

The Second Sunday of Advent

(Sunday between 4 and 10 December inclusive)

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 11.1-10	Prophecy of future righteous leader and of peace on earth
Psalm 72.1-7, 18-19 [or 72.1-7]	Blessings from the promised king
Romans 15.4-13	The ancestry of Jesus, and purpose
Matthew 3.1-12	The proclamation of John the Baptist

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The proclamation of John the Baptist

³ In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ² ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ³ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”’ ⁴ Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’ ⁸ Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹ Do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹ I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to

carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.¹² His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

Matthew 3.1-12 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

John's confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees reminds us that John is a Jewish prophet. Something more is demanded than simply having a label of identity. The imminence of the kingdom makes us consider our position and leads to repentance. John baptizes with water but imagines a baptism with 'fire' that will be apocalyptic and judgemental. An interior renewal is called for, rather than relying on outward show or external identity.

Quotations

1

Of all acts of man repentance is the most divine. The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.

Thomas Carlyle, 1795–1881

2

I was being called to surrender the very citadel of my self. I was completely in the dark. I did not really know what repentance was or what I was required to repent of. It was indeed the turning point of my life.

Bede Griffiths, 1906–1993

3

It may well be that we will have to repent in this generation. Not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say, 'Wait on time'.

A testament of hope: the essential writings and speeches / Martin Luther King Jr. 1986

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Related topics

For further study:

Advent; eschatology; kingdom of God; discipleship; repentance and reconciliation; Christ's coming – future, present, past; Son of Man; parousia

Closing Prayer

Your kingdom is at hand,
O God of justice and peace;
you made John the Baptist its herald
to announce the coming of your Christ,
who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Give us a spirit of repentance
to make us worthy of the kingdom.
Let complacency yield to conviction,
that in our day justice will flourish
and conflict give way
to the peace you bestow in Christ.

Grant this through him whose coming is certain,
whose day draws near:
your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Collect for Advent 2, Year A²

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² *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for Years A, B and C, from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999. – (The ICEL Collects, 1997)*