

*Sermon for 2 Christmas  
by Fr. Garrin W. Dickinson  
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Jeremiah is sometimes known as the weeping prophet. He prophesied all the way up to the final destruction of the nation, when most of the people of Israel were taken into captivity in Babylon. And yet, even in this darkest hour, even in the midst of weeping and judgment, God gives us through Jeremiah a vision of blessing. And he does this because blessing is ultimately his will for his people.

He says, “Sing with gladness, shout aloud that the Lord has saved his people.” God puts this in the perfect tense. The prophet says that God *has saved*, because it is sure to happen. His hearers haven’t experienced the salvation yet. But he wills it, and he has the power to do it. And so, in one sense, it is already done. There is no question of its happening. The Lord *will* gather his people. He *will* care for them as a good shepherd. He *will* turn their mourning into joy. He is, he says, “a father to Israel”. And in the end, his people shall be *satisfied* with his goodness.

That was, of course, difficult to see for the people going into captivity. Which is why they needed the prophecy. And it is sometimes difficult for us to see, as well. Which is why we need it.

During the Christmas season, we celebrate one fulfillment of this prophecy. God the Son has come to us as a man. Through his death in the flesh, he has ransomed us and saved us and gathered us from the farthest parts of the earth, even the blind and the lame, those of us who are broken and imperfect, just as Jeremiah foresaw. And the broken and the imperfect turn out to be all of us. God’s flock is made up of sick and maimed sheep. Yet God in Christ Jesus is the perfect father, the good shepherd, who leads and cares for us better than we could possibly imagine.

But prophecy does not follow a simplistic logic in which one prophecy equals one fulfillment. The word of God is more powerful than that. It ripples through all of creation and time until its final consummation. We celebrate what God has done for us in Jesus. And we wait on him to complete all that he has promised, the perfection of all things, including us. In the meantime, we have fulfillments of prophecy that encourage and empower us but still leave us waiting for that final absolute fulfillment.

And so, in faith, *much of* our mourning has been turned to joy. The world, the flesh, and the devil *have been* defeated. Death is robbed of its power over us. And yet, we still long for the second coming of our Lord in power and great glory to judge the earth, and so to bring all things to their completion.

St. Paul understands this longing. His prayer for the Ephesians is that they may live for the present in the light of that glorious day until its coming. He reminds us that we are destined by God to “be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace”. And he prays that God may enlighten the eyes of our hearts, so that they may see clearly the hope we have in Jesus. This isn’t just a hope for life after death, like some cosmic consolation prize. It’s the hope of the final day of perfection, when all will be put right. It’s the hope that, as we respond to his call and as we align our wills with his, we ourselves will grow more and more into the perfection he created us to have, into the glorious people that he created us to be rather than the crippled imperfection that we all see in ourselves.

When we have the “spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of [God]” that St. Paul prays for, we will know “what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints”. We will see the blessings that God has poured out on us. And we will have joy in allowing God to make us into saints, to make us holy. We will be able to see how wonderful that remaking is, even when it is painful, rather than avoiding it like a dreaded chore. And we will understand “the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who trust” in him. The power that God will unleash in us, if we will only trust him, is staggering. It is this power that saves us. It is this power that remakes us and makes us holy. It is this power, then, that binds us together in unity with him in order to unleash his power on the rest of the world. If we will only trust him and obey, then we will be Christ’s church. And, in the end, even the gates of hell don’t stand a chance against that.