

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Advent Year “A”

*“they will see the glory of the LORD”*

December 15, 2013

Readings: Isaiah 35: 1-6, 10; James 5: 7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

We Minnesotans, if anything, are for the most part very hearty and resilient people. We take things in stride, including our unpredictable winters. If we did not know better, the Lectionary is perhaps even poking fun at the cold weather these past ten days, with its beautiful imagery of abundant flowers blooming in the steppe, the expansive plain that will shimmer with colors.

This chapter utilizes poetic lines that emphasize contrasts. It invites us to hope that what is taking place can give way to something much, much better. In periods of uncertainty when a situation seems fraught with danger and uncertainty rules the day, we turn to the Lord, Who is in control. Life may seem to have led us into a dry period where our efforts have not borne the fruit upon which we were counting. Then suddenly we are told of a future that will transform what takes place now. “The desert and the parched land will exult. The steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers and rejoice with joyful song.”

Indeed it is the Glory of the Lord that will accomplish this. The expression “the glory of the Lord” refers to God himself insofar as He is revealed in His majesty, power and holiness. The prophet Isaiah says in another passage: “all the earth is filled with his glory” (Is 6:3). The glory of God here refers to the Divine protection, and the praise that creatures give to God because of his glory. The sense of this text from Isaiah is that all creatures reflect the wisdom and perfection of God. The “glory” of the Lord is spoken of all throughout the Bible, with different shades of meaning, each rich and filled with meaning for us.

The Psalms often called upon all creatures to praise the glory of the Lord (cf. PS 57; 97; 145-50). But the one passage in the Old Testament to which the “coming in glory” of the Creed refers, more than to all others, is the description of the “son of man” in the prophet Daniel (7:13-14): “I saw one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven... He received dominion, glory and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him.” This passage is commonly interpreted as referring to Jesus Christ who will “come in glory to judge the living and the dead.”

Too often the presence of sin in our lives obscures the glory that the Lord desires to shine through. It is like the smog and fog that covers a beautiful landscape, preventing the land's true beauty from shining forth. When that happens, the Lord's glory is hidden from our view, not because it is lacking, but because we no longer have the eyes to see it. The problem is with us.

This may seem to be quite a serious message on a day we call *Gaudete* or Rejoice Sunday. Indeed, we do rejoice in the Lord; we do believe that he is our hope and glory. But we do so knowing that if we take our eyes off of Christ, we may very quickly lose sight of His glory. That glory is not fully revealed; in fact, were it to be, it would be altogether too much for us. But we need glimpses; we need a taste of the beauty that is the Lord's.

During Advent, our Savior remains hidden; He is on the way, but not yet here. The Third Sunday of Advent gives us a momentary glimpse, encouraging us in the midst of the stillness of waiting. More importantly, he comes to save us. God is coming to save us, and for this reason we wait in joyful expectation, knowing that our salvation is near at hand.