

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Baruch = buh-ROOK

This exhortatory reading is a study in contrasts. Set these up by emphasizing the prophet's call to "take off" the "robe of mourning" and to "put on" God's glory.

mitre = Mī-tehr

Bring good energy and anticipation to your voice here but avoid being too dramatic. These poetic words bring their own power.

Continue highlighting the contrasts of time, direction, geography, and emotion.

The final sections poetically describe the transformative power of God. Slow your pace while maintaining the same volume.

LECTIONARY #6

READING I Baruch 5:1-9

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Baruch

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever: Wrapped in the cloak of justice from God, bear on your head the mitre that displays the glory of the eternal name. For God will show all the earth your splendor: you will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship.

Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. Led 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. For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground, that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God. The forests and every fragrant kind of tree have overshadowed Israel at God's command;

READING I

The deuterocanonical book of Baruch joins other biblical books that analyze the Babylonian exile and respond to it. Although it is attributed to Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch (Jeremiah 36:32), the book contains many historical (but not theological) inaccuracies and is probably pseudonymous, reaching its final written form during the Maccabean period (200 to 50 bc). Baruch considers four themes—sin, exile, repentance, and return—and today's reading, coming from the final portion of Baruch's poem of consolation (4:5—5:9), considers the return from exile.

After having offered a sincere confession of Israel's sin, an interpretation that considers the exile to be a just punishment for that sin, and a reflection upon the mysterious ways of God, the last part of Baruch's poem declares that Israel will return to Jerusalem. He addresses Jerusalem with several directives. She is to "take courage" (4:30), for God now looks kindly upon her and is putting down her enemy (Babylon). She is to "look to the east" (4:36), for her children are returning. Coming to today's passage, we read more of Baruch's exhortations to Jerusalem: "take off your

robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever." Jerusalem is to "stand upon the heights." All of the glorious things described in this reading—splendor, justice, peace, eternal glory—and the safe arrival of Jerusalem's children come from her benevolent God, who is accompanied by "mercy and justice." With such a future vision filled with hope, the sins of the past vanish and the trials of the present diminish.

READING II

In AD 49, during the height of the Roman Empire, Paul

for God is leading Israel in **joy**
by the **light** of his **glory**,
with his **mercy** and **justice** for company.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 126:1–2, 2–3, 4–5, 6 (3)

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the LORD brought back the captives
of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

Then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things
for them.”

The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad indeed.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those who sow in tears
shall reap rejoicing.

Although they go forth weeping,
carrying the seed to be sown,
they shall come back rejoicing,
carrying their sheaves.

READING II Philippians 1:4–6, 8–11

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians

Brothers and sisters:

I pray always with **joy** in my **every prayer** for **all** of you,
because of your partnership for the **gospel**
from the **first day** until **now**.

I am **confident** of this,
that the one who **began** a good work in you
will **continue** to **complete** it
until the day of **Christ Jesus**.

God is my witness,
how I long for **all** of you with the **affection** of **Christ Jesus**.

And **this** is my prayer:
that your **love** may increase ever **more** and **more**
in **knowledge** and **every** kind of perception,
to discern what is of **value**,
so that you may be **pure** and **blameless** for the day of Christ, »

Philippians = fih-LIP-ee-uhnz

Use a tone of gratitude. Also, take note of Paul’s attention to the movement of time and the development of the community’s commitment through time. Help the assembly grasp this sense by pronouncing the time-related words more slowly.

Pause after the phrase “And this is my prayer.” Then read the prayer of blessing.

established a Christian community in Philippi. Acts tells of a couple of the first converts in the community, a foreign woman named Lydia and an unnamed jailer, and their respective households (see Acts 16:11–40). Few communities were as dear to him as this socially and ethnically diverse community. As with other communities, Paul remained present to them through his written communication.

Today’s reading comes from the thanksgiving and prayer section at the beginning of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Not only is this a typical element of a letter,

the thanksgiving also often summarizes the overall message of the letter. Although Paul was critical in many of his letters, that is not the case here. Rather, he is full of thanks for his and their “partnership for the gospel.” Dwelling on one of the most defining characteristics of early Christian life, *koinōnia* (Greek, “partnership”), Paul uncovers its dimensions. He notes that they are partners in prayer, in the Gospel, and in love “from the first day until now.” While elsewhere he notes that they responded to his physical needs (Philippians 4:14–16), his words primarily celebrate their *koinōnia* in

giving witness to the Gospel and ask only that it increase. Ultimately, his thanksgiving flows into a prayer that his and their *koinōnia* will find its best expression in an increasing and overflowing love, preparing them for “the day of Christ.” Clearly, hope can long for ever greater abundance!

GOSPEL

For Luke, establishing Jesus’ place in human history is of primary importance, as is his commitment to showing how Jesus was the fulfillment of all earlier prophetic messages. Both commitments are on full display in

These names provide context for the introduction of John the Baptist.

Tiberius Caesar = tī-BEER-ee-uhs SEE-zehr

Pontius Pilate = PON-shuhs Pī-luht

Judea = joo-DEE-uh or joo-DAY-uh

tetrarch = TET-rahk

Iturea = ih-too-REE-ah

Trachonitis = trak-uh-Nī-tihs

Lysanias = lī-SAY-nee-uhs

Abilene = ab-uh-LEE-nee

Annas = AN-uhs

Caiaphas = KAY-uh-fuhs or Kī-uh-fuhs

Slow down, beginning with "as it is written," and pause slightly just before beginning the prophecy.

A similar sentiment of transformation was expressed in today's first reading. The repetition of ideas is deliberate, so remain strong in your proclamation as you conclude the reading.

filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

GOSPEL Luke 3:1–6

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

In the fifteenth year of the reign of **Tiberius Caesar**, when **Pontius Pilate** was governor of **Judea**, and **Herod** was tetrarch of **Galilee**, and his brother **Philip** tetrarch of the region of **Iturea** and **Trachonitis**, and **Lysanias** was tetrarch of **Abilene**, during the high priesthood of **Annas** and **Caiaphas**, the word of **God** came to **John** the son of **Zechariah** in the **desert**.

John went throughout the **whole region** of the Jordan, proclaiming a **baptism of repentance** for the **forgiveness** of sins,

as it is **written** in the **book** of the words of the prophet **Isaiah**:

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

*"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.*

Every 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,

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

today's Gospel reading, exemplified by the person and preaching of John the Baptist.

The elaborate synchronism (a listing of simultaneous historical events) in the first two verses of today's reading is actually Luke's third in as many chapters (see Luke 1:5 and 2:1–2). Moving from the broadest political scope of the "Caesar" (emperor) in Rome to local political leaders and concluding with religious figures, Luke skillfully places John the Baptist within this historical context of various political powers and interests. It is even more striking, though, that Luke passes by the movers and shak-

ers to place John at center stage. This focuses our attention on John and reminds us of the role he played in the story of the incarnation of Jesus into human history in Luke 1–2.

Omitting Mark's detailed descriptions of John's clothing and food (Mark 1:6), Luke focuses his attention on John's prophetic role in three ways. First, calling him "John the son of Zechariah" recalls the prophecies made about him by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:13–17) and his father Zechariah (Luke 1:67–79). Second, John's message is itself a prophetic message of repentance,

beginning in the desert and extending to the region of the Jordan. Third, John fulfills Isaiah's prophecy as the "voice of one crying out," preparing people to "see the salvation of God": Jesus. John and his message are signs of hope for the people that God will accomplish his promise of salvation. S.L.