

Our Sunday Readings

BARUCH 5:1-9
PSALM 126:1-6
PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6,8-11
LUKE 3:1-6

And All Shall See

BARUCH 5:1-9

Reading closely

1. How do you envision Jerusalem before and after the city hears these prophetic words?
2. What all will God do?
3. What imagery most captures your attention?

Living the word

4. Who would be uplifted by these words today?
5. Has God ever turned your sorrow to joy?
6. Is your path right now easy or difficult?

THE FIRST READING

Who's Baruch?

Baruch was a follower of the prophet Jeremiah, who lived during the Babylonian conquest of Israel. Baruch recorded much of what Jeremiah prophesied.

Sin and Mercy

The Book of Baruch invited its first hearers to reflect on what caused the Babylonian invasion: namely, the failure of God's people to obey his laws. The book invites later generations to confess their sins and seek forgiveness. The passage for this Sunday promises healing and restoration for the conquered city of Jerusalem and for all who repent and seek God's mercy.

A glorious restoration

Baruch personifies Jerusalem and urges her to exchange her sorrow and misery for symbols of glory and justice (vv.1-2). Everyone, including the city's enemies, will see this amazing transformation (vv.3-4).

Jerusalem will then watch as those who fled the city during times of unrest return home. These people return like royalty (vv.5-6). God will also make their journey comfortable by smoothing their path and even providing shade (vv.7-8).

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths!"

LUKE 3:1-6

Reading closely

1. Name your president, senators, and all your representatives. Name your pope, bishop, and pastor or administrator. This list is comparable to vv.1-2.
2. What might it have been like for John to have received the word of God?
3. Why might God have chosen John?
4. How might John have felt about God's call?
5. How might John have changed because of his prophetic role?
6. How might people have reacted to John?

Living the word

7. Have you ever felt called by God to do something?
8. In what ways do you need to prepare yourself for God's arrival?

THE GOSPEL READING

Setting the stage

Other Greek writers of Luke's era also began their literary works by noting the people who ruled and where they ruled. They did this in order to establish the historical context of the events they wrote about. Such introductions also lend weight and solemnity to the events that follow. Some of the prophetic literature in our Old Testament begins the same way.

Luke might also have been making other points with this introduction.

- despite their positions of power, God doesn't call any of these people to announce the gospel
- both John the Baptist and Jesus will come into conflict with those in power
- although John's ministry begins in one small pocket of the Roman Empire, it has repercussions that stretch from Jerusalem to Rome itself (*all flesh shall see the salvation of God*)

The desert

The desert was a religiously significant place for the Jews. When God led their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt, he led them into the Sinai desert and formed a covenant with them.

Centuries after the Exodus, God's people were conquered by the Babylonians, and some were forced to live far away in Babylon. Once this time of oppression had ended, God called Isaiah to urge people to make a new Exodus by journeying through the desert to rebuild their homeland.

Time of salvation

John quotes the passage from Isaiah to declare that God is coming with salvation, but only for those who turn away from sin and accept this new era. He echoes other Old Testament prophets in saying that God is coming, so people must amend their ways or face condemnation.

Baptism

The Jordan river marks the eastern boundary of Israel and is that nation's largest river. Many significant events in Israel's history happened at that river, making it the perfect place for John to begin his ministry.

Jews immersed themselves and objects in water as a way of ritually purifying them. John adapted this practice to suit his prophetic ministry. He makes baptism a sign that people are sorry for their sins and ready to embrace whatever is coming.

John's baptism isn't the same as Christian baptism. John's baptism is only a sign of contrition, whereas Christian baptism also takes away a person's sins. Christian baptism also immerses believers into the life and death of Christ and makes them part of a new spiritual community.

PRAYER

Opening Prayer for the Second Sunday of Advent

God of power and mercy,
 open our hearts in welcome.
 Remove the things that hinder us from receiving
 Christ with joy so that we may share his wisdom
 and become one with him
 when he comes in glory,
 for he lives and reigns with you
 and the Holy Spirit, one God,
 for ever and ever. Amen.