

Born In Humility, Returning In Glory for three voices

The Book of the prophet Isaiah has long been appreciated for its vivid imagery depicting broad Messianic themes: the Anointed One, the Coming One who will bring about God's redemptive purposes in history; the Messiah as King who "will judge the needy with righteousness and with justice will give decisions for the poor;" but also Messiah as obedient servant whose suffering unto death works God's redemption.

As a consequence, Isaiah has often been called "the Fifth Gospel." St Jerome said that Isaiah "should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet because he is able to describe all the mysteries of Christ and the Church." Augustine once asked his bishop for advice on vacation reading, and Bishop Ambrose prescribed Isaiah "because, I believe, he is more plainly a fore-teller of the Gospel and of the calling of the Gentiles than are the others." In Early Judaism, the figures of dominating stature were Abraham, Moses, David and Isaiah.

The New Testament itself has a strong presence of Isaiah. There are approximately 250 references to Isaiah in the New Testament, and of the 37 times that Paul quotes from the Prophets, 27 are from Isaiah. When Jesus spoke in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry, he quoted from Isaiah. When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip to explain the Scriptures to him, that Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah. Philip had ready answers for him, interpreting Isaiah with "the good news about Jesus." Much of the imagery and language of the book of Isaiah was familiar and deeply rooted in Jewish religion and culture; it formed a major part of the backdrop against which the first century Jews interpreted their experience of the risen Christ.

This reading takes sections of text from Isaiah and from the Letter to the Hebrews and lays them side by side. Hebrews is not the obvious choice to illustrate the influence of Isaiah: it includes only one direct quotation and only a few allusions.

There are, in fact, significant differences between the books. Isaiah is a large collection of texts — narrative history, poetry, prophecy — recorded for the benefit, the edification of the whole nation of Israel. The narrative and events described circulate within the world of high politics: kings, courts and the affairs of empires.

On the other hand, the Letter to the Hebrews is written in the form of a sermon to a local church in early Christendom. The author lived in a world of ordinary, vulnerable people who had been persecuted and who were in danger of further persecution. They were, in fact, a community of Christians who were engaged in a painful struggle for their own existence, and the author is concerned that they are in danger of "falling away from the living Gods." Herein lies the similarity. The book of Isaiah also addresses a people living through a time of extreme danger. And this danger threatens to destroy their trust in God. The authors of Isaiah and Hebrews both respond with dire warnings but also with words of deep-felt encouragement. And both speak boldly of the Messiah as bringing about God's saving purposes.

This reading is especially appropriate for the Advent season.

Direction:

Reader A speaks the text from Hebrews and Readers B and C speak the text from Isaiah. To help clarify this distinction it is helpful if Reader A is physically separated from Readers B and C; for example, left and right at the front of the sanctuary, or front and back.

Born In Humility, Returning In Glory

for three voices

ONE • God Spoke

- A God spoke
- A We do see Jesus
B born in humility
C returning in glory
- A Long ago
God spoke to our ancestors HEB 1.1
- B From the beginning
I have not spoken in secret ISA 45.16
- A in various ways through the prophets HEB 1.1
C from the time it happens
I have been there ISA 45.16
- A But now at last
in these last days
he has spoken to us by a Son HEB 1.2
- C And now the Lord GOD has sent me and his spirit ISA 48.16
- B For to us a child is born
to us a son is given ISA 9.6
- A whom he appointed heir of all things
C And the government will be on his shoulders ISA 9.7
- A through whom he also created the worlds
B who made all things
who stretched out the heavens
who spread out the earth ISA 44.24
- A He is the reflection
the radiance of God's glory HEB 1.3
- C And he will be called Wonderful Counselor
Mighty God
Everlasting Father
Prince of Peace ISA 9.6
- A and the exact image of God's very being HEB 1.3
- B The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding
the Spirit of counsel and of power
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD
- A the brightness of God's glory and like him in every way HEB 1.3

C He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes
or decide by what he hears with his ears

B but with righteousness he will judge the needy
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth ISA 11.2-4

A He sustains all things by his powerful word HEB 1.3

B He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever ISA 9.7

A by the power of his word HEB 1.3

C As the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return to it without watering the earth
so is my word that goes out from my mouth

B It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it ISA 55.11

C for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea ISA 11.9

A Come, Lord Jesus

[TWO • GOD INCARNATE]

