

Dear saints awaiting for the coming of the Christ child, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As the Israelite people wondered in the wilderness there was lots of grumbling and complaining. After all, they were delivered from the bondage they had lived in under the Egyptians, the Lord was with them and even gave them a visible sign of his presence with a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. They were no longer enslaved. So they grumbled, they complained they were wondering in the wilderness, they complained they didn't have enough food or water though they seemed to always be provided with enough to live off of for the forty years, and they were even complaining about the fire and the cloud and voice of the living God being in their midst and wished upon themselves death.

Nonetheless, the Lord still continued to provide for the people. When they grumbled and complained about the desire to have another voice aside from the of the Lord, he provided a prophet, like Moses, and he says that he will speak to them through this prophet.

This is where things seem to be a little dicey. For now it is possible for sinful men to corrupt the Word of God. The Lord knows the heart of men and speaks to this. After all, who wouldn't all kinds of power and authority and who wouldn't want everything they say to be taken as absolute truth? Imagine the possibilities. The Lord knows our sinful hearts, he knows the hearts of men and thus gives this word of warning: "but the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die."

The question then arises, how are we to know if one is a prophet or not? A prophet speaks not of himself but the Word of God. The Lord spoke of the assurance that the things said by the prophet sent from him would come to pass. If a prophet were to speak of things and they were not to come true then you need not have any fear of him. The Word of the Lord always comes with a promise as well. God's prophets certainly spoke of things to come, but not merely for the sake of being fortunetellers.

The Lord says he will send his prophet, like Moses. Meaning that there will be one who is sent, one who comes bearing the Word of God. When the Lord sends his prophets, he often times sends them with a condemning word, a word speaking to and showing of sin and proclaiming the death and hell that it deserves. God always sends his Word of promise, his word of forgiveness, cleansing and atonement.

The prophet would always pray for God's people, praying that they would be lead to repentance and faith. Most essentially, God's prophets always spoke to and proclaimed that promise which was first given, that despite the bondage of sin and death that we have deserved, despite our continual rejection, grumbling, and complaining of his good gifts and his Word, the Lord is faithful and he promised the sending of the Messiah, the Christ, who would restore creation.

The prophets sent by the Lord did not have an easy task. Who wants to hear proclaimed that they are sinners deserving of death and hell? After all, isn't all this talk about God supposed to be the exact opposite, what about the loving God, the God who brings comfort and peace? Well, that God is the Lord who first convicts you of your sin, brings you to repentance and leads you to confess that you cannot by your own reason or strength do anything to merit forgiveness and salvation.

God's prophets found a lot of opposition as they brought the Word of the Lord to his people. Imagine if you will, being brought up in a place and then being placed in a position of authority. And from the Word of God, those who knew you and your family, their sin is pointed out. Not well received. No one likes to be pointed out that they are sinners deserving death and hell. We know his background, we know his family, we know the teachings he was given. After a series of parables and asking if they knew what he was saying to them, Jesus is criticized. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him.

Why the offense? Jesus in his parables was speaking of sowing seeds, some growing and some dying, he spoke of weeds being gathered and burned, he spoke of grains of mustard seed growing into the largest of trees, he spoke of flour being preserved and leavened, he spoke of the great value of pearls with the kingdom of heaven, he spoke of the kingdom of heaven being like a fishing net and there being separation of the good from the evil, and he even spoke of weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's a lot to take in. But Jesus was teaching in the synagogue from his youth. This is not what was taught, where did he get all these things?

Indeed, from the prophets of the Old Testament that spoke to and proclaimed the coming of the Messiah and Christ himself were constantly rejected in their hometowns. No one wants to hear that your way of living, your lack of receiving the Word of God with joy, your family disagreements, your arguments and name calling, are contrary to the Word of God and deserving of death and hell. And certainly it is not the human inclination to be overjoyed to hear that there is nothing you can do to save yourself from this sinful condition.

Dear saints awaiting the coming of the Lord, your sins are great, your judgment is deserving of nothing but death and hell and none of your actions can redeem you, you can never be good enough to earn salvation. But all of Scriptures, Moses and the prophets, spoke of this man Jesus. This man who comes as God in the flesh. His Word is the Word of God. His Word is that you, the people of Nazareth, the Pharisees and the Scribes, are indeed sinners who deserve nothing but death and hell.

His advent, his coming, is more than a mere promise never to be fulfilled from the Old Testament. His advent, his coming, is more than a mere historical hiccup or story to make people feel better. His advent, his coming, happened in real time in real space. His coming would be to fulfill all that was said by Moses and the Prophets. He comes as God and man, he comes as the son of Mary, his brothers are James and Joseph and Simon and Judas, he had sisters, Joseph cared for him and raised him as a son, he was a carpenter. Yet, he is God in the flesh.

He comes being sent by the Father, despite our continuous rejection and questioning of His Word, despite our grumbling and complaining, despite our bondage to sin. He has come to save us and deliver us from this bondage. He comes with the promise and delivers to you the true gifts. His becoming flesh is for you. His life, his death, his resurrection cleanse and atone your sins. You are forgiven, you are released from sin, death, and the devil.

Yes, he comes and speaks a harsh word that may even make you feel uncomfortable at times. That's good, he comes and leads you to repentance and faith. He comes and gives you the gifts won in his death and resurrection. He comes and gives you himself and gives you faith. You are forgiven and cleansed. And he has promised to come again, as we await his second advent, we rejoice in the forgiveness that he gives. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son," (Hebrews 1:1-2a) the Son who has purified your sins, the Son who has restored you and gives you the promise of the resurrection. The Son who says, "yours is the kingdom of God."

In the name of Jesus. Amen.