

Second Sunday of Advent

[Reading I: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14](#)

[Reading II: 2 Peter 3:8-14](#)

[Gospel: Mark 1:1-8](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/120620.cfm>



This week, the readings begin with a selection from an earlier part of Isaiah compared to last week. This selection comes from during the Babylonian captivity (587-537BC). This portion is a message of hope to the people who have experienced their king being deposed, being led away from their land, the temple being destroyed, and losing their ways of practicing their faith.

It was during this time that synagogues came into use. Since they could not go to the temple to worship, synagogues were designed as communal gathering places to listen to the scriptures, study God's law, and offer prayers. When they returned to Judah, the synagogue practice came with them so that in the villages, synagogues developed for prayer and study while official worship took place in Jerusalem at the temple. Following the destruction of the temple by the Roman armies in 70AD, synagogues have been the center of Jewish faith life and remain so today.

In their experience of loss, the question arose concerning whether God had given up on them because of their sinfulness. If so, do they need a new God? Isaiah comes with a word of comfort and hope. Isaiah proclaims that the time of exile will soon end. This was fulfilled when Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians and gave the Jewish people the freedom to return home. God will be like a shepherd who will lead his flock home and provide for them. The passage presents the first use of:

"In the desert, prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God." (verse 3) Mark uses this passage with a combination of other Old Testament passages to situate the ministry of John the Baptist.

Isaiah also stresses that God comes with power to act. God is involved in human history. This shifts our focus from the end of the world in the scriptures last week to an awareness that God is acting now, coming now, this day, into our lives, a second focus of Advent.

While we read from the later part of Mark last week, today, we hear the very beginning of the Gospel. He begins with the key awareness of who Jesus is: the Son of God. Mark is certain of this, and so is his audience. Mark shows those disciples who were with Jesus and others struggling to understand Jesus. He writes for those who know Jesus and challenges them with the consequences of this awareness. Thus, Mark offers no infancy narrative, as do Matthew and Luke. He begins with the ministry of John and Jesus as adults.

John lives out the prophecy in Isaiah by ministering in the desert and calling people to prepare for God's arrival. They will make straight a way for the Lord by acknowledging their sinfulness and turning their life around. Conversion is to make a turn, to be redirected. (Sin comes from the word for missing the target, for being off course.) To refocus one's life by turning away from selfish pursuits and seeking to live according to God's instruction, God will lead us to a fuller life and even a sharing in God's own Spirit.

John clearly proclaims that he is not the one, but one greater is coming. He tells his disciples and all who are listening to prepare to look for the greater one as all Christians, particularly speakers and writers, should do.

John comes in the dress of Elijah, the prophet who ministered almost 900 years before Jesus. He dressed in animal skins and often had to flee to the desert because others sought

to kill him. Elijah challenged the King with God's word. John will do the same to Herod, who will have him put in prison and beheaded. Elijah is presented as stepping onto a fiery chariot and going to God. The expectation was that Elijah would return to complete his ministry. Jesus identifies John as fulfilling that ministry.

Baptism was an immersion into something. We have come to see Christian baptism in that way, and we use it as an expression of being thrown into a situation and immersed in it. John calls for people to be immersed in a new way of living. In their turning, they find a whole new life. He describes the one who was to come, Jesus, as offering a baptism, an immersion, into the very life of God. The Hebrew for spirit is Ruah, which can mean spirit, breath, or wind. God breathed into the nostrils of the first human, the very breath of God, and the human came alive. Jesus will lead us into this life of God and place his Spirit within us.

The Second Letter of Peter is one of the later New Testament documents. Like the people in Babylon, these Christians wondered what had happened to Jesus. Did he forget to return, or was he not really going to happen? The author strives to respond by observing God's time is not our time. "with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day." (verse 8) Instead, it is God who is so very patient and allows more and more time so that more and more people may come to know God and the gift of life in Jesus.

There will be an end when the world as we know it will disappear (be dissolved). There will be a new heavens and earth. We, also, will be transformed. Our focus should be on living for God each day, not giving into the preoccupations of the self-centered practices of this age. Neither power, fame, possessions, nor titles lead us to new life in God. These can only be tools to love and serve God more fully.

Themes:

Conversion and Repentance
God's Presence in our midst

Conscious formation
Holy Spirit in our lives

Reflection Questions:

What areas of contemporary life distract you or keep you from being a witness to Jesus?

How have you experienced waiting? What helps you when you are waiting?

Have you become more aware of God's presence and action in your life this week?

Has God's patience in giving time and more time impacted you?

What is your primary or ultimate goal in life?

Suggestions for Prayer:

For the Church: that God will give us the energy and desire to pursue conversion, advocate for justice and peace, and be heralds of God's presence in our world

For openness of heart: that God will renew the gift of the Spirit within us and help us to be active and dynamic disciples

For all who are waiting: that God will give us patience, help us to accompany one another through difficult times, and open us to God's presence and invitations to service

For Christians during this Advent season: that we turn from the wastelands of violence, deceit, and greed and dedicate ourselves to promoting faithful, honest, and loving relationships

For all seeking to know the Lord: that God will reveal his love his love and presence to catechumens, youth, and those who have experienced trauma