

Notes for Next Sunday

Second Sunday in Advent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 40:1-11). The Lord's prophet reminds the Israelites that they are still His covenant people. Repetition is the Hebraic way of driving home a point; Isaiah used this literary device often. Luther: "God's people are those who need comfort because they have been wounded and terrified by the Law and they are an empty vessel capable of receiving comfort. Only those who are afflicted have comfort and are capable of it, because comfort means nothing unless there is a malady" (AE 17:3). The Lord promises comfort and restoration for the Babylonian exiles. These promises, fulfilled through John the Baptist's ministry, have personal consequences for you and for all people. Just as the Lord doubled the comfort and forgiveness for the exiles, He has doubled comfort and forgiveness for you in the person of His Son.

Epistle (2 Peter 3:8-14). Knowing that this world will not last, we are to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt 6:33). Sadly, we are often distracted by "the cares of the world" (Mt 13:22). Despite our many failures, the Lord graciously works through Word and Sacrament to forgive our sins and to renew us in the faith. He will preserve us unto the end.

Gospel (Mark 1:1-8). Mark begins by telling of (1) John's call to repentance, (2) Baptism, and (3) eager expectation of the Messiah's coming. John warns us not to adopt worldly values and expectations. Happily, all of us who are baptized have received the promised Holy Spirit, who continually forgives us, restores us, and focuses us on the splendor of Jesus' second coming. The theme of preparation introduced in the Gospel for the First Sunday in Advent (Mark 13:33-37) is continued in the text for the Second Sunday in Advent. It describes one of the messengers who prepared the way for the mission, ministry, and message of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." ⁹ You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

In chs. 1-35 Isaiah prophesies against the backdrop of the Assyrian threat against Judah and Jerusalem, in chs. 36-39 he records Assyria's failure and warns about the future rise of Babylon, and in chs. 40-66 he

writes as if the Babylonian exile of Judah were almost over. He comforts the exiles and spiritual Israel of all times with the promise of deliverance from sin through the incarnation and death of the Messiah. (CSB)

40:1-2 A full pardon. In our own lives, we face the judgment that we have broken God's laws. We all fall short of what His holiness demands. But there is a great source of comfort for us. God Himself, speaking through His Holy Word, has issued us a full pardon.

40:1 Comfort, comfort. Repeated for emphasis ("Comfort greatly"). The double imperative is found also in 51:9, 17; 52:1, 11; 57:14; 62:10. (CSB)

40:1 my people. After all their unfaithfulness, all their rebellion, all their sins, they are still his people. God remains their God. (PBC)

40:2 sin ... paid for ... double. † Although she could do nothing to make amends for the debt incurred by her sin, nevertheless the Lord would let her receive good things in "double" proportion to the punishment she deserved (cf. 61:7). (CSB)

40:3 make straight ... a highway. According to His eternal plan, "the way of the Lord" has as its predestined goal the redemption of all humankind through His Son, Jesus Christ. All obstacles will be cleared from His highway of salvation. His chosen people will come forth from the grave of the exile and survive the rise and fall of empires in order that the Savior might be born "of the house and lineage of David" (Lk 2:4) as foretold. (TLSB)

40:4 rough ground ... level. All obstacles to redemption of God's people shall be taken out of the way. (Concordia Bible)

40:6 voice. The Lord's messenger. (TLSB)

40:6 like grass. The message to be called out or read aloud is sobering. "All flesh is grass, and all its covenant love is like a flower or the field." At his call Isaiah had drawn attention to the sinful nature of humanity by saying that the people are "unclean of lips" (6:5). Original sin and its consequence, universal death, is the reason for the declaration that "all flesh is grass," that is, we are temporal, unreliable, and dying. (CC)

40:10 reward ... recompense. The Lord brings punishment for the wicked and blessings for the faithful. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Second Peter 3:8-14

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

3:8 do not forget. If people in Peter's day thought that God would never return (if indeed He was ever there in the first place), how much more hardened and apathetic are the people of today with two thousand more years of getting comfortable with their "nothing will happen" mentality. (PBC)

3:8 a thousand years are like a day. Peter refers to Psalm 90:4, an ancient prayer of Moses. It is important to recognize that Peter is not saying a thousand years and a day are the same. Nor is he providing a numerical formula for predicting the day of Christ's return, as some have suggested. He says that to the Lord one is "like" the other. Since God is eternal, what seems to us to be long time is not very long at all to Him. (TLSB)

3:9 not slow. He had many people in Asia Minor to call to faith. And the only reason the world has lasted this long is that God still has people to gather into His church. Let His patience arouse in not apathy but evangelism! (PBC)

3:10 day of the Lord. The Last Day, when the Lord returns to judge the ungodly and to redeem the faithful. (TLSB)

3:11 Since everything will be destroyed. Luther: "Since you know that everything must pass away, both heaven and earth, consider how completely you must be prepared with a saintly and godly life and conduct to meet this Day" (AE 30:197). (TLSB)

3:11 what people ought you to be. What difference does this foreknowledge of judgment day make in our daily lives? Peter is blunt. He calls on people who are washed, justified, sanctified, and filled with the Spirit's power and gifts to "live holy and godly lives...be.. spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him. (PBC)

3:13 home of righteousness. "Righteousness" is very dear to a Christian. It is that reconciling gift of God in Jesus Christ which is the very antithesis the condition of man and the whole universe ever since the fall. (Buls)

3:14 spotless, blameless. Cf 1 Peter 1:19. Christians are to make every effort to conform to the character of Christ. These efforts do not gain salvation (Jesus has already accomplished that), but they do bear witness to His amazing grace toward all people. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"— ³"a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" ⁴And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

1:4 John came. Mark, like John, has no nativity narrative, but begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. The name John means "The LORD is gracious." (CSB)

1:4 baptizing. John's practice of baptizing those who came to him in repentance was so characteristic of his ministry that he became known as "the Baptist" or "the Baptizer." (CSB)

1:4 the desert region. Prophets and their activity are frequently set in the wilderness (e.g., Elijah; 1 Kings 19:4-8). Here, it probably refers to where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea. (TLSB)

1:4 baptism. John was preaching repentance-baptism, i.e., baptism that was preceded or accompanied by repentance. Baptism was not new to John's audience. They knew of baptism for Gentile converts, but had not heard that the descendants of Abraham (Jews) needed to repent and be baptized. (CSB)

1:5 whole ... all. John attracted large numbers. For this reason, Herod began to worry about his influence. (6:17-20). (TLSB)

1:5 Jordan River. The principal river in Palestine, beginning in the snows of Mount Hermon and ending in the Dead Sea. Its closest point to Jerusalem is about 20 miles. (CSB)

1:6 camel's hair ... leather belt. Worn by Elijah and other prophets. Jews of Jesus' day expected Elijah to return just before the Messiah would come. Jesus later equated John's ministry with this expected return of Elijah (9:11-13; cf 6:15). (TLSB)

1:6 locusts and wild honey. John's diet was just as unusual as his attire. These foods functioned as "enacted prophecies" against the prevailing worldliness and excessive concern for creature comfort. Locusts are mentioned as food in the Cairo Damascus Document 12:14. They were cleansed by water or fire before eaten. (TLSB)

1:7 whose sandal I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. Tying and untying the master's shoes were among the lowliest tasks performed by slaves. Thus, John casts himself as a humble servant of the coming Messiah. (TLSB)