

LIVING THE GOSPEL
2nd Sunday of Advent
December 8th 2024



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

Gathering Prayer

All: Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:1-6

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness; ³ and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Gospel Notes.

1. The Gospel identifies very precisely the time and place of the

Living The Gospel bible study/sharing via Zoom
Every Wednesday
Time: 8 – 9.30 pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2760073734?pwd=cDRZR2JQMGRobVkwY3ZVF5L1BwZz09>

Meeting ID: 276 007 3734
Passcode: 1WordOfGod

All are welcome!

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References:
(1) Gospel Notes are taken from The Navarre Bible
(2) Gospel Reflection and Living Liturgy are taken from "Living Liturgy for Sundays and Solemnities" by Order of St Benedict. Published by Liturgical Ministry, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota
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(3) CCC references are taken from Catechism of The Catholic Church

public appearance of John the Baptist, the Precursor of Christ. Tiberius Caesar was the second emperor of Rome, and the fifteenth year of his reign corresponds A.D. 27 or 29, depending on which of the two possible calculations is correct.

Pontius Pilate was governor or praefectus of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. His jurisdiction also extended to Samaria and Idumea.

The Herod referred to here is Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, who succeeded to part of his father's territory with the title of tetrarch, not king. "Tetrarch" indicated that he exercised his power in subordination to Roman authority. It was Herod Antipas, who died in A.D. 39, who had St John the Baptist beheaded.

Philip, another son of Herod the Great and stepbrother of Herod Antipas, was tetrarch in the territory mentioned here up to the year A.D. 34. He married Herodias, who is spoken about in Mark 6:17-19.

2. The high priest at the time was Caiaphas, who held the position from A.D. 18-36. Annas, his father-in-law, was still so influential that he was considered as the de facto head of the Jewish religious and political life. That is why, when Christ was arrested, he was first interrogated before Annas (Jn18:12-24). St Luke therefore is perfectly justified in calling him high priest.

2-3. Here St Luke formally introduces St John the Baptist, who appears in his gospel a number of times. When Christ praises the Baptist (cf. Mt 11:7-9) he refers particularly to his strength of will and his commitment to his God-given mission. Humility, austerity, courage and a spirit of prayer figure strongly in John's personality. So faithful was he to his mission of preparing the way for the Messiah that Christ praises him in a unique way: he is the greatest of those born of woman (cf Mt 11:11), "a burning and shining lamp" (Jn 5:35). He burned with love, and shone by the witness he bore. Christ "was the light" (Jn 1:9); the Baptist "came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him" (Jn 1:7).

John the Baptist appears on the scene preaching the need for repentance. He prepares "the way of the Lord". He is the herald of salvation: but his mission does not go beyond that; he simply announces that salvation is coming. "Among you stands one...who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" (Jn1:27). He points Christ out: "Behold, the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29, 36), behold "the Son of God" (Jn 1:34); and he rejoices to see his

3. Both John and Jesus experience a period of time in the desert before taking on their public ministry. Where might you cultivate desert places in your life where you go to be with God in solitude and prayer?

Closing Prayer

All: O God, you hear us in our joys and in our sadness. Accept the prayers we offer for ourselves and all the world, and help us all to grow in confidence in your everlasting mercy. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

Second Reading – Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

⁴ ...always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ... ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

535. Jesus' public life begins with his baptism by John in the Jordan. (Cf. *Lk* 3:23; *Acts* 1:22.) John preaches "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins". (*Lk* 3:3.) A crowd of sinners (Cf. *Lk* 3:10-14; *Mt* 3:7; 21:32.) - tax collectors and soldiers, Pharisees and Sadducees, and prostitutes- come to be baptized by him. "Then Jesus appears." The Baptist hesitates, but Jesus insists and receives baptism. Then the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, comes upon Jesus and a voice from heaven proclaims, "This is my beloved Son." (*Mt* 3:13-17.) This is the manifestation ("Epiphany") of Jesus as Messiah of Israel and Son of God.

Sharing and Discussion

1. As we prepare the way for Jesus to be born anew into our hearts this Christmas, what are the valleys we are called to fill in? Which mountains within our lives (pride, greed, anger) must be made low?
2. In his letter to the Philippians St. Paul writes, "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" (1:9-10). How might we fulfill that prayer within our own lives?

own disciples leave him to follow Christ (*Jn* 1:37): "He must increase, but I must decrease" (*Jn* 3:30).

