

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

### ***First reading:***

(Baruch 5.1-9)

*High Mountains Laid Flat*

This part of the Book of Baruch is a meditation on Isaiah's promises for Jerusalem at the return of Israel from Exile in Babylon. It is, of course, taken up by John the Baptist in his proclamation that the high mountains will be flattened and the valleys filled in to make a smooth road for the Messiah to cross the desert to Jerusalem.

There were many aspects of the expected Messiah, the harbinger of God's Kingship. For Isaiah, it was a conquering hero, his garments stained with the blood of his victories. In this prophecy, the reign of God is more peaceful, a heartfelt dedication to God and the values of the divine sovereignty, for at this coming of God the names of Jerusalem shall be 'Peace through Justice' and 'Glory through Devotion'.

True peace is possible only through the saving justice of God, when the people of God truly act as God's representatives, made in the image of God, and the envoys of his saving values. The ideal of God's Kingdom appears in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, when his representatives, Adam and Eve, lived in perfect harmony with one another and with God's whole creation.

### **Question:**

*In what sense has the coming of Christ brought peace to the world*

### ***Second reading:***

(Philippians 1.3-6, 8-11)

*Filled with the Fruits of Uprightness*

Paul always begins his letters with a commendation and a blessing. The Philippians to whom he is writing were Paul's favourite community. The letter is full of friendship and affection. Here he commends the Philippians for their partnership with him in the gospel, and prays that God's work in them may be completed. So they may be ready for the Day of the Lord, which he envisaged to be imminent.

The passage is chosen as a preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus at Christmas. It serves as a reminder that the traditional three comings of Christ cannot be separated. The coming in history was the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. The coming in mystery is the coming of Christ into our hearts as we endeavour to mould ourselves as his faithful followers and to live out his values. The coming in majesty is the final coming of Christ in glory to gather his elect to himself, either at our homecoming in death or at the end of all things. The three comings lead on, one to another: the coming in history gives a new impetus to the Kingdom of God, the coming in majesty brings it to its climax, and the coming in mystery is our own repeated response.

### **Question:**

*Which of these three comings of Christ is the most important for us?*

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## Gospel:

*(Luke 3.1-6)*

### *The Baptist's Message*

Each year the two middle Sundays of Advent centre on John the Baptist, preparing the way for Jesus. John came to prepare a community of repentance who would be ready for the Messiah. This was to be a community not of those who went around moping about their sinfulness, but a community of those who had changed their ways and their whole system of values and priorities. The Hebrew concept that he proclaimed was a matter of turning round and going in the opposite direction. To be ready for the Messiah meant - and still means - such a radical change of attitude. J

John himself had prepared by going out into the desert, for the Messiah was to come striding across the desert, as did Israel at the exodus. John's clothing and his whole way of life showed his rejection of current materialism and his single-minded dedication. It is not primarily a negative point of view, for his quotation of Baruch (as in today's first reading) or of Isaiah shows that the flattening of the hills and the filling of the valleys is a preparation for the Kingdom of Peace and Justice. A good deal of positive planning and of spadework is needed if we are to be ready to welcome that Kingdom.

## Question:

*What sort of change in my lifestyle is needed for me to welcome Jesus at Christmas?*

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