led
the people of Israel out of Egypt;
eleven hundred years from the time of Ruth and the
judges;
one thousand years from the anointing of David as king;
in the sixty-fifth week according to the prophecy of
Daniel; in the one hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad;
the seven hundred and fifty-second year

from the foundation of the city of Rome;
the forty-second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus;
the whole world being at peace,
Jesus Christ, eternal God and Son of the eternal Father,
desiring to sanctify the world by his most merciful
coming, being conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and nine months having passed since his conception,
was born in Bethlehem of Judea of the Virgin Mary.
Today is the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ,
according to the flesh.

God truly does experience joy in our existence,
and our coming to Him with clean soul,
and in right relationship.
God does not create to subsequently reject.