

Advent 2



Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Malachi 3:1-4

{1} See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight--indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. {2} But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; {3} he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. {4} Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

1. my messenger...the messenger of the covenant: The Hebrew for "my messenger" is mal'aki, "my angel." "Yahweh intends to send his messenger, the 'messenger of the covenant'...to refine and purify the sons of Levi and bring testimony against sorcerers, adulterers, those who swear falsely, and those who oppress the poor. Here the mal'ak (like Satan) functions as the heavenly prosecutor who pleads for a guilty verdict against those who disobey the covenant." [1]

Comment: In the Gospel of Mark, Malachi 3:1 is used to introduce the quotation from Isaiah 40:3. Since Luke does not follow Mark in this, the lectionary repaired Luke's omission.

Or Baruch 5:1-9

1 Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. 2 Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes 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 God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory." 5 Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; 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 out 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.

1-2: Jerusalem is urged to exchange the garments of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10) and glory from God (Isaiah 62:3) for those of sorrow and affliction, and to look expectantly to the east to see the exiles returning. These verses reverse the description of the despair of Jerusalem in 4:20.

4. the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory": Jerusalem will be given a new name. The change of name indicates a change of status and situation. See Isaiah 62:2-4

6. they went out from you on foot: They were driven by the Babylonians out of Jerusalem into exile on foot.

God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne: The restoration will reverse the exile even in the means of travel.

7: This verse reflects Isaiah 40:4.

9: Isaiah 60:1-3.

Comment: "Baruch is one of the deuterocanonical and pseudonymous Old Testament

writings which are not found in the Hebrew Bible and have been termed, in Reformation tradition, the Apocrypha.... The book presupposes for its situation the Babylonian exile (586-538), but it consists of various materials written later. Our reading comes from the last part, comprising two prophetic poems modeled on Deutero-Isaiah, and forms the concluding section of the second poem. The fictitious situation it assumes is that of Israel waiting to return from exile.... The miracle of the return is pictured in a series of supernatural events reminiscent of Isaiah 40 and, earlier still, of the exodus itself. [2]

"This reading is a magnificent choice for Advent 2. It matches the quotation of Isaiah 40 in the gospel, and it captures the church's Advent stance in the thrilling words: 'Arise, O Jerusalem! Stand upon the height and look toward the east.' The symbolism of salvation coming from the east like the dawn is deeply embedded in the church's Advent lore." [3]

Luke 1:68-79

{68} "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. {69} He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, {70} as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, {71} that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. {72} Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, {73} the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us {74} that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, {75} in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. {76} And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, {77} to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. {78} By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, {79} to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

69. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David: Literally, "He has raised up for us *a horn of salvation.*" The phrase "horn of ...salvation" is used in 2 Samuel 22:3 (2 Kingdoms 22:3 in the Septuagint), Psalm 18:3, with reference to Yahweh. Yahweh is the horn of salvation raised up in the house of David. In the New Testament song, the horn of salvation is the "Lord" whom John will precede to prepare his way.

76. you child: Zechariah addresses his infant son, John.

will be called the prophet of the Most High: John will be a prophet, like the "holy prophets from of old."

you will go before the Lord: As sung by Zechariah "the Lord" would refer to Yahweh. As understood by the readers of the gospel, "the Lord" is Jesus.

to prepare his ways: A link, conscious or not, with Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1

77. to give knowledge of salvation...by the forgiveness of their sins: An explicit connection with Luke 3:3.

Comment: The "Psalm" for the day is the Benedictus, sung by Zechariah, "filled with the Holy Spirit," in response to the question, "What then will this child become?" (verse 66). The song addresses John's particular ministry in verses 76-77.

Philippians 1:3-11

{3} I thank my God every time I remember you, {4} constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, {5} because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. {6} I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. {7} It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. {8} For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. {9} And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight {10} to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, {11} having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

5. the first day until now: When Paul left Macedonia, "in the early days of the Gospel," only the Philippians helped Paul, and they have continued to do so until the present (Philippians

4:14-18).

6. *the day of Jesus Christ*: The second coming of Jesus. Also verse 10, where the emphasis is on the judgment.

Comment: Verses 3-8: Thanksgiving; verses 9-11: Intercession. "Paul is in prison at Ephesus (?). The Philippians' envoy, Epaphroditus, who has brought along a 'care parcel' for the incarcerated apostle, had fallen sick but has now recovered. Paul has also heard rumors that false teachers had either arrived or were about to descend to stir up trouble in this faithful community, and so he is somewhat anxious about them. He sends his second letter (1:1-3:1, 4:47) to tell them the new about himself and Epaphroditus and to exhort them to unity. These concerns are reflected in the thanksgiving and intercession."

Luke 3:1-6

{1} In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, {2} during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. {3} He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, {4} as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out 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 made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth;{6}and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

1. *the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius*: Tiberius succeeded Augustus as the second emperor of Rome in 14 A.D. The fifteenth year would be 29 A.D.

Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea: Pilate was appointed in 26 or 27 A.D. His term of office may have lasted until 37.

Herod was ruler of Galilee: Herod Antipas ruled from 4 B.C. (the death of Herod the Great) until 39 A.D.

Philip ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis: Tetrarch from 4 B.C. until his death in 33/34 A.D.

