

## 3 Advent Year B Readings and Commentary

### Commentary By Dale J. Sieverding

In the first passage from Isaiah, we have the text which is quoted in Luke's Gospel at the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry. The speaker in the passage is empowered and commissioned by God to authorize such good news to the poor and downtrodden. In the Old Testament milieu, these words would have only been spoken by a king, for only a king would have been authorized to declare a year of jubilee. Hearing this passage alongside today's Gospel passage from John, highlights the thematic emphasis that Jesus is King and rules with authority. This is a theme which John works with throughout his Gospel up to and including the crucifixion scene where Jesus "reigns" from the tree of the cross.

John's Gospel today highlights the life and ministry of John in relation to Jesus who is the "Christ", the anointed one of God. John's importance to the narrative of Jesus' life is that of the "announcer" who points to the dynamic intervention of God in human history in the life and ministry of Jesus. In art history, John is always pointing away from himself to Jesus or a representation of the "light of the world". John "announces" the public ministry of Jesus.

The first letter to the Thessalonians is the earliest writing of Paul and speaks of the end times expectation that God will bring to fulfillment the work begun in the life of Jesus. Admonitions are given to the community to rejoice, pray and give thanks. If we are to understand the life of the fledgling Christian Church, it is under the banner of a community at prayer and giving thanks. Further, the community is charged to let the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit flourish in the Church.

As the community approaches the celebration of the Nativity of the Lord, these passages highlight the uniqueness of God's breaking into the world in the life and ministry of Jesus who announced not just a year of favor from the Lord, but an entirely new existence of life in the Spirit. © 2008, OCP. All rights reserved.

### **First Reading** Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

*I rejoice heartily in the Lord.*

#### **A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah**

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,  
to heal the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and release to the prisoners,  
to announce a year of favor from the LORD  
and a day of vindication by our God.

I rejoice heartily in the LORD,  
in my God is the joy of my soul;  
for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation  
and wrapped me in a mantle of justice,

like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem,  
like a bride bedecked with her jewels.  
As the earth brings forth its plants,  
and a garden makes its growth spring up,  
so will the Lord GOD make justice and praise  
spring up before all the nations.

**The word of the Lord.**

**Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11** By Deacon Owen Cummings: In Luke 4 in the synagogue at Nazareth, our Lord uses these words of Isaiah to speak of his mission. In the holy season of Advent we are waiting to celebrate the Lord's coming. It is a season of expectation, of anticipation. Reading the passage through the lens of Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue, we are given a hint of what our expectations and anticipation are all about. They are about One who is filled with God's Spirit, but for a purpose. That purpose has to do with human healing: those who never hear good news are to hear it, those who have no freedom are to have it, and even the land will experience the jubilee favor of the Lord. Good news fills us with joy. Thus, the second part of the reading has Jerusalem sing a song of joy to God:

"I rejoice heartily in the Lord,  
in my God is the joy of my soul."

Jerusalem's joy is like the joy of one who is in love, about to be married. We may translate Jerusalem's song of joy into the Christian's song of joy, awaiting the coming of the Lord. We may make Jerusalem's words our own: God is my joy, God is inviting me to intimacy. We celebrate God's healing in the Coming One, who is also our Joy.

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**Responsorial Psalm Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54**

**℟ (Is 61:10b)** My soul rejoices in my God.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the LORD;  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked upon his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:

**℟** My soul rejoices in my God.

The Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him  
in every generation.

**℟** My soul rejoices in my God.

He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

✠ My soul rejoices in my God.

**Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54** By Virginia Smith: This weekend's responsorial psalm doesn't originate in the Bible's Psalter at all, but rather from a Gospel. We might not be quite so startled by that if we remembered that most psalms are meant to be sung. What we have recorded in Scripture are the lyrics to songs, and although 150 of these appear in the Book of Psalms, others are scattered throughout both testaments, beginning with Moses, his sister Miriam, and the Israelites celebrating their triumphal march through the Reed Sea (Exodus 15:1-21). Singing is mentioned about 178 times in the Bible. No wonder so many songs came to be classified as praise psalms.