4-6. In the second part of the book of Isaiah (chaps. 40-55), which is called the "Book of Consolation of Israel", the Jewish people are told that they will once again suffer exile and a new exodus in which their guide will be, not Moses, but God himself; once again they will make their way through the desert to reach a new promised land. St Luke sees the preaching of the Baptist, who announces the arrival of the Messiah, as fulfilling this prophecy.

Because the Lord is imminent, people must prepare themselves spiritually, by doing penance for their sins, to receive the special divine grace the Messiah is bringing. This is what he means by leveling the mountains and making the Lord's path straight.

Every year in its Advent liturgy the Church proclaims the coming of Jesus Christ, our Savior, exhorting every Christian to purify his or her soul by a new interior conversion.

Gospel Focus

The first paragraph of this gospel might seem superfluous—all those names and places are nearly meaningless to us in our time and place. But they serve a purpose: they are locating John the Baptist (and soon Jesus) in a specific time and place. Jesus' humanity is not half-baked. He enters into human history with all its political turmoil. He is born in a real place with real leaders and their ongoing, feeble attempts at peace. He lives amid all these goings-on as we do, and yet he will transcend them. Even as we wait for his final coming, he already is the true King whose power is in weakness and who leads by humble service. It is in Jesus that we will find at last the peace for which humanity has always yearned.

Gospel Reflection

In some cultures, a woman who has been widowed or who loses a child wears black for a year or more, signalling her mourning. Her face, too, wears a mark of grief. The sparkle in her eyes gives way to ready tears and her gait becomes heavy from sorrow. Such is the image of the city of Jerusalem in today's first reading.

Baruch characterises the devastated city as a woman mourning for her exiled children who have been forcibly taken from her. The

prophet declares that it is now time for Jerusalem to exchange her robe of mourning and misery for a brilliant new mantle. Her new cloak is spun from justice and glory from God. The humiliation of their forced march into exile on foot will be undone by their being carried aloft, as if they were royalty. It is not that suffering is forgotten, but now the divine gift of joy settles over the grieving mother as rebuilding life out of the ruins begins.

Divine mercy embodies God's motherly care, as she grieves with all who mourn and acts with compassion to bring relief for all who suffer. Divine justice is the setting aright with of all relationships with God, self, others, and the whole of the cosmos. With these two companions come healing, restoration, and the chance for a new beginning.

In the gospel, there is similar invitation to a new beginning announced by John the Baptist. The narrative starts with an ominous note, as John's ministry is set against the backdrop of the Roman imperial rulers. Luke is not simply displaying an interest in history by naming Tiberius Caesar, the emperor; Pontius Pilate, the governor, Herod, Philip, and Lysanias, the tetrarchs, and finally, Annas and Caiphas, the high priests who colluded with the Roman authorities. He is reminding his hearers of the omnipresent imperial power that kept the inhabitants of Palestine in fear and grief at many levels. He foreshadows the terror of John's execution and of Jesus' crucifixion by introducing HEROD AND Pilate before these two prophets have even spoke their opening words.

Luke's hearers already know the end of the story. It is in this context that we hear John's invitation not only to turn away from personal choices that impede God's coming but also to collective repentance and a turn towards divine mercy. Any desire for revenge, any attempts to retaliate with violence, must give way to forgiveness on the part of the offenders. Using Isaiah's words, John first speaks in imperatives: prepare and make straight the way. But then the verbs shift to the passive voice, implying that it will be the Coming one himself who will do the filling in of the valleys and the levelling of the mountains, straightening out winding roads, and smoothening the rough ways.

For them and for us, his coming does not eliminate these challenges along life's path but fills us with saving joy, justice, forgiveness, and mercy as we open ourselves to the great things God has done and continues to do for us.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Bar 5:1-9

¹ Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on for ever the beauty of the glory from God. ² Put on the robe of the righteousness from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. ³ For God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. ⁴ For your name will for ever be called by God, "Peace of righteousness and glory of godliness." ⁵ Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height and look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east, at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. ⁶ For they went forth from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. ⁷ For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. ⁸ The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. ⁹ For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Responsorial Reading — Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

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. **(R)**

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. **(R)**

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the torrents in the southern desert. Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. **(R)**

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