

Tear Open the Heavens and Come Down

Isaiah 64:1-9

In the *Advent Lessons and Carols* service we have a series of Old Testament scripture readings that speak of the hope and longing for God to do something to help his people, to help his broken, hurting world, for God to act ***PDQ!***, for God to act decisively to make things right. We've chosen 6 O.T. readings for this *Advent Lessons and Carols* service, but there are many others we could choose from that would expand upon their message. They express a tremendous longing for God:

- to *save* his people (to rescue them)
- to act *clearly* and *directly*
- to bring *justice* and overturn oppression
- to end all war and hate and killing
- to make a new beginning, a fresh start, to establish a new rule, a new heaven and a new earth
- to bring *retribution*, to punish the wicked
- to forgive and cleanse his people
- to heal our brokenness
- to lead his people like a shepherd leads the sheep
- to end all want and poverty and hunger
- to give his people hope
- to overturn death itself and bring new life.

This longing for God to act is expressed in the hope for God's Messiah, God's *anointed one* to come. That longing for God to come to help his people is expressed in songs, in Psalms, by prophets, by priests and by those in great distress such as Job. But nowhere is that longing better expressed than in the words of the Prophet in Isaiah 64:1-2:

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

Well isn't that what we want as well... for God to ***tear open*** the heavens and come down and help us? Whatever that barrier is between heaven and earth, between the *immortal, almighty, all powerful* God and God's frail, and all too mortal and fallible creatures on earth, we want God to rip it apart and come to our aid. Come Lord God, come quickly and help:

- me in this time of financial collapse to get by
- me to find meaningful work
- me not to lose everything I've worked so hard to build
- me to save my home
- me not to lose my nest egg
- to vindicate me against ____ (and you can fill in the blank for there's plenty of blame to go around) so and so who profited while frittering away my investments

- to give me back my health
- to make my loved one well again
- to make things right
- me to know without a shadow of a doubt that you are real

That's the Advent cry and longing for the Messiah to come. And we cry out that longing just as fervently and desperately and loudly as they did in the O.T.

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence! (Isaiah 64:1)

The prophet imagines that God will come with fantastic special effects as he did with Moses in helping the Hebrew people get out of Egypt, with thunder and lightning, with volcanic eruption and with earthquake. When God acts to save his people it ought to look something like what the military bombardment of Baghdad was proclaimed to be in 2003, "*shock and awe.*"

Aah, but God did come down. God did tear open the heavens. God's longed-for Messiah has come. But none of it was what anyone expected. We witness the act of those heavens being torn apart in today's Gospel reading. The Angel Gabriel appears in the backwater of the broken Kingdom of Israel, in the small town of Nazareth to a poor girl of no consequence engaged to a carpenter. "*Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you!*" the angel proclaims. "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High.*" With those words the angel – the messenger of God – proclaimed that God would be born among us.

God has torn open the heavens and come down. God has come to save and to help his people. But it is not with special effects and he has not brought us out of our misery, out of our poverty, out of our need. Rather God has come into the midst of it. God has come into the midst of our brokenness, into our need, into the most difficult challenges of our world. God has split apart the heavens and come among us as one of us.

It is the darndest thing. It was the last thing that Mary expected. It is the last thing we would have expected. The *Word* that was spoken at the beginning of creation has been spoken anew into our world, into our messy lives, into our sinful hearts, into our longing and need.

For God has come down not with *shock and awe* but with love and humility. God has not come down with special effects but has still come among us with power – power to change, power to heal, power to forgive, power to transform lives, power to believe, power to hope, power to serve others, power to die to self, power to rise from death. May we follow Mary's lead and with longing hearts, with wonder and awe, with fear and trepidation, with surprise and hope, and with joy, say "**YES!**" to the possibility and hope of *God come among us. Amen.*