

## FIRST READING – B ADVENT 2

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together;  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
“Here is your God!”

See, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.  
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – B ADVENT 2

A reading from the second letter of Saint Peter.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved,  
that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years,  
and a thousand years are like one day.  
The Lord is not slow about his promise,  
as some think of slowness,  
but is patient with you,  
not wanting any to perish,  
but all to come to repentance.  
But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,  
and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise,  
and the elements will be dissolved with fire,  
and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.  
Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way,  
what sort of persons ought you to be  
in leading lives of holiness and godliness,  
waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,  
because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved,  
and the elements will melt with fire?

But, in accordance with his promise,  
we wait for new heavens and a new earth,  
where righteousness is at home.  
Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things,  
strive to be found by him at peace.

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



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – B ADVENT 2

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,’”

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness,  
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
And people from the whole Judean countryside  
and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him,  
and were baptized by him in the river Jordan,  
confessing their sins.

Now John was clothed with camel’s hair,  
with a leather belt around his waist,  
and he ate locusts and wild honey.

He proclaimed,  
“The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me;  
I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.  
I have baptized you with water;  
but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

In series B the gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of Mark, supplemented by the Gospel of John. This is necessary because Mark's Gospel, being the shortest, requires supplementing. Also, in the three-year cycle, John is otherwise read only at certain seasons (especially Lent and Eastertide) in series A and C.

Let us first remind ourselves of the structure of the Advent season. The theme of future eschatology—the Christian hope for the final consummation of history—dominates the concluding Sundays of the year and reaches its climax on the first Sunday of Advent.

On the following three Sundays, other themes preparatory to the celebration of Christmas and the first coming of the Messiah gradually take over. Thus, each succeeding liturgical season dovetails into its predecessor.

### **Reading I: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11**

This is the best known of the prophecies of Second Isaiah. Indeed, it is one of the best known passages of the Old Testament, if for no other reason than its use by Handel in the three opening numbers of *The Messiah*.

Of course, the unknown prophet of the Exile was not consciously thinking of the Christ-event. He had in view the restoration of Israel from the Babylonian Exile around 538 B.C.E. Cyrus of Persia had won his preliminary victories and the power of Babylon was waning.

The prophet himself, then, is the voice crying in the wilderness. He, according to the reading of the NRSV margin (anticipated by the English text of *The Messiah* and certainly to be preferred) is the bearer of good tidings:

Get you up to a high mountain,  
O herald of good tidings to Zion;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem.  
(NRSV margin)

“Good tidings”—in the Hebrew original this is a verb that later gave us the noun “gospel” in its New Testament sense. The good tidings here is the good news of the impending divine intervention in history bringing about the return from exile.

The prophet envisages this return as a second Exodus, in which miracles similar to those of the first Exodus will be repeated:

Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

One might call Second Isaiah the father of typology. Henceforth the Exodus event becomes the type of expected eschatological event and is taken up into the New Testament as the type of the Christ-event itself. It was in this latter sense that this prophecy was applied in the text of *The Messiah*, and it is in the same sense that we read it today.

Typology is based upon the conviction, not that history repeats itself, but that God's mighty acts in history follow a consistent pattern because God is true to himself and his purpose.

The eschatological event is defined as the revealing of God's glory, a thought that will have profound significance in New Testament theology (see, for example, John 1:14). "Glory" becomes a word of salvation history; it is an event, the event of the active, saving presence of YHWH. YHWH "comes with might."

If the expected event becomes, in Christian interpretation, the Christ-event, so too, according to the New Testament, the prophet of the Exile foreshadows John the Baptist. He is the "voice" (John 1:23, to be read next week) that cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord" (see today's gospel). His preparatory work that will make a highway for the advent of the Messiah will be his preaching of repentance.

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### **Responsorial Psalm: 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14\***

No one knows for certain when this lament was composed or what concrete situation it had in view. It is not unlikely, however, that the psalm was more or less contemporaneous with Second Isaiah. Like the Old Testament reading, the lament looks forward to the intervention of YHWH in history.

