

Advent 2 – Reflection



Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem by Rembrandt, 1630

The theme for the second week of Advent is the Prophets, who helped to prepare for the coming of Christ by directing people towards God. The prophets were not always popular characters because they challenged people about their lifestyles and tried to make them aware of the presence of God. Jeremiah is often depicted as the prophet of doom because he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, the Holy City. The term “Jeremiah” is still used nowadays to describe someone of a gloomy disposition!

In this image Rembrandt has painted Jeremiah at a time of absolute despair. Jerusalem has been invaded and conquered by the troops of King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. Most of the nobility and educated people from the city are being taken into exile, so that the city is left without leaders who may lead a rebellion against the occupying forces. It is no consolation to Jeremiah that he had predicted this – but was ignored. (*Jeremiah 39-52*)

When God calls people to be prophets, he puts a considerable burden on them. Jeremiah was isolated from friends and neighbours because they did not like his message. He faced hatred, fear, death threats and imprisonment because people did not want to accept what God was saying to them via him. They could not see that it was their actions and lifestyle that was the problem, rather

than Jeremiah's words. This picture by Rembrandt shows the effect of this on Jeremiah; he is exhausted, depressed and alone. He has not been injured in the conflict, but he is about to be exiled. He appears to be dressed for the journey (although his feet are bare!), and surrounded by the possessions he has salvaged. His left arm is leaning on a book labelled Bibel (the Torah, the first books of the Hebrew Bible). You may find it helpful to view this picture on the internet and enlarge certain sections, so that you can see the detail of the destruction of Jerusalem in the background and the way in which Rembrandt has portrayed the devastation on the face of Jeremiah.

One of the great skills that Rembrandt displays as an artist is the use of light and shadow to convey a message or highlight part of an image. In this picture Jeremiah is bathed in a soft, glowing light which appears to come from the bottom left-hand side of the picture. Is this a lamp or torchlight? Or does it represent God's presence, indicating that Jeremiah is not as isolated as he feels? Themes of light and darkness are also linked with the season of Advent. It is a dark time of the year, with short days and cloudy skies; but we look forward to the light of the Christmas season when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, Light of the World. Like Jeremiah, Jesus faced rejection and hostility in his life as he passed on the word of God; he was rejected by his own people. But Jesus is also the embodiment of God's love for the world and us. The prophets brought good news as well as bad; they foretold the birth of Jesus and reminded people of God's eternal presence. In this season of Advent the prophets remind us that God is with us at all times.

Consider: How might you pass on a prophetic message about God to others?

Prayer

Come, O Lord,
open our eyes to your presence,
open our minds to your grace,
open our lips to your praises,
open our hearts to your love,
open our lives to your healing
and be known among us. Amen