

2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C

In the season of Advent, the Church assumes the position of ancient Israel waiting for her Messiah. Israel waited 4,000 years for the coming of Christ and so the Church waits for 4 weeks to suggest the wait of Israel.¹

Baruch 5:1-9

Nine prophets left us some record of their messages to Israel just before, during or after the exile. These prophets told the people and the kings that God WOULD allow their subjugation to the Babylonians in punishment for the sins of the nation. This was a time of extraordinary religious significance because in the depths of their oppression they were richly blessed by the reform and renewal of covenant life.¹ However, the description of the return so far exceeds the reality of the actual return that it naturally came to be seen as a prophecy of the ultimate redemption of God's people in the future. Thus it serves for us today as a vision of the coming of God's kingdom in its fullness.² Baruch was the secretary of Jeremiah the prophet and the book contains four short speeches given by him to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Their effect on the people was moving: "Everyone cried, fasted, and prayed to the Lord. Then everyone gave as much money as he could and the collection was sent to Jerusalem."⁵

1Jerusalem, Here the city is a personification for the people of God as she seeks to explain her sorrows and thereby revive her hopes. They are reminded that it is not blind chaos, but rather, God's hand that directs what happens.⁶ **take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God** The gloriously resplendent and wonderful effect of God's saving action upon Israel.⁴ **forever:**

2wrapped in the cloak of justice This means that Messianic hope must be accompanied by renunciation of sin.⁷ She had taken off the cloak of justice and is now invited to put it back on!⁶ **from God, bear on your head the mitre** This was the priestly headgear worn by Aaron (and now by Catholic bishops) and here it infers that Jerusalem is robed as a priest. **that displays the glory of the eternal name.** The "mitre" will have the sacred name inscribed on it.⁴

3For God will show all the earth your splendor: All the nations will see the glorious and resplendent salvation God will bring Israel.⁴

4you will be named by God forever the peace of justice, "Peace," the product of justice, will reign in Jerusalem. She will be an honorable city; her honor will derive from the fact that she worships God.⁴ **the glory of God's worship.** This is a name change for Jerusalem (which represents the people of God) and at the same time as the name changes occur, the attributes are bestowed on her reflecting her new status and privilege.⁴

5Up, Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; look to the east Look with hope toward the Savior as we look for the sunrise at dawn.⁷ **and see your children gathered from the east and the west** Those who were taken into exile are now returning. **at the word of the Holy One,** God calls them back. **rejoicing that they are remembered by God.**

6Led away on foot by their enemies they left you: but God will bring them back to you borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones.

7For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground, The road to Jerusalem is made level by God to make the return easier.⁴ **that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God.** Israel advances in the glorious presence of God.⁴

8The forests and every fragrant kind of tree have overshadowed Israel at God's command; To make the return journey as comfortable as possible, God will cause shade trees to grow to shield the exiles from the sun.⁴

9for God is leading Israel in joy God is leading the people personally on their return! by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company. Divine "mercy" and "justice" are personified here as they accompany God and the exiles on the journey.⁴ Mercy is a fruit of charity. The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity; it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.⁸ (CCC 2447) While God was leading Israel in this reading, in our world that same God makes the same promise to his children of today: Jesus Christ, who is the light that has broken the darkness, is leading us and we follow him in his justice and mercy and finally in his glory.⁹

Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

The church of Philippi was the first to be founded by St. Paul when he came into Europe during his second missionary journey. Most of the Christians would have been of Gentile origin and they had great affection for St. Paul and were very generous towards him. For his part, Paul had great confidence in them and it was only from them that he accepted material help. This letter to the people of Philippi was written by Paul, while he was in prison, probably in Rome, in 62 or 63 A.D. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus with gifts to minister to Paul's needs. Epaphroditus, however, took ill while he was with Paul and almost died. Once he recovered, Paul decided to send him home for the consolation of the church in Philippi and used the opportunity to send this letter, thanking the people for their kindness and exhorting them to be ever more faithful to the Christian way of life.¹⁰

Brothers and sisters:

4I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, Paul's attitude is one of joy which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift that a soul in grace experiences, irrespective of its personal situation or circumstances. It comes from union with God and recognition of his loving Providence towards all creation and especially towards his children. Joy gives the Christian peace and objectivity in everything he does.¹⁰

5because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. Paul writes about them in 2 Cor. 8: 2-4: "In the midst of severe trial their overflowing joy and deep poverty have produced an abundant generosity. According to their means—indeed I can testify even beyond their means—and voluntarily, they begged us insistently for the favor of sharing in this service to members of the church."

