

Home Worship December 2017 - Revd Ian Russell

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This is a five-Sunday set of material using passages and concepts of prophecy and fulfilment; plus a reading and prayers for Christmas Day.

Sunday 3rd December 2017

Prophecy, generally, means a prediction - and this will be followed by a period of waiting - leading to fulfilment.

For example:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed,

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken"

Isaiah 40: 1-2 / 3 / 5

[the fulfilment of the above text will be shown through a passage relating to John the Baptist on December - Sunday 24th]

There are many predictions in the Bible; accordingly concepts of waiting occur, such as the material this month including "waiting", as in his passage from Psalm 130.

**I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.
O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.**

Psalm 130:5-7

"*Prophets and Psalms*" suggests the above passage shows, on an inner level, the coming of the Lord with redemption [liberation from evil and falsity] and salvation [acknowledgement of God and being led by him in a life of charity and faith - releasing a celebration and experiencing worship of the Lord].

Below, in the next two passages a prophecy is being developed towards fulfilment.

Then this [people of Assyria] will look towards the earth and see only distress and darkness, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

Isaiah 8:22

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne

and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Isaiah 9:1 / 2/ 6-7

Spend a little time if you wish to consider some prophecies that you can think of which show themselves often at Christmas time; for example, the coming of the angel Gabriel to Mary.

Prayer:

Lord, it is with an open and expectant heart that I wait patiently for earthly celebrations of your great coming into the world so many years ago. It is with a willing heart that I seek your presence within my daily life and activity. I can do nothing without your love and guidance within me. Permit me to hold any of your prophecies within me so that I may celebrate your coming not only as a memorial, but also because you are welcomed and loved within my whole life. Amen.

Sunday 10th December 2017

This Sunday's material will show you a text from the Bible which leads to fulfilment of prophecy / expectations. Take some time considering this passage; what draws your attention? In what way are you able to feel the presence of the Lord through any of the text you considered?

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he said to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

*[See Isaiah 61:1-2]
Luke 4:13-22*

Sunday 17th December 2017

Song *Come, O long-expected Jesus, born to set your people free;
from our fears and sins release us, Lord, in you our rest shall be.*

The line of the song - "**Come, O long expected Jesus**" gives a hint of how prophecy can be a long or very long wait, gauged by a measure of earthly time.

Sometimes, as here with the virgin spoken of in the Prophet Isaiah (7:14), the earthly time-frame is hundreds of years before Christ was born. Waiting, therefore, for a prophecy to be manifest could mean many generations being unaware of when the virgin is to give birth.

There is no such thing as time in the spiritual world, but rather differing periods of states

of life. While these states vary, they are all concerned with activity of the spirit within different aspects of the heavenly kingdom. So, differing states can be within a person or within a whole and specific heavenly sphere.

Gabriel and Michael are not the names of two people in heaven, but those names mean everyone in heaven who possesses wisdom about the Lord and worship him.
Swedenborg; True Christian Religion 300:1

Here, for the virgin called Mary her period of waiting is relatively short, that is, the earthly time of human gestation. Yet the inner state of Gabriel's sphere within heaven may well be active in developing this momentous sphere in heaven to be felt within the soul of Mary which in turn radiates the expectation of the birth of Christ.

In your own times of waiting in life, what type of mixture of feelings do you have? For example, anxiety, great expectation, hope, excitement. For you how does time affect any of these states?

Sunday 24th December 2017

Below a passage shows a movement towards a fulfillment: in what way can you see some action towards welcoming the Lord? Literally there are baptisms, also a willingness to welcome and believe in the possibility of a Messiah manifesting. It may be possible for you to bring some meaning of celebration from the meeting of John the Baptist and Jesus, historically; yet also you may be able to embrace what this means for you in your own life and faith.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:(40:3) "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "

Matthew 3:1-3

The above passage from Matthew is a fulfilment of a prophecy from Isaiah 40 which was used on Sunday 3rd.

Perhaps, for an individual, there may be a need to wonder what a desert may mean with regard to his or her spirit. What does a desert mean for you in a physical sense? What for you does a straight path suggest? The text in Matthew is asking for some preparation to be done. How would you deal with an empty-like state of the spirit?

The Annunciation by Gabriel of the Incarnation of Christ.

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the

Most High will over-shadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called' the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age,

and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.” I am the Lord’s servant, “ Mary answered. “May it be as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:26-38

Christmas Day 25th December 2017

Here is the wonder of fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her first-born, a son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2: 1-7

The Lord’s prayer: (a more modern version)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, as in heaven so upon earth. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. for yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Sunday 31st December 2017

Conflict emerges so swiftly following the birth of Christ. The *Magi* belong to those people who are called the sons of the east. These people were aware that the Lord was to be born - they knew of his coming from the star - hence the great joy of their meeting in Bethlehem. Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17 shows “A star will come out of Jacob

Herod, on the other hand, wishes to destroy the child.

When they [The Magi] had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him”.

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son”.

Matthew 2: 13-15

Bearing in mind that all things in the scriptures apply on some level to every person it may be useful, if you wish, to do some reflecting on this conflict.