

Weekend Readings & Reflections

December 4-5, 2021 – Second Sunday of Advent

Reflection: *Today's Psalm paints a dreamlike scene—a road filled with liberated captives heading home to Zion (Jerusalem), mouths filled with laughter, tongues rejoicing. It's a glorious picture from Israel's past, a "new exodus," the deliverance from exile in Babylon. It's being recalled in a moment of obvious uncertainty and anxiety. But the psalmist isn't waxing nostalgic. Remembering "the Lord has done great things" in the past, he is making an act of faith and hope—that God will come to Israel in its present need, that He'll do even greater things in the future. This is what the Advent readings are all about: We recall God's saving deeds—in the history of Israel and in the coming of Jesus. Our remembrance is meant to stir our faith, to fill us with confidence that, as today's Epistle puts it, "the one who began a good work in [us] will continue to complete it" until He comes again in glory. Each of us, the Liturgy teaches, is like Israel in her exile—led into captivity by our sinfulness, in need of restoration and conversion by the Word of the Holy One (see [Baruch 5:5](#)). The lessons of salvation history should teach us that, as God again and again delivered Israel, in His mercy He will free us from our attachments to sin if we turn to Him in repentance. That's the message of John, introduced in today's Gospel as the last of the great prophets (compare [Jeremiah 1:1-4, 11](#)). But John is greater than the prophets (see [Luke 7:27](#)). He's preparing the way not only for a new redemption of Israel but for the salvation of "all flesh" (see also [Acts 28:28](#)). John quotes Isaiah (40:3) to tell us he's come to build a road home for us, a way out of the wilderness of sin and alienation from God. It's a road we'll follow Jesus down, a journey we'll make, as today's First Reading puts it, "rejoicing that [we're] remembered by God."*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our study for the first Sunday of Advent, a time of preparation. let us pray from Psalm 85:

All: You once favored, LORD, your land, restored the captives of Jacob. You forgave the guilt of your people, pardoned all their sins. You withdrew all your wrath, turned back from your burning anger. Restore us, God of our salvation; let go of your displeasure with us. Will you be angry with us forever, prolong your anger for all generations? Certainly you will again restore our life, that your people may rejoice in you. Show us, LORD, your mercy; grant us your salvation. Amen. — Psalm 85:1-7

Leader: In an Advent message in 2011, Pope Benedict said that John the Baptist's mission "was an extraordinary appeal to conversion," "a fiery invitation to a new way of thinking and acting," and, above all, "the announcement of God's justice." He added, "Therefore, John's appeal goes far beyond and deeper than a call to a sober lifestyle: It is a call for inner change, starting with the recognition and confession of our sins." On this Second Sunday of Advent, let us consider how the message of John the Baptist calling for a "new exodus" is a timeless message that has great relevance for us today as we wait and watch for the coming of the Lord, both during this Advent season and at the end of time. As you watch this short video, consider where in your own life you might be "in exile." Ponder the following questions as you watch the video from Tim Gray.

An Act of Contrition

Consider a daily Act of Contrition and Examination of Conscience.

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven, and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](#) - [Opening the Word – Second Sunday of Advent \(Year C\)](#))

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 mitre 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.

The Prophet Baruch shares a beautiful image for Advent. Have you noticed when you take off old clothes and put on new clothes there is a sense of joy and a new attitude? In ancient times, when a significant transformation happened a new name was also given. Like last week, Jerusalem - which is us in the Church today - is invited to prepare by shaking off the old and putting on the cloak of justice. And, our new name is to be Peace of Justice.

- *What old ways of mourning and misery would you like to leave behind this advent season? How could your life reflect God's hope for you of peace and justice, glory and worship?*

The city of Jerusalem is on a hill. The view from the top of the Temple could see all peoples coming from every direction.

- *Can you glimpse God's hope wanting us to stand up and invite everyone home to Church this Christmas? Through us, mountains and gorges - difficult pathways - will be made level ground so people can return easily. Mercy and justice will be our story and song. Do you know anyone who is experiencing an obstacle to returning to God? The Church? What earthmoving help could you offer personally to them?*

SECOND READING ~ 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 ~

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.

Paul had a special place in his heart for the Community at Philippi. Paul wrote this letter to them while in prison, facing a death sentence. They had provided financial assistance for his missionary journeys and now supported him in prison. He invites them to discern what is of value in their lives.

