

Ken Overberg, S.J.
Second Sunday of Advent, 2018

As daily darkness lengthens in the northern hemisphere, the Church invites us into the light. As holiday preparations become more stressful, the Church invites us into peaceful prayer. It is Advent, bringing glad tidings of comfort, hope, and joy: our God is with us! To proclaim this good news, the gospels for the Sundays of Advent always follow the same pattern: the first Sunday looks ahead to God's final coming at the end of time (as we heard last week). The second and third Sundays turn our attention to John the Baptist. The fourth Sunday focuses on Mary and/or Joseph, this year describing Mary's visit with Elizabeth.

Our Advent readings frequently speak of time and history. This is not surprising, for both Judaism and Christianity believe that God works within history, freeing and choosing and loving people in real times and places.

This Sunday's first reading, from the book of Baruch (actually written hundreds of years after the exile in Babylon, 587-538 BCE), returns to the past in order to move into the future. Baruch uses images of the return from exile in Babylon to speak about the new Jerusalem of the end time--and all this to stir up hope in the present.

The second reading, a passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians, reveals Paul's joy, affection for the people, and hope for their future.

The gospel introduces John the Baptizer (all the gospels describe John's ministry as setting the stage for Jesus). With almost solemn though not accurate historical details, Luke sets the stage for the action of God in John and then Jesus in a particular place and time in history. Luke quotes Isaiah to describe John's role in preparing the way for Jesus.

God's nourishing word now addresses us. Let's listen attentively!

+++++

Advent seems to come at the wrong time of the year. This season of beginnings contrasts with the end of the semester (for some of us) and the end of the calendar year (for all of us). Advent's prayerful pondering is jarred by shopping, holiday preparation, and this year profound political concern. A season of joy becomes a season of stress. Hope and love contend with glitter and greed and power.

Do the words of Baruch and Isaiah, Paul and Luke still speak to us? It is so easy to feel the opposite--hopeless and oppressed, like a people in exile. There are so many reasons: besides the distractions of the season, we experience earthquakes and floods, war and violence of all kinds, irresponsible political behavior,

discrimination and division.

How good it is, then, to ponder these words of hope and comfort, rooted in God's faithfulness, words for us today. Past, present, and future, God comes to save us, strengthening our hearts with abundant love. God's reign is in our midst!

This second week of Advent, consider how God has been active in your life's history. Where do you experience light, joy, mercy, and hope?