

The Second Sunday of Advent

Principal Service readings

Baruch 5.1-9	The hope of Jerusalem
or Malachi 3.1-4	The Day of the Lord
Philippians 1.3-11	Growing in faith until the Day of Christ Jesus
Luke 3.1-6	John the Baptist prepares the way for the Lord

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 message of John the Baptist

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
⁵Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'

Luke 3.1-6 NRSV¹

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.

Comments and Questions

Today's readings remind us that we should be preparing for the coming of Christ. Just as John the Baptist was preparing people for his first coming, so we should be prepared for his second coming, as St Paul tells his readers: '... that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless' (Philippians 1.10).

Luke begins this chapter with details of the political context. Why does he give us so much detail? Is it (a) simply because he is a historian; (b) because the coming of the saviour has relevance for the whole world, not just Judaism; (c) because he wants to contrast earthly rulers with God's anointed one, Jesus Christ?

Luke calls baptism by John 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (v.3). What might that have meant to those who came to John and received it.

Luke (vv.4-6) is quoting from the prophecy of Isaiah (40.3-5). The prophecy he quotes is not simply about the coming of the Messiah as an individual, but uses images that indicate a very full and visible salvation – such as the straightening out of crooked ways, and the idea that everyone will see the salvation of God.

Luke sees John as the last in the line of prophets of the old law, so he is connected with the past; but he is also connected with the future, as the forerunner, preparing the way of the Lord.

Quotations

1

This is the secret of joy. We shall no longer strive for our own way; but commit ourselves, easily and simply, to God's way, acquiesce in his will and in so doing find our peace.

Evelyn Underhill 1875–1941

2

Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream, so shall you become. Your vision is the promise of what you shall one day be; your ideal is the prophecy of what you shall at last unveil.

James Allen, 1864–1912

3

The people who were honoured in the Bible were the false prophets. It was the ones we call the prophets who were jailed and driven into the desert, and so on.

Noam Chomsky 1928–

4

The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?

David Sarnoff's associates in response to his urgings for investment in the radio in the 1920s

Related topics

For further study:

Salvation/redemption; Conversion; Parousia; Eschatology

Closing Prayer

Eternal God,
source of all insight, we pray to you.

Open our eyes
and let us see the vision of peace
which you place before the sight of humankind.
Set our footsteps in your path of justice
and guide us in your way of truth
so that the work you have begun
may be completed,
and all the world behold your salvation.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.

Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent²

² *Celebrating the Christian Year : Prayers and Resources for Sunday, Holy Days and Festivals : Years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*