

# The Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2009

*Zephaniah 3:14-20*

*Canticle 9*

*Philippians 4:4-7*

*Luke 3:7-18*

*In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Suppose someone came up to me and said, “Have you heard what’s happening down on the river? I’ve heard that there’s this guy dressed up like a camel standing in the water saying ‘Come on over here and let me baptize you, like pour water on your head; then you should go home and live a better life.’”

Would I drop everything and run off to see what that’s about? Probably not.

First, I really don’t like crowds, I don’t trust them. Crowds are noisy and messy, and they get emotional and excited about all sorts of irrational things.

Also, I am really not comfortable around strange people, particularly loud, impassioned fanatics in funny clothes. I don’t care what they have to say. They make me nervous.

So, I would say, “Thank you, I think I’ll just stay away. I’m sure I’ll hear all about what happens in due time.” I mean, seriously, why get involved – how important can it be? What could happen?

Thereby, I would miss the whole thing.

Can you imagine how many people must have felt like that, how many had some reason not to go to see and hear John? Can you imagine how many missed the end of an age and the beginning of a new world?

The new world began with John, the latter-day Elijah crying prophetically that the Messiah was come, that the time had come when every person, every single person, would stand in judgment, not by the standard of who they are, not because they are sons and daughters of Abraham, but because of what they do in this world.

Isn't it interesting that the people heard John and they hadn't a clue about how to respond? "What are we supposed to be doing? Nobody ever mentioned personal responsibility before." They are conveniently forgetting centuries of warnings by a succession of prophets on just that personal responsibility. It had been 600 years since Zephaniah had called them to "Save the lame and gather the outcast" if they really meant to do the will of God.

Now the time is up. John tells them plainly that right behind him, perhaps literally, stands the one who will judge, the judge in the deceptive guise of a young rabbi from Galilee. We can only speculate if John realizes that he is that close, in time and space, to God Incarnate.

Why do we read this story now, on this third Sunday in Advent?

I think it's because we are approaching Christmas, the Feast of the Incarnation. We read it because we are so tempted to romanticize, even trivialize the Incarnation, the birth of God made human, into just a sentimental story of a baby and a little family and shepherds and wise men. It is a tender and beautiful story that speaks straight to the heart of us all. But if it remains no more than a tender story, we can, if we are not very careful, lose sight of just who that is lying in a

manger. The baby is no less than the omnipotent, omniscient God. The baby in the manger will grow up to be that one standing by John at the Jordan, both the judge and the savior of the world. More than that, in the Incarnation God entrusts himself to our love and care, entrusts Himself to us fallible and completely unreliable human beings. God accepts a state of being dependent on us.

Our faith in God pales before God's faith in us.

Advent is the time to put The Incarnation in perspective, a time to contemplate the magnitude of God's love and trust for each of us.

*In His Holy Name.*