

scriptures; Word of God; prophetic tradition; typology; Christ, the fulfilment of the scriptures

Closing Prayer

With tender comfort and transforming power
you come into our midst,
O God of mercy and might.

Make ready a way in the wilderness,
clear a straight path in our hearts,
and form us into a repentant people,
that the advent of your Son
may find us watchful and eager for the glory he reveals.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain,
whose day draws near:
your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening Prayers : ICEL Collects, Advent 2, Year B²

CPL • LBC Year B Advent 2.odt • 2020-10-22

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

The Second Sunday of Advent

(Sunday between 4 and 10 December inclusive)

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 40.1-11	Prediction of deliverance for God's people
Psalms 85.1-2,8-13 or 85.8-13	Prayer for peace and justice
2 Peter 3.8-15a	The Day of the Lord will come suddenly
Mark 1.1-8	John the Baptist, the forerunner

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The beginning of the good news

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”,

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

Mark 1.1-8 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

Today's reading comes from the very beginning of Mark's gospel. After quoting from a prophecy of Isaiah (actually Malachi 3.1 then Isaiah 40.3), we are plunged straight into the proclamation of John the Baptist. Mark has no infancy narrative, either for John or for Jesus. Why is this? The focus on John's ministry helps us to see that more was involved in the incarnation than simply the birth of Jesus. We can see that Mark's work is not one of biography, neither does he seek to prove that Jesus is the 'Son of God'. It is a gospel of message and action, that tries to draw the reader into the inspiring story.

Although John fits into the role of messenger or forerunner, he also seems to be like the Old Testament prophets, especially Elijah, who wore rough clothes too. John is rather cryptically identified with Elijah in Mark 9.11-13. John appears in the wilderness or desert, a place of testing and rebellion, but also a place of renewed love (Jesus is tested in the desert, Mark 1.12-13). John is 'a voice crying in the wilderness', a solitary voice, as prophets tend to be. He proclaims: 'Make ready for the way of the Lord'. What is this 'way', which is a common theme in second Isaiah (see Isaiah 40.3; 42.16; 43.16, 19; 48.17; 49.11; 51.10)?

In our gospel reading today John offers baptism for repentance. Baptism was something that had been offered before, but to those wanting to become Jews. The new thing John does is to offer it to Jews. Repentance is a positive thing, because it implies change, whereas remorse is fixed only on the past. The people who came to John confessed aloud. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement, started his Class Meetings with members confessing in the presence of others (cf. James 5.16). We are not so used to this approach today. Are there benefits in it?

The people who came to John looked up to him, but John said someone was coming after him who would be more worthy to be looked up to. John points to the difference between him and Jesus, which is that he baptizes with water but Jesus will baptize people with the Holy Spirit. We don't know if Jesus did actually baptize people. Perhaps his disciples did (see John 3.22; 4.2), but he did tell them to use this sign (Matthew 28.19), and it became a permanent feature of the church.

Quotations

1

Our Lord says 'Watch!' Now I consider this word watching a remarkable word; remarkable because the idea is not so obvious as might appear at first sight... We are not simply to believe, but to watch; not simply to love, but to watch; not simply to obey, but to watch; to watch for what? Most of us have a general idea what is meant by believing, fearing, loving and obeying; but perhaps we do not contemplate or apprehend what is meant by watching.

And I conceive it is one of the main points, which, in a practical way, will be found to separate the true and perfect servants of God from the multitude called Christians. I am speaking of two characters, the true and consistent character, and the inconsistent; and these I say will be found in no slight degree discriminated and distinguished by this one mark — true Christians, whoever they are, watch, and inconsistent Christians do not.

John Henry Newman, 'Watching', in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. IV. 1875

2

In Mark, John the Baptizer seems to emerge suddenly; he 'appeared' (v. 4). He is an envoy, a messenger. What John announces prepares what Jesus is going to proclaim. John baptizes in the desert as a sign of life, and he calls for repentance (v. 4), namely, to change what must be changed, to straighten what is crooked, to seek justice and to prepare earnestly for the encounter with the Lord who comes daily in the midst of what is insignificant in this world. John the Baptizer represents the function which God, who reveals his love and presence, fulfills in what we call the Old Testament. This revelation reaches its fullness with Jesus.

Sharing the word through the liturgical year / Gustavo Gutiérrez. 1997

Related topics

For further study:

Advent; Jesus' coming – past, present and future; parousia; eschatology; conversion; non-violence; cost of discipleship; authenticity of the