It picks up many of the themes of Second Isaiah: "salvation is at hand," "that glory may dwell in our land." The second stanza is a veritable compendium of theological terms for the eschatological event: "steadfast love," "faithfulness," "righteousness," "peace." The third stanza also speaks of the coming of YHWH as being heralded in advance:

Righteousness will go before him,  
and make its footsteps a way,

reminding us how the exilic prophet described his mission and how this terminology is taken up in the New Testament and applied to the Baptist.

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### **Reading II: 2 Peter 3:8-14**

The second letter of Peter is commonly thought nowadays to be not only a pseudonymous work but also the latest document in the New Testament, written perhaps after 125 C.E. The unknown author appeals to the authority of Peter and to certain Petrine traditions in order to convey to his Church a message that, he is convinced, is precisely what Peter would have said had he still been alive.

The author is faced with false teachers, perhaps of a Gnostic character, who have no place for belief in the second coming of Christ. As in 1 Corinthians, these Gnostics emphasize the "already" at the expense of the "not yet." They dismiss the Church's traditional teaching about the second coming by pointing scornfully to its failure to occur, despite constant teaching that it was just around the corner.

In answer, the author appeals to Psalm 90: "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night." God's time scheme is different from ours. But the author still seeks to retain the existential vitality of the parousia hope.

The dominical parable of the thief in the night is cited to show that Christians must always expect the day of the Lord to come at any moment. This gives a motivation for holiness and godliness of living

(v. 11). It is therefore not true to say, as some have said, that this letter, like other early catholic writings in the New Testament, has relegated the parousia to the last chapter of dogmatics and deprived it of significance for the Christian life.

The following points in this pericope seem to still speak to contemporary Christianity:

1. Christians must always live as though the end were to come at any moment. Watchfulness is a part of Christian living.
2. Rightly understood, the imminent hope in Christianity is a motivation for the pursuit of holiness and godliness of life.
3. However much we demythologize the New Testament pictures of the end, the hope of a new heaven and a new earth as the final goal of history is something that can never be surrendered.

### **Gospel: Mark 1:1-8**

Following the established pattern of Advent, John the Baptist occupies the forefront of our attention on the second and third Sundays. He marks the inauguration of the Christ-event, and therefore the inauguration of the gospel.

It is unclear whether Mark means “gospel of Jesus Christ” to be taken subjectively (the gospel preached by Jesus, the good news of the kingdom, as in Mark 1:14) or objectively (the gospel about Jesus).

The subjective sense makes good history, for it is an incontestable fact that Jesus’ mission grew out of the Baptist’s. In some sense the one was a continuation of the other, in others a breakaway. John’s accent was on judgment, Jesus’ on salvation. This difference is expressed in the parable of the children in the market places (Matthew 11:16-19).

Mark (v. 3) picks up the Deutero-Isaian prophecy of today’s first reading and prefaces it with a prophecy of Malachi (3:1), which he alters significantly. “*My face*” becomes “*thy face*,” so that it is addressed to Christ. Both techniques—the combination of two widely separated texts and the alteration of a text—are now familiar to us from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

As reported by Mark, John’s preaching consists of two aspects: first, the preaching of repentance and baptism and the forgiveness of sins; second, the announcement of the coming of the mightier One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

In recent years there has been something of a “quest for the historical Baptist” for reasons similar to those that motivated the “quest for the historical Jesus.” Both historical figures have been subject to reinterpretation in the light of post-Easter Christian faith.

There can be no doubt that the “historical Baptist” did baptize; this is attested not only by the New Testament but also by the Jewish historian Josephus. The latter gives a non-sacramental interpretation to it; he regards it merely as a sign of conversion from sin to righteousness that had already taken place. This we may suspect, however, as an attempt to debiblicize the Baptist for the benefit of Josephus’ pagan readers.

But did John also speak of the stronger One who was to come after him? Josephus says nothing of this, but it is generally agreed that he did, although he was not consciously predicting the coming of Jesus.

The stronger One whom the Baptist expected was either YHWH himself or a very different kind of Messiah from what Jesus turned out to be—a Messiah whose accent, like John’s own, would be on judgment rather than on salvation (see “fire” in Matthew 3:11/Luke 3:16).

In that case, “Holy Spirit” will be a Christian reinterpretation of “fire” from the perspective of Pentecost, but a wholly legitimate one.

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