

Which Jerusalem are we talking about?

Today's first reading from chapter 60 of Isaiah was composed about 25 centuries ago – around 500 BC - and here we are still reading it today! From our point of view in history perhaps we can say the writer was expecting too much when he called upon Jerusalem *to rise up in splendor . . .* when he boasted: *See darkness covers the earth . . . but upon you the Lord shines . . .* and foresaw that *Nations shall walk by your light and kings by your shining radiance . . . Caravans of camels shall fill you . . . bearing gold and frankincense.* Maybe enthusiasm had gotten the better of him.

Of course back then he had reason for such great expectations because a benevolent Persian Empire had just conquered an Empire that had destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple and dragged its people into captivity far from home. And now after that ordeal they were going back to run their own territory in Judah, rebuild their city and Temple – a new lease on life, the revival of the hopes of their long history. So indeed, *rise up O Jerusalem in splendor!*

Well – splendor? Over the subsequent 25 centuries Jerusalem hardly became very radiant. It was destroyed again in 70 AD, was the scene of bloody politics, party strife, tyrannical regimes . . . ultimately Muslim possession to the point where a mosque occupies the old Jewish Temple site to this day. And within the last century the city has been a bone of constant contention. So what happened to the splendor the prophet proclaimed?

As Christians we *can* say a splendor did arise out of Jerusalem with the birth of Jesus and his Good News 20 centuries ago - the radiance of a light that did indeed expand to illuminate many a nation not Jewish; that became the underpinning of our whole Western culture so that universally other peoples can claim Isaiah as a prophet of their own.

But to return to the question in the title of this essay: which Jerusalem are we talking about? A long time ago church preachers began to feel free to identify the Jerusalem of today's first reading with the *Church itself* as the new Temple of God and even while there have been periods when the Church slipped into darkness I personally believe that with the calling of the Vatican Council by Pope John XXIII in 1958 the Church did begin *to rise up in splendor* – like a new epiphany of Christ. And may the radiance of that time prove durable enough to withstand any effort to dim it.

But such preachers also saw fit to identify the Jerusalem of our first reading with *every individual Christian* as God's Temple. Therefore it is YOU who are called upon to rise up in splendor for YOUR light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon YOU and from within YOU. Darkness may still cover the earth, thick clouds the nations, but over and out of YOU the Lord shines . . . making others radiant.

Moreover, endowed as you are by the Gospel's revelation of God as a God of pure grace, your own horizons should be widening, offering YOU a chance to grow in

wisdom. Insights, inspirations, a bigness of heart, faith, hope, love, caravans of camels (so to speak) should be filling your mind, your imagination, your life with precious things. Indeed, to turn our attention to today's Gospel reading we might say that the Magi with their gifts wait upon YOU even as upon the infant Christ to welcome YOUR birth as well as his.