A God Incarnate

A We do see Jesus

C born in humility

B returning in glory

A who for a little while was made lower than the angels HEB 2.9

B You are my servant
in whom I will display my splendour ISA 49.3

A who during the days of his life on earth
offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears HEB 5.7

C But I said, "I have laboured in vain
I have spent all my strength for nothing at all ISA 49.4

B Let me weep bitter tears
Do not try to comfort me for the destruction of my beloved people" ISA 22.4

A with cries and tears to the one who could save him from death

B Surely God is my salvation
I will trust and not be afraid
for the LORD God is my strength and my might ISA 12.2

C Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength

B They will run and not grow weary
they will walk and not be faint ISA 40.31

A and he was heard because of his reverent submission HEB 5.7
 C He will not shout or cry out
 or raise his voice in the streets
 A bruised reed he will not break
 and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out ISA 42.2-3
 A Since, we, the children, share flesh and blood
 he himself likewise shared these same things HEB 2.14
 B He will be named Emmanuel
 God with us ISA 7.14
 A Come, Lord Jesus

[THREE • GOD WITH US]

A God with us

A We do see Jesus
 B born in humility
 C returning in glory
 A He himself likewise shared with us in our humanity
 so that through death he might destroy
 the one who has the power of death HEB 2.14
 C The people walking in darkness have seen a great light
 B on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned ISA 9.2
 A might destroy the one who has the power of death
 that is, the devil
 so that through death he might free
 those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death HEB 2.15
 B The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me
 C He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted
 to proclaim freedom for the captives
 and release from darkness for the prisoners ISAIAH 61.1
 A It was fitting that God
 for whom and through whom all things exist
 in bringing many children to glory HEB 2.10
 C Surely you will summon nations you know not
 and nations you do not know will come running to you ISA 55.5
 A that God should make the pioneer of their faith
 the author of their salvation
 perfect through sufferings HEB 2.10
 B From the sole of the foot even to the head
 there is no soundness in his body
 but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds ISA 1.5-6

A to make a sacrifice of atonement
 a reconciliation for the sins of the people HEB 2.17

C Because he poured out himself to death
 and was numbered with the transgressors

B He was pierced for our transgressions
 he was crushed for our iniquities ISA 53.5

C For he bore the sin of many
 and made intercession for the transgressors ISA 53.12

A Son though he was, he learned trusting obedience from what he suffered HEB 5.8

C He was led like a lamb to the slaughter

B By oppression and judgment
 by a perversion of justice he was taken away

C And he was cut off from the land of the living ISA 53.7-8

A and, once made perfect
 he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him HEB 5.9

C By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many
 and he will bear their iniquities ISA 53.11

B I will make you a light for the Gentiles
 that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth ISA 49.7

C Nations will come to your light
 and kings to the brightness of your dawn ISA 60.3

B For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations ISA 56.7

C Peace, peace to the far and near ISA 57.19

A When he had made purification for sins HEB 1.3

B After he has suffered
 he will see the light of life and be satisfied ISA 53.11

A he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high HEB 1.3

B And the glory of the Lord will be revealed
 and all people will see it together ISA 40.5

A Come, Lord Jesus

[FOUR • CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN]

A Christ will come again

A We do see Jesus
 C born in humility
 B returning in glory

A He had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect
 so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God HEB 2.17

B I live in a high and holy place
 but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit
 C to revive the spirit of the lowly
 to revive the heart of the contrite ISA 57.15
 A Because he himself was tested
 tempted by what he suffered
 he is able to help those who are being tested HEB 2.18
 C The LORD God has given me the tongue of a teacher
 that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word ISA 50.4
 B For he tends his flock like a shepherd
 he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart
 He gently leads those that have young ISA 40.11

A Therefore, brothers and sisters
 lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees
 C Strengthen the feeble hands
 steady the knees that give way
 B say to those with fearful hearts
 C "Be strong, do not fear
 your God will come
 with divine retribution he will come to save you" ISA 35.3-4
 A and make straight paths for your feet
 B Make straight in the desert a highway for our God ISA 40.3
 A so that what is lame may not be put out of joint
 but be healed HEB 12.12
 C Then your light will break forth like the dawn
 and your healing will spring up quickly ISA 58.8
 A Let us not lose sight of Jesus
 the pioneer and perfecter of our faith
 B He died in humility
 A and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God HEB 12.2
 C He is returning in glory
 A Christ will appear a second time
 to save those who are eagerly waiting for him HEB 9.28

A Come, Lord Jesus

Presentation time: 9 minutes

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