

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**

**Second Sunday of Advent
December 5, 2021**

SCRIPTURES:

Baruch 5:1-9	God’s people return to Jerusalem amid great glory.
Philippians 1:4-6,8-11	Paul prays that the Church may show itself blameless.
Luke 3:1-6	In John the Baptist, God introduces salvation for all.
Psalms 126:1-2,2-3,4-5,6	God’s people return from captivity in festive joy.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions which an individual may have. We simply ask, “What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear? We listen to the word with that question in mind.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Luke:

The author of this Gospel will show that God is faithful to his promises. The Gentile Christians for whom he wrote had begun to wonder if that same God who had abandoned the Jewish people with the destruction of their Temple in Jerusalem might not abandon them also someday. Luke attests that Jesus Christ is the living fulfillment of all the promises of God, to Jew and Gentile alike. God is faithful in those who preceded Jesus; God is faithful in Jesus; God is faithful in the disciples of Jesus.

Beginning in Chapter 3 and going on through 4:13, Luke introduces the public ministry of Jesus. He shows that Jesus will have the same response to his preaching as did John the Baptist. He demonstrates who this Jesus is in Galilee, on the way to Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem. Jesus is God’s beloved Son, working in the Spirit; Jesus is the completion of God’s plan for creation; Jesus is the faithful one who conquers the powers of evil.

John the Baptist has been sent to prepare the way for the work of God in Jesus Christ. The historical persons listed by Luke not only situate the work of God in time and space but also serve to illustrate how both secular and religious leaders will fail to respond to John, will be openly hostile to Jesus, and ultimately (in Acts) will treat the disciples of Jesus in the very same way.

“In the desert” is where Luke most often situates John, reminding his audience that God is preparing his new people in the midst of struggle and wanderings for an entry into a land of promise and salvation. Luke’s John is an itinerant preacher, just as Jesus will be. The Jordan is associated

with a renewal of the Covenant. Forgiveness means a new liberation from slavery, the bondage of sin.

Liberation comes through Jesus Christ, not through John. John points to Christ who is himself the Liberator.

The geography lesson in Luke, along with the lesson from secular history, serves a theological purpose: God is present and active in the world and in the duration of time. The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ does not live in splendid isolation on Mount Olympus, nor even just in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Mount Olympus is a fiction; the Temple has been destroyed, but God lives!

Baruch:

This book is not found in the Hebrew Bible, although it probably existed in Hebrew before it was translated into Greek and became part of the Greek Bible for the early Church. It is called deuterocanonical (belonging to the *second collection* of the Old Testament). Probably written just over 100 years before the time of Christ, it is ascribed to Baruch, a companion and secretary to Jeremiah who lived almost 500 years earlier. (Often, Baruch is not included in Protestant editions of the Bible. When it is included, it is situated in an appendix and called *apocryphal*.) God's people, both at the time of the real Baruch and at the time this book was written, were in deepest trouble: in exile in Babylon in the first case and under Greek occupation in the second. They long for divine deliverance and restoration as a nation. Baruch proclaims a great mercy from the Lord, a most joyful return from captivity. The Church sees the work of God about to take place in deliverance from sin with the coming of the Messiah.

Philippians:

Paul writes words of consolation and promise to a church which he founded, the first on the continent of Europe, in Macedonia. Although there was a Jewish population there, they had no synagogue and gathered for prayer at a riverbank. Women seem to have been important in this Christian community at Philippi. The "Day of Christ" refers to the Second Coming of the Lord, when great blessings will be handed out to the faithful.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Luke goes out of his way to situate the ministry of John the Baptist in a precise historical context of time and space? How important is it for the Church to realize that it, too, ministers in a very real world of human culture and achievements? Salvation takes place in real times and in real places. It is not just in our minds. How important is it for us to know that? How can we apply this in our lives?

2. Relate the consolation which Baruch proclaimed in God's name to the oppressed and disconsolate people of his times to our situation today. How are we consoled by God's promises in the midst of times which seem so hopeless? Millions die of starvation, some in our own land. Hundreds of thousands are refugees. People suffer all around us. We ourselves are often severely afflicted. What hope is there for all people today?

3. Can you make the connection between the realization of God's promises in the birth of the Messiah and in his return in glory at the end? How is your Advent spirituality this year focused on

both the Nativity and the Second Coming? Why does the Church connect the First Coming with the Second Coming?

PRAYER

In Psalm 126, we read: “The Lord has done great things for them; the Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.” Make lists of the great things that God has done for your community or your family. After each item, say: “Lord, we are glad indeed!”

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Christian community awaits the return of Christ in glory for the fulfillment of the work begun by God in the incarnation, in the passion and resurrection of Christ. The Church lives in the time between what already has been accomplished and what still needs to be completed.

Christ reigns in glory already at the right hand of the Father in heaven. As head of the Church, Christ continues the work of redemption in time and in history, so that we, too, may participate in the work of establishing God’s reign in the world. Through the ministry of the Church, which is joined to the living Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, the salvation of all things and all persons is extended into history toward the ultimate fulfillment that will come in God’s own time.

The reign of God has been inaugurated in the Passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. It awaits completion in the body of Christ that is the community of faith. The final victory is not in question. Its outcome is assured by the promises made by God to his people. The death and resurrection of Christ will not be nullified by an earthly or diabolical power. There can be no reversal of what Jesus Christ has achieved on our behalf. God does not take back what God has already given.

The present times are surely times of hope, for we are empowered by the energies of the Holy Spirit to complete what Christ has begun in his earthly ministry. We must continue to give sight to the blind, physically and spiritually; to make straight and level the paths that lead to the City of God; to lead captives back to the place where God dwells. We are called to do the works of Christ in the times and in the places where we live. There is no other time or place for this work to be done. No one else will do the works of Christ if we do not do so. The work of the Church, its very mission, is to extend and to implant the Gospel which announces and accomplishes the work of God in the world.

The Advent Season helps us realize that the coming of Christ awaits our ministry for the transformation of the world through the action of the Holy Spirit. We know that the Holy Spirit works through us, not only through us, but truly, at times, through us.

See: *The Catechism* # 668-677

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