



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Advent 2 – Year C
December 9, 2018

[RCL]: Baruch 5:1-9; Canticle 16; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

Baruch 5:1-9

In the previous chapter of Baruch, the city of Jerusalem speaks as a mourning mother to her children who are in exile, encouraging them:

“Go, my children, go; for I have been left desolate. I have taken off the robe of peace and put on sackcloth for my supplication... Take courage, my children, cry to God, and he will deliver you from the power and hand of the enemy. For I have put my hope in the Everlasting to save you, and joy has come to me from the Holy One, because of the mercy that will soon come to you from your everlasting savior. For I sent you out with sorrow and weeping, but God will give you back to me with joy and gladness forever.” - Baruch 4:19-23

In this passage, the prophet addresses to Jerusalem a message of great hope: he tells her to remove the garment of her mourning and replace it with a robe of righteousness, beauty, and glory that comes from God, for God has commanded that her children should be brought back to her. He has “ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low,” by the preaching of John the Baptist; Christians proclaim that the “fragrant tree” God would command to shade Israel was fulfilled in the Cross of Christ.

Advent is a season for Christians both to remember God’s saving visitation of his people in the past and to anticipate the fulfillment of his promise to “come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead” and usher in life everlasting. In like fashion, this passage at once captures Israel’s immediate hope of being restored to the land God gave to their ancestors and their hope, which merges with ours, as it looks forward to the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises in Jesus Christ.

- Can you identify any language in this passage that anticipates or prefigures baptismal imagery?
- Galatians 4:26 states that the Jerusalem above “is free, and she is our mother.” How might this affect our reading of Baruch 4:19-23?

Canticle 16

The song of Zechariah wonderfully captures what God’s salvation is all about. Zechariah begins by declaring God “blessed,” just as we do every day in the Mass: “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” We are not merely calling God supremely happy, like the archangel Gabriel calls Mary; rather we are calling God the very source of *beatitudo* and perfection of all creation. Zechariah then carries on, describing why God is blessed. He has visited his people with the purpose of freeing them by means of the anticipated Savior. But freed *for what?* Just as when God delivered his people who were enslaved in Egypt, they are being freed in order to worship God: “Free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.” It is the effects of sin in our lives that God is saving us from, that our lives might be fully given to God without fear or hindrance, and so that he might fully share his blessedness with us. This has always been the purpose of God’s covenants: to restore humanity to communion with himself, ever since Adam turned away in the Garden. It is for this reason that John the Baptist comes onto the scene, preparing the way for Jesus by preaching God’s overwhelming generosity in declaring amnesty for repentant sinners. “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” “And blessed be his Kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.”

- What would it look like to be “free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight” in your everyday life?
- Have you experienced worshipful and joyful freedom at some point in your life?

Philippians 1:3-11

“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.” This is precisely our Advent hope as we wait for the day of Jesus Christ’s return. The good work begun in us was our baptism, where we were joined to Jesus Christ as members of his mystical Body, forgiven our sins, and given a new source of life in God by the giving of the Holy Spirit. Paul prays that the life of God given to the Philippians as a seed in baptism would come to maturity in an overflowing of love and prudence, virtues that produce the likeness of God in us because God *is* love (cf. 1 John 4:7-9). These virtues enable us to discern what is good in every circumstance and to will to do it wholeheartedly, producing the “harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” God is glorified above all by his likeness being reproduced in his people, and so he is at work in us, pouring his life and love into us, transforming us into transparencies of himself—holy, blameless, pure, and righteous. This is a wonderful gospel: let us join with Paul in proclaiming it, no matter the cost!

- Who is one person God is stirring you to share the Gospel with? Who can you ask to help you pray for that person, so that God might lay the foundations of faith in him or her?
- How is God calling you to mature in the life of Christ?

Luke 3:1-6

The Evangelist Luke takes great pains to provide historical context for John the Baptist's preaching of repentance in the wilderness. First, Luke places us in the timeline of emperors, governors, tetrarchs and high priests—the “this world” history defined by the plans of powerful men and their governments. Then Luke places us in the timeline of salvation history with the quote from the prophet Isaiah (vv. 4-6). Here the eternal plans of God intersect with a particular place and time, and at that intersection is a particular person making a unique summons to repent and be forgiven. This call to re-think the direction of our lives in preparation for the Lord's visitation is, however, remarkably universal—repentance is the great equalizer. Jews as well as Gentiles, strong as well as weak, rich as well as poor, people of the 1st century and people of the 21st century alike must turn humbly to God to ask his forgiveness and start living a life that bears good fruit. But it is an equality that paradoxically favors the Gentile, the weak, the poor, the humble, and even the one without modern prejudices against a notion of divine revelation.

We too, therefore, must examine ourselves in light of Jesus' imminent return, and ask that God would give us grace with joy to make good on our baptismal repentance and renunciations, that he would help us make every crooked way straight, every prideful barrier low to receive his grace, every deficiency filled, and our roughness smoothed, so that we might greet Jesus with joy at his return.

- Do you find yourself wishing you had more time before Jesus returns, or can you say “Maranatha, come Lord Jesus” without hesitation?
- What crooked ways might our Lord want to make straight in you? What obstacles have you placed in front of him that he needs to remove so that you can more joyfully anticipate his return?

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