

December 10-16

Second Sunday of Advent B

Church Begins at Home

An Advent Hymn for the Week

(can be read or sung after lighting the Advent wreath)

On Jordan's banks the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of Kings.

Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin;
Make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.

Text: Charles Coffin, 1676-1749



Daily Readings

SUNDAY'S GOSPEL Mark 1:1-8

This week's readings remind us that the coming of the Messiah must be understood in the context of the people of Israel's experience with Exile — that period of time after Jerusalem was destroyed (587 B.C.) and the monarchy ended. A hope was proclaimed by the prophets that a new king, a Messiah, would restore the kingdom of Israel. We begin the week listening to John the Baptist described in terms of the prophet Isaiah as one who will "prepare the way of the Lord."

MONDAY Isaiah 40:1-11

Chapter 40 of Isaiah begins a section (chapters 40-55) often called "Second Isaiah". The original prophet Isaiah (chapters 5-12) lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah around 740 B.C. Second Isaiah was written during the Exile (587-538 B.C.) This is the passage from which Mark quotes in yesterday's reading to describe the work of John the Baptist.

TUESDAY Isaiah 26:7-15

In the days before paved roads when the primary mode of travel was walking, having a level path on which to walk was a real blessing. In yesterday's reading the prophet says God will prepare a level road on which the exiles will return home. The prophet here uses another metaphor: that living according to God's Law is like walking on a smooth path.

WEDNESDAY Mark 11:27-33

Not everyone was willing to recognize John the Baptist as God's messenger preparing the way for the Messiah. Here Jesus engages the temple leaders in a discussion about the source of his authority to heal and forgive. Jesus asks them to make a judgment about John's ministry.

THURSDAY Malachi 2:10—3:4

This passage is either a criticism of idolatry (by means of the metaphor of unfaithfulness in marriage) or, more likely, a criticism of unfaithful marriage relationships themselves. Malachi announces a divine judgment as a response to those who weary God by complaining that the wicked prosper. The identity of the messenger is not stated, though the conclusion to Malachi (4:5) connects him with the prophet Elijah. The Christian community sees in the "messenger who prepares the way" a foreshadowing of John the Baptist.

FRIDAY Acts 11:1-18

The original Christian community was all Jewish and it was a common assumption that Jesus was the Messiah for the people of Israel. But God led Peter to see that Jesus is the Messiah all people, Gentiles as well as Jews. Peter here recounts how he came to realize this truth, including a reference to John's preparatory role to Jesus.

SATURDAY John 1:6-8, 19-28 (Tomorrow's Gospel reading)

John the Baptist remains on stage for the Third Sunday of Advent. In this passage, people ask John if he himself might not be the promised messiah.

Blessing of the Advent Wreath

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
ruler of the universe.

John the Baptist called the
people to prepare the Lord's way,
for the kingdom of heaven has
come near.

Bless us as we light the candles
on this wreath. Baptize us with
the fire of your Spirit, that we
may be a light shining in the
darkness, welcoming others as
Christ has welcomed us, for he is
our light and our salvation.