

I Predict A Sticky End

Jesus' prediction of the Passion is threefold in both Gospel traditions. The three Synoptic gospels describe the cross in detail, and John uses a more meditative form: Jesus speaks of being "lifted up". The solemnity of these warnings is the same in either case.

Morbid, Or What?

The pictures people have painted of Jesus always try to etch into his features the knowledge of the oncoming cross (the only exceptions I can think of are the illustrations of children's catechisms in the last thirty years: is this significant?). Perhaps this bears witness to one element of Jesus' enduring appeal to people; he knows what we avoid knowing; he resolutely faces death in a way we'd call morbid or gloomy. And on the way to this end he liberates, dispenses life, forgives, heals, opens eyes, ears and hearts, feeds the poor, reconciles the outcast, and repossesses the demoniacs. If that's a morbid way of life, I'd like to get a bit more morbid.

Mourning In David's House

David's House means the royal dynasty; but it is also simply the principal residence of Jerusalem, the city of peace and of festival. Our drawing Jesus as a kind of elder brother, a children's Master of the Revels, falls disastrously short of the truth of Easter. Last week we remembered the great self-inflicted wound of David's murder of Uriah, and how the prophet told him: *Now the sword will never be far from your house*. Today's prophet tells us that there will be mourning in Judah: but it will come because God is going to pour out over his people *a spirit of kindness and prayer*: one translator says *grace for kindness*. The grace depends on the mourning, the repentance, the turning-back from evil. If we have real hope, we can do this turning-round whole-heartedly. There will be a feast, but not a trivial, easy-come feast made out of our preferred materials - too much indulgence, a bit of jollity, and a judicious tincture of drugs. As in the upper room in Jerusalem on Easter night, there will be wounds to show, and they will be the true source of the joy.

Jesus, Son Of David

Perhaps Jesus' rôle as "son of David" meant that he was prepared to shoulder the kings' whole inheritance, including the legacy of

their sins. In order to become a figure of salvation, in order to shepherd people, you have to ask for their trust. This often means picking up the burdens left by your predecessors. Teachers, on the first day of a new job, know that they step into the shoes of other teachers. If they were great, much-loved figures, it goes hard, because you're going to be compared unfavourably every day. And if they were bad-tempered and talentless, it will be even harder, because the pupils will expect you to bore them, abuse them, and waste their time. More intimately, I marvel at the courage of adoptive parents, who take up the parental rôle for children who feel betrayed or abandoned by their "real" parents. The process of acceptance is long and can be stormy. So for Jesus, Pilate's question "Are you the King?" was hard to answer. Are you David, adulterer and murderer? Are you Solomon, tyrant and tax-gatherer? Are you Ahaz, usurper and renegade? The true answer - *None of these: but I am a King* was a hard one for Jesus to give. He would be crucified wearing a crown. But it was essential for his obedience to God the Father, that he should die like that.

The Gifts Of The Messiah

The royal messiah would be a true shepherd, would be the faithful heir of David. He would give Israel its voice, as David's Psalms had done. He would give Israel its place of worship, as Solomon had built the Temple. He would bind up his people's wounds, and make the land a place of peace and plenty. He would, above all, restore the honour of Israel, and gather it from all its polluted past, its present dispersal. He would rebuild the relationship, the Covenant, with God. But in order to do all these things, he would need to suffer the violent opposition of a people that had become possessed by evil. He would accept no trace of honour from demons, or from the worldly motives of the godless. That meant that his messianic honours could only come from above, from the hand of God. So he would accept the enmity of the world he had come to save, not trying to turn the stones into bread, or bow down to Satan in order to possess the earth. "Who do you say I am?" *The Christ of God*, says Peter; but he has yet a very small understanding of what his words imply. The true glory of Christ cannot appear without the cross. *Fr Philip*