

## FIRST READING – B ADVENT 3

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.  
I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,  
my soul shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.



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 3

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters,  
rejoice always,  
pray without ceasing,  
give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.  
Do not quench the Spirit.  
Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything;  
hold fast to what is good;  
abstain from every form of evil.  
May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely;  
and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless  
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

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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 3

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

*Glory to you, O Lord*

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.  
He came as a witness to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
He himself was not the light,  
but he came to testify to the light.  
This is the testimony given by John  
when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem  
to ask him, “Who are you?”  
He confessed and did not deny it,  
but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.”

And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?”  
He said, “I am not.”  
“Are you the prophet?”  
He answered, “No.”  
Then they said to him, “Who are you?  
Let us have an answer for those who sent us.  
What do you say about yourself?”  
He said,  
“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,  
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”  
as the prophet Isaiah said.  
Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.  
They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing  
if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?”  
John answered them, “I baptize with water.  
Among you stands one whom you do not know,  
the one who is coming after me;  
I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”  
This took place in Bethany across the Jordan  
where John was baptizing.



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 on certain occasions (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 61:1-2a, 10-11

This is one of the most familiar passages from Third Isaiah (Is 56-66). It is akin to the servant psalms of Second Isaiah (Is 40-55), for although the prophet does not explicitly call himself the servant, he describes his mission in terms of servanthood.

This passage appears to have profoundly influenced Jesus' understanding of his own mission. Even if—which, however, is by no means certain—the sermon at Nazareth (Lk 4:16-22) is a Lucan composition, Jesus himself alluded unmistakably to this text in his answer to John (Mt 11:2-6/Lk 7:18-23), whose authenticity is beyond reasonable doubt.

Responsorial Psalm: Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54\*

The Christological interest of this text, however, would be more appropriate for the Epiphany season (a slightly different selection from Isa 61 is used in the Episcopal Church's adaptation of the Lectionary on the third Sunday of Epiphany in series C).

Today's caption highlights the theme of joy in face of the impending advent of God's salvation, a theme that is reinforced by the responsorial psalm (the Magnificat and the refrain taken from its two opening words). This, it will be noted, is in accordance with the tradition of the Roman Missal, where this Sunday was known as Gaudete Sunday, from the opening word of the Introit.

In the Book of Common Prayer, this theme belonged, as generally in the medieval rites of Northern Europe, to the fourth Sunday of Advent. We might note that the Magnificat is particularly associated with Advent, Bach's Magnificat, for instance, being frequently performed on one of the Advent Sundays.

Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

The opening of this reading continues the theme of joy from Isaiah and the psalm (note that in the old Roman Missal this was “Gaudete” from the opening of the Introit). However, the caption underlines the second paragraph with its references to the parousia.

As we have already noted, the theme of the Second Coming is replaced after the first Sunday of Advent by that of the First Coming, but there are occasional echoes of the earlier theme on later Sundays.

Such is the genius of Advent. It refuses to contemplate the First Coming apart from the Second, or the Second apart from the First.

Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28

This Gospel reading represents an ingenious combination of two separate passages. The first paragraph is a prose comment that the evangelist inserted into the Logos hymn.

Bultmann thought that the Johannine prologue was first composed as a hymn to John the Baptist by his followers, who regarded him as the bearer of the eschatological revelation. Perhaps it was, even earlier than that, a hymn to Wisdom, successively adapted for “baptist” and for Christian use.

In any case, the evangelist’s prose insertion is clearly designed to counter a false estimate of the Baptist: he is not the light but only a witness to the light.

The same tendency ostensibly to downgrade the Baptist continues in the second paragraph of our pericope. John is here presented as entirely repudiating all messianic or quasi-messianic titles. He is neither the Christ, the prophet-Messiah, nor (contra the Synoptics) Elijah, but only the “voice” of Is 40.

This disagreement with the Synoptic interpretation should not worry us unduly. In the Synoptists’ environment, it was perfectly safe to interpret John as an Elijah redivivus. But for the Fourth Gospel, in its different situation, Elijah could well have been too high a title, suggesting that he was actually the Messiah, the immediate forerunner of YHWH.

Perhaps John reflects an earlier state of christology than that of the Synoptists, a stage when Elijah was still preempted for Christ himself—the stage that John A. T. Robinson characterized as the view that Jesus was his own Elijah, in the sense that he was the forerunner of the apocalyptic Son of Man and was himself exalted to heaven to fulfill that role.

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