Iona School for Ministry

Old Testament

December 3, 2022

Exercise in interpretation

The goal of this exercise is to interpret a specific lectionary pericope, in accord with the interpretive method that we have been practicing. The only information needed comes from the class presentations and discussions, and from the NRSV translators’ notes and the New Oxford Annotated Bible notes.

Isaiah 9:2-7

*Read the text aloud*

World in front of the text

On what occasion is this text to be read, and how does this affect the way it would be received by the congregation?

As an example of the cultural baggage that come with this text, consider the way v. 5 is used in a widely known section of Handel’s *Messiah*.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MS3vpAWW2Zc>.)

Do such adaptations of this text affect the way it is heard when read in the liturgy?

How might people who don’t celebrate Christmas hear this text?

World of the text

This oracular speech has no narrative context. How can you tell where it begins and where it ends? What does the typography of NRSV suggest in this regard? Do the translators’ footnotes have any bearing on this question? Does the lectionary delineate a self-standing unit, or does the interpreter have to take into account some or what precedes and/or some of what follows?

Who is speaking to whom?

What are the main sections of the text, and how are they related (i.e., structure analysis)?

No names, dates, places, etc. are explicitly mentioned, but there is narrative action. What sorts of things are happening in the main sections of the text?

World behind the text

The NOAB notes put this prophetic speech into historical context, specifically identifying the events that are alluded to in the text itself, and identifying who the newborn child might be. In light of this historical contextualization, what is the significance of the birth of this child?

Back to the world in front of the text

This text is not explicitly cited by the New Testament as a prophecy that has been fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Rather, this is the implication of its being read in the Christmas liturgy. What typological analogy could be drawn between the birth of Jesus and the birth of the child in Isaiah 9:2-7? What typological analogy could be drawn between the life-situation situation reflected in Isaiah 9:2-7 and our life-situation?

In a paragraph summarize your plan for a Christmas sermon preached on this text, identifying the main themes and points you would present. Then distill from this the central focal point you would make, expressing it in the form of a sermon title.