

## FIRST READING – A ADVENT 2

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

On that day:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand  
as a signal to the peoples;  
the nations shall inquire of him,  
and his dwelling shall be glorious.



Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – A ADVENT 2

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

Whatever was written in former days  
was written for our instruction,  
so that by steadfastness  
and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement  
grant you to live in harmony with one another,  
in accordance with Christ Jesus,  
so that together you may with one voice

glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you,  
for the glory of God.

For I tell you

that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised  
on behalf of the truth of God

in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,

and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,  
and sing praises to your name.”



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – A ADVENT 2

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

In those days John the Baptist  
appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,  
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”  
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.’”  
Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair  
with a leather belt around his waist,  
and his food was locusts and wild honey.  
Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea  
were going out to him,  
and all the region along the Jordan,  
and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan,  
confessing their sins.  
But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism,  
John said to them,  
“You brood of vipers!  
Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?  
Bear fruit worthy of repentance.  
Do not presume to say to yourselves,  
‘We have Abraham as our father’;  
for I tell you, God is able from these stones  
to raise up children to Abraham.

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.  
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.  
His threshing 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.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### Reading I: Isaiah 11:1-10

(The) Second Sunday of Advent marks the shift from future eschatology to preparation for the Incarnation. This shift appears in all the readings of this Sunday, though, as we shall see, the second readings of the second and third Sundays of Advent contain echoes of the earlier theme.

In today's Old Testament reading we have one of the great messianic prophecies of Isaiah. It pictures the ideal king from the family of David. He is to be endowed with the spirit of YHWH and with charismatic gifts.

Note the three pairs: "wisdom and understanding" are powers of intellect; "counsel and might" denote practical ability; "knowledge and fear of the Lord" are gifts of piety. The benefits of the king's reign are described in idyllic terms.

This picture is much older than the messianic hope proper. It probably expresses what each succeeding generation hoped for from its Davidic king. Yet the ideal was never realized, and the poem was shelved for messianic fulfillment.

Christian faith naturally found its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus, and that is the sense in which we read it in the liturgy today.

### Responsorial Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

This psalm is remarkably similar to the prophecy we just read and suits it admirably as a responsorial reading.

It is a prayer that the monarch (presumably, again, a king of David's line, for much of the prosperity of his kingdom recalls the reign of Solomon) may have used in prosperity and peace.

Again, like the Isaian prophecy, this psalm was later interpreted messianically both in Judaism and in Christianity.

### Reading II: Romans 15:4-9

This is the traditional epistle for this Sunday, and because Cranmer constructed a new collect on the basis of this reading, Anglicans have long called this Sunday "Bible Sunday." Unfortunately, this had the effect of distracting attention from the main Advent theme of this passage.

Two things are to be noted. First, the "scriptures" and "whatever was written in former days" refer to what we now call the Old Testament. There was as yet no New Testament

in the early church, of course; in fact, when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he was actually taking a hand in producing what would later become the New Testament.

On these Advent Sundays there is, as we have seen, a particular emphasis on the Old Testament as the book of promise. This theme is taken up in our present passage, with its reference to hope. Paul prays that by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

The Old Testament is precisely the book of hope and promise. It is an incomplete book, pointing forward to an event that had not yet taken place, namely, the final act of God. Jew and Christian ought to be able to agree about this. But then comes the point of divergence.

Christians believe that the event toward which the Old Testament points has, in principle at least, already occurred with the coming of Jesus Christ. Jews, of course, believe that the event has not yet taken place.

The Christian belief that the promises of the Old Testament have already been fulfilled in principle does not mean that there is no further room for hope.

Paul says that the Old Testament scriptures were written in order that Christians may still have hope.

The current theology of hope (Jürgen Moltmann and Johannes Metz) stresses that the acts of God are always such that they contain within them the hope for more.

This pattern reproduces itself again and again throughout salvation history. When the Christian belief that God has fulfilled his promise in the sending of his Son Jesus Christ is kindled, it at once also raises the hope of the Second Coming.

So Christian existence, like that under the Old Testament, remains an existence geared to the future. That is why the Old Testament has not become irrelevant now that the event to which it points has taken place.

We still read the Old Testament to orient ourselves in hope to the future, to the final event toward which the Old Testament points—the consummation of the kingdom of God.

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

If the readings of this season are preparatory to the Incarnation, it seems a little odd that John the Baptist should figure so prominently on these Sundays.

Unlike the Old Testament prophets or the annunciation story that we shall read on the last Sunday of Advent, the Baptist does not point toward the nativity of Jesus, but rather to his ministry, life, and death: “one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. ...

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”; and (in John’s account), “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

When New Testament scholars speak about the Incarnation, however, they tend to think of it in somewhat wider terms than popular piety or even dogmatic theology does.

The Incarnation, from the biblical perspective, is the whole “Christ event,” the total coming of the Son of God in the flesh, which includes not only his nativity but also his whole ministry, his death, resurrection, and ascension.

In fact, most of the New Testament, aside from the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, can proclaim the Christ event without speaking of the nativity at all. So when the Advent season prepares for the “advent” of Christ, this is not just his nativity but rather his total coming.

The nativity is merely one way of speaking of the advent of Christ, and not the central one at that. Hence, it is wholly appropriate that John the Baptist should figure prominently in the Advent season as a herald of the Messiah’s coming.

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