Luke is fond of this ancient teaching tool, featuring four canticles (another name for songs) in the first two chapters of his Gospel. The second of these, known by Catholics as the Magnificat, is excerpted today. Reading Mary's canticle in its entirety in Luke demonstrates immediately that it is the evangelist's composition, not Mary's. Each verse is cross referenced to its counterpart in the Hebrew Scriptures. That seems only reasonable for what teenage girl, arriving at a relative's home after an exhausting journey of several days, could be expected to burst into song on the doorstep. It sounds like an old Hollywood musical where the plot stops dead while everybody sings; then the story line resumes. Nonetheless, Luke has masterfully succeeded in capturing the moment, and doubtless Mary's heartfelt praise rose to God inwardly, if not vocally. A better question than whether or not the young Mary actually sang these words is when was the last time we felt like singing with mad abandon about our love of God.

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**Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

*May you entirely, spirit, soul and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians**

Brothers and sisters:

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.

In all circumstances give thanks,

for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not despise prophetic utterances.

Test everything; retain what is good.

Refrain from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfectly holy

and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body,

be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful,

and he will also accomplish it.

**The word of the Lord.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-24** By John Paul Heil: Main Theme: God will faithfully preserve us as blameless for the final coming of Christ.

This reading from the conclusion of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians appropriately instructs us on how to be prepared for the final coming Christ that we look forward to during this season of Advent. It is God's will for us who are in Christ Jesus that we be constantly joyful, prayerful, and thankful in all circumstances. We should listen to the Spirit speaking to us through the prophets or preachers of today, carefully evaluating what they say so as to retain what is good and beneficial but refraining from what might be evil and detrimental.

Paul concludes the instruction with a powerful prayer that the God of "peace"--not just the absence of conflict but an overall well-being in our relationship with God, ourselves, and others, a "peace" that only God can give--may make us completely "holy"--set apart from the world and consecrated for God. And may God preserve us in every dimension of our existence--"spirit, soul, and body"--as blameless for the final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul encouragingly assures us that the God who first called us to be believers is himself always faithful to us, so that he will surely accomplish this preservation of our ultimate blamelessness when Jesus comes again.

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**Gospel Acclamation** Isaiah 61:1(cited in Luke 4:18)

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

### **Gospel**

John 1:6-8, 19-28      *There is one among you whom you do not recognize.*

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to John**

A man named John was sent from God.  
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
He was not the light,  
but came to testify to the light.

And this is the testimony of John.  
When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests  
and Levites to him  
to ask him, "Who are you?"  
he admitted and did not deny it,  
but admitted, "I am not the Christ."  
So they asked him,  
"What are you then? Are you Elijah?"  
And he said, "I am not."  
"Are you the Prophet?"  
He answered, "No."  
So they said to him,  
"Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?"

What do you have to say for yourself?"

He said:

"I am *the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord,'*  
as Isaiah the prophet said."

Some Pharisees were also sent.

They asked him,

"Why then do you baptize  
if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?"

John answered them,

"I baptize with water;  
but there is one among you whom you do not recognize,  
the one who is coming after me,  
whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

This happened in Bethany across the Jordan,  
where John was baptizing.

### **The Gospel of the Lord.**

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

**John 1:6-8, 19-28** By Virginia Smith: For the first two Sundays of Advent, the Gospel readings have asked us to look forward to the coming of the Christ at the close of human history. Today's reading has a more traditional outlook, backward toward the coming of the incarnated God into human history some two millennia ago. While John the Baptizer is stressed this weekend, Jesus himself will take center stage on the fourth and final Sunday.

Here the author of the Fourth Gospel accents one of his favorite themes, the contrast between light and darkness, light always pointing to the Son or Word of God. Across the world at this Christmas season, homes, businesses, and city streets will be ablaze with brightly lit seasonal displays. How many realize that each of those tiny bulbs represents the Light of the World? Too often the original meaning of our various Yuletide decorations is entirely lost, and what was meant to emphasize the Incarnation becomes just another secular show.

In the argument between the Baptizer and the Jewish priests and Levites, it would be a mistake to equate John's baptism with that with which every Christian is initiated. Obviously, the Trinitarian aspect is missing entirely as it has not yet been developed. John's baptism is more a symbolic purification rite. Asked if he is Elijah whose return was expected before the appearance of the Messiah, he denies it. Asked if he is *the* Prophet whose coming Moses foretold, he refutes that as well. John in his own eyes is nobody special. Everything points to "...one who is coming after me...". That, indeed, is what the entire Advent/Christmas cycle points to in all it does.

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