Lysanias ruler of Abilene: This Lysanias cannot be identified with certainty.

2. *high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas*: Annas was appointed high priest by the Roman governor, P. Sulpicius Quirinius (the Quirinius of census fame)⁵ in 6 A.D. and deposed in 15. He was succeeded by his son-in-law Caiaphas who held the office from 18 to 36.

"The six-fold synchronism serves the historical perspective of Lucan theology. It cannot be understood as an exact dating of the appearance of John on the Palestinian scene nor, consequently, of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It is, rather, intended to provide a Roman and Palestinian ambience, a description of the Palestinian situation in which John's appearance and inauguration took place." [4]

the word of God came to John son of Zechariah: The phrase is used of Shemaiah, the man of God in 1 Kings 12:22. It identifies John with the prophets of the past. John has already been introduced in Luke 1:15, 44.

3. *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*: John is explicitly identified as "the Baptist" in 7:20, 33; 9:19. "*Baptisma* must be understood of a ritual washing having a religious connotation, and the following phrases specify the connotation. It is associated with metanoia, 'repentance' (lit. 'a change of mind,' but when used in a religious sense, it connotes 'conversion, reform of life'...." [5] The purpose of John's baptism is to effect "the forgiveness of sins. In 3:16, Jesus' baptism will be with "the Holy Spirit and fire."

4-6: Isaiah 40:3-5. In the original "in the wilderness" does not modify "crying out," but rather "make ready." The quotation is used to explain why John was in the wilderness. And it affirms John's prophetic identity.

wilderness: On the one hand the wilderness is a place of disorder and danger, and yet, on the other, it is the place where Yahweh is directly present to his people.

Comment: John is Jesus' relative (Luke 1:36) and a prophet who spoke of "making ready the

way of the Lord," who for the readers of Luke's gospel would have been Jesus.

Reflection

The season of Advent is not just a season of preparation for the Nativity, but rather for the mighty acts of God (like the Exodus and the restoration after the exile) which culminate in the ministry of Jesus. The first lesson (Malachi) looks ahead to the sending of a messenger who will purify the priests and the worship of the people. Baruch reflects the eager anticipation of end of the exile and a triumphant return of the exiles to Jerusalem. Paul views his own ministry as a preparation for the parousia, Christ's return

The "Psalm" turns our attention to John who came as a forerunner to prepare the way for the Lord (Jesus) to return in righteousness and judgment, and the Gospel develops this theme, identifying John with the holy prophets of old.

The first and second coming of Jesus as well as the coming of Yahweh to the exiles are all alike in that God's people waited expectantly for them, preparing themselves by lives of holiness and righteousness.

Paul praises the Christians in Philippi not for their faith, but for their faithfulness, for their sharing in the proclamation of the Gospel, and prays that their love may overflow and that they may produce "the harvest of righteousness." In the prayer of the day we pray that God will help us also to prepare for the return of his Son coming.

Hymns [6]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), Hymnal Supplement 1991 (e.g. 725s) and LBW (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

35 --E--Hark, the Glad	782s --P--Christ, Whose Glory
36 --D--On Jordan's Banks	725v --P--Blessed Be the God
26 --D--Prepare the Royal	38, 507, 556, 38, 7
37 --I--Hark! A Thrilling	

Prayers of the People [7]

P or A: Gracious God, you sent John the Baptist to announce the coming of your Son that the way of the Lord would be prepared. Prepare us for the coming of Jesus through your gift of forgiveness and the truth of your Word. We pray by saying "God, light of our path," and respond, "**Hear our prayer.**"

A: For the whole church, that it may ever submit to your refining fire, seeking to be fashioned not by human hands and desires, but by you alone. God, light of our path, **Hear...**

A: For the nations, that they may come to know you as light for a world made dark and frightening by human greed and ambition. God, light of our path, **Hear...**

A: For all those persecuted for speaking out against oppressive governments, that they may be strengthened by you, lover of justice and advocate of the poor. God, light of our path, **Hear...**

A: For the sick, the dying, and their friends and families, that they may be touched by your healing hands and held in your comforting arms. We pray especially for _____, and those whom we name in our hearts... . God, light of our path, **Hear...**

A: For our own congregation, that we may be steadfast in faithfulness as children of God, adopted into your family and heirs of salvation through the waters of baptism. Strengthen us to accept your call to live as christians to one another. God, light of our path, **Hear...**

A: For those preparing to affirm the wondrous gift of their baptism, that they may come to know the depth of your grace and mercy through the study of your Word. God, light of our

path, **Hear...**

Or [8]

Presider or deacon

As we prepare for Jesus Christ to come among us, let us offer prayers to God who will bring all to completion in the day of his appearing.

Deacon or other leader

For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ.

For N our bishop and all bishops, for the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority.

For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for those in prison.

For the dying and the dead.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Joining our voices with the blessed Virgin Mary and with all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

O Rising Sun, brightness of light eternal, sun of justice, come and shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

Notes

[1] David Noel Freedman, B.E. Willoughby, “*mal’ak*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren). Vol. VIII. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997, p. 323.

[2] Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*. Collegeville Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1971-1974, p. 458.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 459.

[4] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (1-IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981, p. 453.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 459.

[6] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[7] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

[8] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>