Fourth Sunday of Epiphany / Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Connecting faith and daily life

A lesson from Deuteronom



William Hepper reflects on Deuteronomy 18:15-20

oday we are looking at a text from the book of Deuteronomy, which is not, perhaps, the most widely read of biblical books. Earlier in the chapter, detailed rules govern the lives and duties of the priests, who were taken from the tribe of Levi. Great detail is given concerning their duties and privileges.

But then, almost out of nowhere, appears a paragraph, framed as the words of Moses, speaking about God raising up a prophet. We may notice that the initiative in this is with God, the divine, rather than any human agent: "I [the Lord] will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command."

This is all consistent with the emphasis in Deuteronomy, which rejects all the religious efforts of the Canaanites who inhabited the land. It is the word of God that matters. The Lord decides when, where and how the people of Israel will worship. There is further emphasis in this passage on the importance of the word of God, which one commentator sees as, "a manifestation of the reality and presence of the deity... it is through God's word communicated by the prophet that the divine rule is carried out".

Christians may also see in the prophet figure, a forerunner of Jesus himself. The ultimate prophet was thus more than God's spokesperson on earth – he was God incarnate.

Lord God, we pray that your word will be heard clearly in these days, when so many reject your voice and your call. Amen.

St Brigid

by Caroline Hodgson

Brigid of Kildare, whose feast is celebrated on Thursday, is one of Ireland's foremost saints. For such a revered figure (in Ireland, only St Patrick comes higher), she is a shadowy figure. But while we know little about Brigid herself, the folklore surrounding her gives us an insight into early Christian Ireland. She was born into slavery, to a slave mother and a chieftain father. It is said that her father sold

his daughter to a druid as a slave, although at ten she was returned to his home. There, her persistent and uncompromising acts of charity provoked her father's fury particularly as she was in the habit of giving away or selling his possessions. In the end he took her to the king to sell her. While the two men were talking, Brigid gave her father's jewel-encrusted sword to a beggar. Seeing this act of kindness, the king persuaded her father to grant Brigid her freedom.

66 Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ."

Ephesians 3:8

The books of the Old Testament - Ezekiel

by Richard Greatrex

Richard Greatrex continues our book-by-book series about the Bible.

Like his older contemporary Jeremiah, Ezekiel came from a priestly family. Before he was old enough to serve, they were exiled to Babylon, casualties of Nebuchadnezzar's policy to subdue the rebellious Judeans by stripping their country of its elites. In exile Ezekiel receives his first vision of God, where he is warned that, even though he will be ignored, it is nevertheless his responsibility to speak God's word.

Ezekiel responds with fierce imagination, piling prophecy upon prophecy – some shockingly explicit. His stark message is that the city's eventual destruction will be a direct consequence of depravity. Then the focus shifts to hope. Ezekiel's visions blossom with positivity, with the famous passage about dry bones breathed into life by God bringing hope of restoration. This carries through into the concluding chapters.

Complex, convoluted, bizarre, obscure, abrupt and suffused with brilliant imagery and sophisticated theology, Ezekiel burns with hope and offers unwavering trust in God's eternal forgiveness, justice and loyalty.