- *At the end of the year consider evaluating your life positively: what has helped you in purity? What areas of your life are blameless? How have you shown righteousness? How could you develop these experiences and practices more?*

Righteousness is an interesting word. In the Old Testament it was a title that was given by the poor to those who lifted up the poor. A rich person could not give this title to themselves.

- *Reflecting upon the year, would the poor give you the title righteous? In what ways have you lifted them up? Was it charity or justice?*

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 throughout 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 straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Luke, like St Paul, is aware of a claim by courts and rulers that these Christian disciples are mad. Making up strange stories! Luke insists the evidence and life of Jesus is historical. Christianity started in a particular place and time in history. In the 15th year... etc. With a great twist Luke lines up the different rulers of the time. Traditionally when rulers returned victorious from battle, people would line the streets and shout triumphantly: 'Lord, Savior!' Luke is turning attention to the true Savior - Jesus - whose preparation victory voice is John the Baptist.

- *How would you personally describe Jesus as savior?*

Celebrating the advent practice of reconciliation (confession) encourages us to prepare our hearts. When a great King visited a city, workers were sent to straighten pathways, cut into mountains, level valleys. Consider the effort involved to welcome the King! Reflect on this image and the famous words of John.

- *What needs to be straightened out and filled in? How much effort will you put into Advent?*

MEDITATION

Luke the evangelist tells us that the "word of God came to John in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2). Who was John the Baptist and what is the significance of the word which he received and delivered to the people of his day? Luke tells us that John was the son of Zechariah, a priest who served in the temple at Jerusalem. John stood at a pivotal juncture in the history of God's dealing with his people. He bridged the Old and New Testaments, also known as the Old and New Covenants which God made with his people.

John's prophetic calling and mission preceded his conception and birth. The angel had announced to Zechariah that his barren wife will conceive a son, and "you shall call his name John," and "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:13,15).

In dramatic fashion Luke tells us when John appeared on the world scene. Luke lists a few of the key reigning rulers in John's era, including Tiberius Caesar of Rome (Luke 3:1). These rulers pale in reference to the man who now stood at the door of a new era of grace and salvation for the world. John's mission was to prepare the way for God's

Anointed King who would come to establish God's rule above all other kings and authorities. Luke emphasizes the universal call of the Gospel to all peoples without distinction. He quotes from the prophet Isaiah that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Isaiah 40:5; 52:10).

Luke tells us that "the word of God came to John" when he was dwelling in the wilderness of Judea (Luke 3:2). John was called from an early age to devote himself to prayer and to the word of God. John not only took the Scriptures to heart, he molded his life according to them, and made himself a servant of the Word of God. John was led by the Spirit into a barren and lonely place away from the noise and distractions of everyday life. There God taught John in the solitude of the desert and prepared him for a prophetic ministry that would turn the hearts of his people to receive their long-awaited Messiah.

In the ancient world when a king decided to tour his kingdom, he first sent his courier ahead to prepare the way. John is the courier and great herald of the Messiah King who proclaims to all the peoples that the impending reign of God is now very close at hand. Isaiah had long ago prophesied the role of the Forerunner of the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3-5). John undoubtedly took this word to heart as he searched the Scriptures and reflected on the word of God in the wilderness. When John began his public ministry he traveled throughout the region of Judea and preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3).

How can we, like John the Baptist, prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus Christ - today and every day and when he comes again to bring us fully into his everlasting kingdom? John the Baptist tells us that the first step is conversion and repentance (Matthew 3:2; Luke 3:7). Conversion involves receiving God's word into our heart and mind and allowing his Word to change our attitudes and wrong ways of thinking and judging. Repentance is the deliberate turning away from sin (wrong-doing) and turning to God to receive his pardon, healing, and strength to do what is good and reject what is wrong.

- Are you hungry for the Word of God and do you allow God's word to transform the way you think, speak, and live your life?
- Do you recognize the voice of the Lord speaking to you when you listen to the word of God in Scripture?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray that we may slow down during Advent and enjoy the time God has given us. Let us not lose focus on what is most important...

ALL: Lord Jesus, you are the Word of God and the Savior of the world. Help me to receive Your Word with expectant faith, and to live it with confident hope, and to proclaim it joyfully with love and boldness to all I meet. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

[Discussion questions created by Fr Frank Bird sm, Marist Priest, and distributed by www.maristlaitynz.org, were shared with permission from www.livingtheword.org.nz.]

[Today's readings come from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) and were copied from the USCCB website: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/index.cfm>]

[Meditation is copyright © 2021 Servants of the Word, source: <https://dailyscripture.net>, author [Don Schwager](https://www.donchwager.com)]