

Third Sunday in Advent 13 Dec 2015

Zephaniah 3: 14-20

Psalm - The Song of Isaiah

Philippians 4: 4-7

Luke 3:7-18

[Advent 3C December 13, 2015 Textweek](#)

The prophet Zephaniah, on face value, could not have got it more wrong; he calls Israel to rejoice, and to rejoice for:

- The LORD... has turned away your enemies
- you shall fear disaster no more
- I will deal with all your oppressors
- I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth

Now, listen to this reading from the BBC News last Thursday;

Israel's defence ministry says it has successfully tested an advanced ballistic missile defence system. An Arrow-3 missile hit a target above the Earth's atmosphere that simulated the trajectory of long-range missiles like the Iranian Shahab-3.

Further tests are expected before the system, which is being developed together with the US, can be deployed.

It is the latest layer in Israel's system of shields, designed to protect it from external threats.

And another piece from 15th October:

Jerusalem is at the heart of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Both sides see it as their capital. Both venerate religious sites that are also national symbols.

And while it is often possible to ignore the conflict in the beaches and bars of Tel Aviv, the conflict, and the hatred it has engendered, is always strongest in Jerusalem.

Some people like to call it the city of peace. In fact, the holy city is one of the least peaceful places imaginable. Even in quiet times, conflict and hate lie close to the surface.

I think it's fair to say, again on face value, the prophesy of Zephaniah, and the call for rejoicing are not apparent in any sense of reality.

Once again we have a good example today to demonstrate that these are not 'to be read at face value' texts!

Just as indigenous Australians seek to understand their being through dreamtime stories that are both geographically and tribally located, so too the early prophets grounded their understanding in the local place for the local people within the frame of their given tradition.

But in essence the dreamtime stories are not stories about aboriginals or about Australia, nor are the bible stories about Israel, Israelis, Jews or Christians.

These are universal stories about the very being of humanity. And when the people of Israel are referred to as 'god's chosen people', we might contemplate that part of us that 'knows' and recognises its divine nature; and that is a part and a place within our landscape, just as we are a part and a place in the landscape of common humanity.

The crucial understanding of Zephaniah's enlightened worldview is evident in verse 15; "the LORD, is in your midst".

And on hearing this, the early listeners of Zephaniah looked around for "*a warrior who gives victory*"; they waited, like good Anglicans, for someone else to 'do it for them', and many in that same primitive tradition continue to wait for what they understand to be a prophesied saviour.

This same sense of waiting for another in much of the Christian tradition; O come, O come, Emanuel is most often sung as a cry of invitation to another, and even more theologically disturbing into a cry for a second coming of one who has come before...

"The LORD, is in your midst" might better be appreciated as a quantum reality, an actual state of being that seems contradictory to the natural order, but that is an actuality that is foundational to all that we are.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes; "The Lord is near"; and during Advent that can so easily be taken as meaning that there are only 12 more sleeps till Christmas, the birth of our Lord.

"The Lord is near" however, does not refer to a late term pregnancy, once again it speaks of an enlightened reality that is to be realised in every moment.

So how do we embrace these enlightened truths, how do we enter this quantum landscape of being in which: "The Lord is near" and "The LORD, is in your midst" We have only to ask of ourselves the question asked of John the Baptist "What then should we do?"

And this time the question is not directed to the baptiser, nor to the priest or to the church or to anyone else; the question is to be asked of that part of ourselves that resides in our deepest soul, that part where God's chosen awaits birth.

As we approach our nativity, we can each contemplate;

“What then should we do?”