

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*Gospel: Luke 3:1-6*

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

‘The voice of one crying out in the desert:  
“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.  
Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”’

### REFLECTION 1:

### ‘CLOTHED IN CHRIST’

If you ever watched an award ceremony, you are probably familiar with the fascination many have for the fashions worn by the stars. As each takes a turn in the spotlight the question arises: ‘What are they wearing?’

On the Second Sunday of Advent, the prophet Baruch (Bar 5: 1-9) poses this same question to all those who are preparing for the coming of Christ: What are you wearing? Our response to this question will reveal the authenticity of our desire to recognise and welcome the comings of Jesus we heard about in the liturgy last week. During their long wait for the promised Messiah, the ancient Israelites went through several changes of clothes: their ‘spiritual wardrobe’ reflected their circumstances as well as their interior posture towards God. For instance, in the time of the patriarchs, the Hebrew tribes wore the garb of the nomad. When they were forced to work at brick-making in Egypt, they were clad as slaves. After their liberation and during their desert trek to the land of God’s promise, the people of Israel wore the dress of the new bride. Tempted by the false gods and their cults, the Israelites were, at times, unfaithful to their divine covenant. But even when they wore the dress of the harlot, God was willing to forgive them, take them back and clothe them once again in holiness and love. Such was the situation that prompted the invitation of Baruch that is preserved in today’s first reading. Having been pummelled by her persecutors, Jerusalem wore for a long time the robes of mourning and misery. Baruch who authored this text was Jeremiah’s secretary and his references are to the Babylonian exile. It was a call to leave behind their widow’s weeds and be dressed anew in glory and integrity.

In today’s Gospel (Luke 3:1-6), John the Baptist celebrates that intervention by inviting his contemporaries to prepare themselves to welcome the salvation of God in the person and through the ministry of Jesus. John proclaimed a baptism whereby sinners would cast off their sin-stained rags and don the robes of repentance. Jesus preached a baptism that initiated believers into the very life of God. Washed clean by the blood of Jesus, the redeemed are to put on Christ and live in holiness and wholeness of life.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic Julian of Norwich described the coming of Christ in flesh and blood as having put on our human tunic ‘aged with sweat and his body, close-fitting and threadbare’. Because of Jesus’ actions, said Julian, we have received a merciful exchange – the cloak of Christ that envelopes us with

endless love. Not only are we privileged to be clothed with Christ, but we are his crown. Dressed with Christ, we are blessed with dignity and grace that we are to preserve and protect, not only for ourselves but with all those who are similarly clothed, blessed and graced.

One day we will all be asked the question – ‘What are you wearing?’ Will we say with our words and our works and our wardrobe that we have indeed put on the Lord Jesus?

## **REFLECTION 2: HERALD OF A NEW ERA**

Legend says that while painting The Last Supper, Leonardo da Vinci had a terrible fight with someone. Afterwards he went to his studio, picked up his brush and prepared to paint the face of Jesus. To his dismay he couldn't make a single decent stroke. So, he put down his brush, went to the man he had fought with and asked his forgiveness. Leonardo returned to his studio and resumed painting the face of Jesus. Sometimes our lives are like that; we seem to be blocked off from doing the good deed when there's a raw anger within. We know that we have done wrong and the joy we once experienced seems to evaporate until we do the decent thing and admit it and repent of it.

Today, the second Sunday of Advent, the stark figure of John the Baptist strides like a Colossus through the pages of Luke's gospel (Lk. 3: 1-6) ‘Turn away from your sins.....and God will forgive you. John was a bridge between the Old and the New Testament and is often referred to as the last of the Old Testament prophets. He sums up in his person and in his message the burden of his people's hopes and expectations. He is the herald of the new era who points beyond himself to Jesus and prepares for his contemporaries the event that would forever change the course of their lives and the world. There was a tendency in early Christian times to regard John the Baptist as a rival of Jesus or even a messianic figure, but now Luke takes great care to portray the Baptist as subordinated to Jesus in all ways. And yet, in John's preaching and his mission the old and the new have dovetailed. Like a prism the task of John is to refract the light and reflect it away from himself and to focus the eyes of his hearers upon the person of the Lord Jesus. According to the Roman Calendar Tiberius Caesar's reign lasted from August 19th, 14 AD to 37 AD, so the 15th year of his rule would have been c. 28-29 AD, so dating the beginning of Jesus' ministry - the secular desert of needful humanity. John the Baptist was introduced as a teacher of repentance and forgiveness for the one truly just and everlasting ruler, Jesus Christ. Notice how Luke, a physician, a Greek and a Gentile, emphasises that salvation is for all peoples, Jews as well as Gentiles. He writes that, ‘all salvation shall see the salvation of God’ (3:6). Salvation is not selective or for the righteous, salvation is a universal gift.

In Jesus day the prophet Isaiah's words gave expression to the people's hopes for a Saviour that would draw God's people together once more. In the spirit of the Baptist, we await with eager anticipation and confident joy his second coming. The prophet Baruch (first reading) tells us that when at last all peoples come together to meet the returning Lord, theirs will be a divinely negotiated peace. The world today, especially in the Middle East is in a deplorable mess and no body or organisation seems to have the ‘silver bullet’ that might solve the crisis. We are all in this together, none of us has an opt-out clause, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not optional, and it is the one and only plan that will lead to our peace where ‘all humanity shall see the Salvation of God’.