6I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you God has begun the work of salvation by giving Christians the gift of faith and filling them with sanctifying grace and he will continue to enrich them with his grace until they at last encounter Christ in heaven. However, as St. Augustine put it, "God who created you without your cooperation will not save you without your cooperation."¹⁰ will continue to complete it Paul did the teaching but God did the work. until the day of Christ Jesus. This refers to the Second Coming when Christ will judge all at the end of time. Then the "good work" so begun and continued will be rewarded with the glorious destiny of the Christian: to be "with the Lord."⁴

8God is my witness, This is an abbreviated oath-formula that Paul uses to assure readers of his sincere affection for them.¹¹ **how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus!** Supernatural love is quite compatible with human affection, but it raises it on to a higher level. This entire epistle is an excellent proof of how the two kinds of love, human and divine, interweave.¹⁰

9And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, St. Teresa of Avila wrote that “helping others is the surest sign of true love, for we cannot be sure if we are loving God, although we may have good reasons for believing that we are, but we can know quite well if we are loving our neighbor. And be certain that, the farther advanced you find you are in this, the greater the love you will have for God; for so dearly does His Majesty love us that He will reward our love for our neighbor by increasing the love which we bear to himself, and that in a thousand ways.”

10to discern what is of value, Here he is talking about “discernment,” which is a deeply Christian view of things that enables one to see the events of everyday life in a supernatural light and therefore to understand them properly, and to know what is the best thing to do in every situation.¹⁰

so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, This refers again to the Second Coming as in verse 6.⁴ The basic foundation of Advent is our awareness that we are in the “between” time: The kingdom of God has arrived in Jesus but has yet to come in its fullness. This time “already but not yet” invites us to rejoice and lament at the same time, to praise and thank God for what is already and to long for and continue to work for what is not yet.²

11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. Paul, like a good runner, has his eyes fixed on the finish line, and encourages his fellow athletes in Christ to do the same.¹

Luke 3:1-6

Luke shows a remarkable interest in tying together the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in Christ. This is quite remarkable considering that Luke is believed to have been a Gentile. Possibly the time he spent sharing the missionary travels of St. Paul gave him a profound insight into the intimate connection between Judaism and its fulfillment in Christ.¹

1In the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar, This is the most precise, chronological reference in all the Gospels for dating the ministry of Jesus.⁴ Luke starts with the empire, works through regional authorities and ends with the religious leadership.¹² **when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod** This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who interacted with Pilate in the passion account.¹² **was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,**

2during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, These were religious leaders of Palestine. Annas was the high priest from AD 6 to 15 (his influence endured long after his term of office) and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, ministered from AD 18 to 36.¹² **the word of God came to John,** The influence of John as the last prophet of the Old Covenant and the first of the New is highlighted by the fact that his father, Zechariah, received the announcement of John’s conception and birth while fulfilling his duty as a Levitical priest in the Temple in Jerusalem.¹ **the son of Zechariah, in the desert.** John serves as a kind of summary of the Old Testament. He goes into the desert to receive God’s word in the way that Israel had gone into the desert of Sinai to receive the Law or Moses. He represents all the prophets in his rough dress of camel’s hair and Jesus said of him that he was “a

prophet indeed and something more.” He also represents the Old Testament priesthood in that he is born to a mother and father who were Levites, the priestly tribe of the Old Covenant.¹

3John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming The word used here suggests an initial proclamation to non-Christians. **a baptism of repentance** This was a ceremonial purification by water that had deep roots in biblical tradition but it differed in that it was administered to Israelites and it was given once for all time to soldiers, to publicans, and to sinners who were not usually accepted in full communion with God’s people. It required that the person be moved interiorly with sorrow and have a change of outlook and behavior, turning from sin and turning to God.⁴ **for the forgiveness of sins,**

4as is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: By citing the opening chapter of Isaiah’s central section, Luke brings to mind a whole group of biblical promises to be fulfilled by the Lord: he will rescue the poor and oppressed, pour out the Spirit, restore Israel, come to Jerusalem as King, destroy his enemies, and show mercy to his children. At the summit of this stands the messianic Servant whose mission is to bless the nations and atone for sin. All of this is fulfilled in Jesus.¹² **“A voice of one crying out in the desert:** This refers to John the Baptist.¹² **“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.**

5Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, Just as roads were improved for the procession of ancient kings, so John prepares for Jesus’ arrival and the salvation of all men.¹²

6and all flesh Mankind **shall see the salvation of God.”** This concluding line from Isaiah stresses the universal scope of Jesus’ salvation. Luke also omitted the line, “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed” because the glory of the Lord was revealed in Jesus, partially at the Transfiguration and fully at his Ascension.⁴

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Grey, (2) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers:1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) “workbook FOR LECTORS AND GOSPEL READERS: 1995” by Aelred Rosser, (4) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) “You Can Understand The Bible” by Peter Kreeft, (6) “The Books of JEREMIAH and BARUCH” by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., (7) “Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday readings” by Achille DeGeest, O.F.M., (8) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (9) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken e³ Marie Finn, (10) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, and (12) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.