

## 24—A Prophet

We remember that Emmanuel means “God with us.” Read Isaiah 2:1-5. The passage begins with words easy to overlook: *In days to come*. Peering into the near future, we see *in days to come* the arrival of the Christmas holiday. We may envision a festival like those in storybooks in which a joyful family gathers in love around a table laden with food and good cheer. Or we may picture a holiday that fulfills our fantasies. Or our holiday vision may embrace a day of service to the homeless or those who live in a memory care unit of a senior living center.

Our vision for Christmas may be less positive or hopeful. We may not have money to fulfill our desires. We may have lost a job or experienced the death of a loved one. We may react to hard times and think *Nothing is changed; nothing will change*. As it was in the beginning, so it always will be.

That cynicism overflowed in me one Advent when, within two months, my mother died, a family member brought legal action against her estate, my research fellowship advisor died, and a friend committed suicide. In the midst of that sad and cynical time, a larger vision of Christmas jolted me from despondent reality to a sense of hope. I developed some new connections, sought emotional and psychological health, and began to pray in varying ways. The words of the Jesus Prayer (“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”) became a close companion as I prayed them over and over and as I rested in that mercy.

When reading Isaiah 2:1-5, the phrase *in days to come* seemed to beg for my attention. *In days to come* points beyond us and our immediate reality, directing us to a broader perspective. The prophet Isaiah surely understands the daily crises of life. Isaiah 1 reminds us that the prophet witnesses the sin of his time. He knows the wicked reality of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. Even so, his perspective remains broad. The everyday

obstacles of sin do not block Isaiah's vision for the future. Amid the brokenness surrounding him, Isaiah speaks of the vision when all people will worship in the house of God. The day will come when the world's diverse peoples will meet in peace to companion one another. In that time, people will turn instruments of war and destruction into implements of nurture. In days to come, says Isaiah, people shall learn war no more.

In days to come we will face urgent matters and troubled times. We may feel mired in personal and corporate controversies. We may become dispirited because institutions we once trusted, such as the church, show evidence of possible collapse. People may interpret other signs as indicators of the crumbling of the familiar order. We do not yet see the vision of what will be, but we are becoming witnesses to a new future. In days to come, God will enlarge our awareness and understanding—that of all people—to know that God's ways are not born of our usual human interaction. The time will come when war and rumors of war will not shatter our lives.

In days to come, we will also experience personal happiness, success, and peace, knowing that God intends these gifts for all people. The rhythm of our human condition comes in experiencing desert valleys of hardship and mountain peaks of joy and love. As Christian disciples, no matter our path, we travel with Jesus Christ as our companion.

Read Isaiah 2:1-5 again. As you read and reflect on this passage, ask God for a vision of the *days to come* and ponder how your life reflects this vision. You may choose to imagine Jesus sitting beside you. Invite him to tell you how the following verse connects with your discipleship.

O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver,  
the Expected of the nations and their Savior:  
Come and save us, O Lord, our God.