

## THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT - C

On this Sunday in the gospel reading we leave behind thoughts of the end of time and the second coming of Christ and turn to concentrate on the first coming. For the next two Sundays the gospel reading is from Luke's account of the ministry of John the Baptist beside the river Jordan. The readings help us to prepare for Christ coming in the flesh, the Incarnation. Christmas has become a secularised word although in itself is full of meaning, but perhaps it is better to keep the Incarnation in our minds when preparing our readings. Luke sets the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in both an historical context and a prophetic context. The first reading is from the Book of Baruch in which the exiles in Babylon are consoled with a reminder of messianic hope. The second reading is from Paul to the Philippians encouraging them and us today to lead the sort of life that 'will help you to become pure and blameless and prepare you for the Day of Christ.'

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Baruch who was Jeremiah's secretary and the book is found after the Lamentations of Jeremiah and before Ezekiel. It is a deuterocanonical book, that is, it is found in the second canon of the inspired scripture books, the Septuagint, those books translated into or written in Greek. The first list contains books originally written in Hebrew. The introduction tells us the book was written in Babylon, by Baruch and sent to Jerusalem to be read at liturgical gatherings. The book may be divided into three parts: 1. A prayer acknowledging guilt but expressing hope. 2. A wisdom poem, in which wisdom is identified with the Law. 3. A prophetic passage in which a personified Jerusalem speaks to the exiles and the prophet consoles them with a message of hope. The book concludes with the Letter of Jeremiah (ch.6) which speaks out against idolatry. The book written outside Palestine c.100 BC gives valuable information about religious life beyond Palestine (the Dispersion): contact with Jerusalem, prayer, devotion to the Law, messianic hope. It testifies to the enduring reputation of Jeremiah and to Baruch's growing reputation.

This beautiful reading, 5.1-9, is spoken to the personified Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the spiritual home of the Israelites housing the Temple of God's presence and she has care for all God's chosen people. She has been clothed in mourning clothes because of the sins of her inhabitants and because of God's punishment inflicted upon them but now the prophet tells Jerusalem to take off her mourning clothes and to 'put on the beauty of God's glory for evermore.' The city is given a new name: 'Peace-through-Justice, and 'Glory through Devotion.' Jerusalem is told to look to the east from where God will come and she will see her children reassembled who were driven away into exile by her enemies but now God brings them back gloriously. The way of return is made smooth in line with the gospel reading 'for God will guide Israel in joy by the light of his glory.' Such is the message of hope to Israel and for us today as we prepare for the coming of our Saviour these words of the prophet should fill us with hope.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 125, is one of the Songs (Psalms 120-134) sung by the pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem. This one recalls the joy of the returning exiles, they could hardly believe what was happening to them it seemed like a dream. The next two verses repeat the great deeds God has achieved by bringing them back to their homeland. The 'torrents in the Negeb,' a desert land south of Judah, supply water to the region in winter and make the soil fruitful and so the thoughts of the Psalmist turn to sowing and then reaping crops with joy, their happiness in God for being home again.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippi, one of the principal cities of Macedonia, had been evangelised by Paul in 50 A.D. on his second missionary journey. Paul is now on his third missionary journey and is imprisoned in Ephesus, the capital of Roman Asia. He hopes to revisit the Church at Philippi and does so in the autumn of 57 and at Passover 58. The letter is almost heart rending showing Paul's love for the Church and in his desire to see them, he writes a friendly letter, giving some news to his converts there. He warns them to 'Beware of evil workmen!' who will destroy the unity of love and joy which he so much desires for them based on humility, the humility of Christ and to that end he writes the Philippians a poem on the humility of Christ Jesus, 2.6-11.

The reading, 1.4-6,8-11, is part of Paul's opening thanksgiving and prayer. Paul prays with joy which is one of the characteristics of the letter; he prays for their partnership in the gospel by contributing money and bearing witness in their lives which they have done from the day when they became followers of Christ. Paul is confident that they will continue until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. Paul becomes quite passionate in his longing for them and he prays they will receive true discernment so that they can remain innocent until the 'Day of Christ' comes. This reading keeps our minds on the second coming of Christ and in preparing for that 'Day' by leading lives with true discernment we will make a good preparation to celebrate the first coming of Christ, the Incarnation.