

## **Second Sunday of Advent**

### **Scripture Readings**

#### **First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9**

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever; wrapped in the cloak of justice from God, bear on your head the miter that displays the glory of the eternal name. For God will show all the earth your splendor; you will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship. Up Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. Led away on foot by their enemies they left you; but God will bring them back to you borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones. For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground, that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God. The forests and every fragrant kind of tree have overshadowed Israel at God's command; for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company.

#### **Second Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11**

Brothers and sisters: I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

#### **Gospel: Luke 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went through the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: *A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

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### **Psalm 126**

**The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing.

Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the torrents in the southern desert. Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

**The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

**Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Breaking Open the Word**

We believe that the Word of God is living and effective. That means when we read or listen to Scripture, it is Jesus who speaks to us now, in the present moment of our lives. His Living Word gives us hope, purpose and direction in our lives. As we break open these readings for this Sunday, reflect on these questions:

**What is Jesus saying to me personally that will give purpose and encouragement to me now?**

**Am I open to the way Jesus' words are living and effective in the people and world around me?**

**How will I respond to his message contained in these living words today?**

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### **What Does It All Mean?**

#### **First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9**

The book of Baruch consists of several pieces, each too small to stand on its own. It is one of the "apocryphal" books, which Catholics alone include in the collection we call the Bible. Today's verses speak to Jerusalem, directly, but also indirectly to the Jewish people. Their holy city has fallen, and Cyrus the Persian has not yet overthrown Babylon or set the Jews free to return home. The prophet urges Jerusalem to take off its robe of mourning. The destroyed city must wear God's glory, clothed in justice and showing to all the earth peace and the glory of God's worship. It must stand on the heights and see all its children gathered, far off, at the word of the Holy One. God will bring them back in glory. God has commanded that mountains and depths be leveled, to ease their way. For even in exile, the chosen people are led in joy, by the light of the divine glory, with mercy and justice for company. For a people in exile, this is hopeful, defining message. It is also one of the great gifts of the Jews to the rest of humanity: God will lead us, restore us, bring us back in glory, mercy and justice.

#### **Second Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11**

The tone of this week's epistle reading is much like last week's. Paul tells his audience, this time the church in Philippi, how he prays on their behalf. He rejoices in the certainty that the one who has begun good work in them will complete it. He prays that their love may grow more abundant, wiser, and more experienced, in order that they may value the things that really matter. It is his wish that on the day of Christ they be found rich in the harvest of justice that Jesus has ripened in them.

#### **Gospel: Luke 3:1-6**

With great care to pinpoint the event in history, Luke describes the emergence of John, son of Zechariah. In the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar, when a cast including Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas, and Caiaphas inhabited local roles, John heard the word of God in the desert. In one simple stroke, Luke has shifted from his stories of Jesus' birth and infancy to introduce the characters who shape Jesus' fate. This John went about the whole region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance leading to forgiveness of sins. He did this according to terms defined centuries earlier, in the book of Isaiah's words made familiar by G. F. Handel's *Messiah*: A herald's voice cries in the desert "Make ready the way of the Lord." Every valley shall be filled and the mountains will be leveled. Winding paths shall be straightened, and rough ways made smooth. And everyone will see the salvation of God. John is a curious figure. Despite the evangelist's detail, his historical place is far less important than his literary and theological contribution to Luke's account of the gospel. Some scholars suggest that John is only

mentioned in the four gospel accounts at all because he and Jesus were contemporaries and rivals. The first Christians had no choice but to speak of Jesus in terms of his relationship to John, they say. Luke portrays John as a summation of the prophetic tradition, a figure who sets the stage for Jesus. We proclaim John's emergence in Advent in order to make universal the message of hope offered long ago to the chosen people. We insist again that the Lord is coming. We remind ourselves, and all who listen, that we must prepare his way into the world, into our lives.

### **Increase**

God is clear in the Bible when he tells us what the goal of life is, namely to love. Now, this command is simple, but far from easy. If love is supposed to be our "goal," how do we get there? Love is not just the destination, but also the journey. So how do we get better at loving every day?

In the first reading, the Jews are living in exile and feeling forgotten. The prophet Baruch is sent to be a voice of hope for the future. The psalm reminds us of all God has done as a way of increasing our gratitude in the present and building hope for the future. St. Paul is telling the Philippians in the second reading that they must continue to move forward in love, that their goal should be for love and virtue to increase more and more!

What does all this have to do with the Gospel you ask? Because when Jesus comes, perfect Love takes flesh. This is the moment we have all been waiting for and for which history was preparing our hearts. Advent is the building of anticipation toward this event; the drawing near to Love coming (down) to us. Christ's birth, life and death are the apex of human history. Love has come!

**Lord, sometimes I fail to see how richly you bless me. Make me mindful of the abundant ways you pour grace into my life, today. Give me insight through your sacred Word so that I can respond with gratitude to the great things you have done, are doing, and will do for us. Amen.**