

Third Sunday of Advent
Cycle C RCL
Revised

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah of Judah (640-609 BCE), and some commentators have thought that he might have been a student of the prophetic tradition of Isaiah of Jerusalem. Although the book condemns the injustice and official corruption that held sway in Jerusalem during the early years of the child-king Josiah, the present passage, which concludes the book, contains a strong affirmation of God's salvation of the holy city after a period of chastisement. Fascinating in vs. 17 is the picture of the Lord singing in joy about the reunion with Daughter Zion. There is also an annoying textual problem in vs. 17. The Greek and Syriac Bibles read "he renews you with his love," but the Hebrew has "ploughs you under (*yaxarish*) with his love." The Hebrew text is most likely the right one.

Canticle 9 (Isaiah 12:2-6)

Canticle 9 is the last of three hopeful songs in the First Isaiah (Isaiah 11:1-9, 10-16; 12:1-6) that end the first set of prophecies in the book. Although the words of Isaiah have been largely threatening up to this point, Canticle 9 provides words of hope for God's ultimate restoration of the Davidic monarchy and the city of Jerusalem. The canticle has some affinities with the *thanksgiving psalms* but on the whole must be reckoned as a *hymn of praise*, perhaps a hymn taken directly from the temple's liturgy.

Philippians 4:4-7

One of the reasons some researchers think Philippians contains fragments of several letters is that 4:2-9 reads like the conclusion to a letter, and Philippians 4:19-20 also reads like an ending. The reference to rejoicing in 4:4 picks up a major theme repeated in Philippians 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 19, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1; 4:10. Joy in suffering stems from the sure knowledge that the afflictions of the righteous are a sign of the end times. This knowledge results in peace and even joy in the midst of those afflictions.

Luke 3:7-18

Luke 3:16 has taken over Mark's account of the preaching of John the Baptist (Mark 1:7-8) and expanded it with material from the large collection of sayings Luke shares with Matthew we call "Q." See Matthew 3:7-12. The dialogues with the crowd, the tax collectors, and the soldiers in Luke 3:10-14, however, are unique to Luke and have the effect of including a population far larger than a crowd made up of pious Jews who might be expected to respond to John's teaching. Those first-century Palestinian Jews, who adopted apocalyptic (end-of-the-world) beliefs, expected the present evil age to end with great suffering, a suffering apocalyptic literature sometimes called "wrath" (vs. 7). John's baptism was not just purification from the uncleanness of sin but is also preparation for the coming Kingdom of God.

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