

2nd Sunday Advent Year "C"

December 8-9, 2018

Readings: Baruch 5: 1-9, Phil. 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

The prophet Baruch is not exactly a household name. His claim to fame, so to speak, was that he had been Jeremiah's secretary, and had perhaps accompanied the prophet into exile. This prophecy was written while the people of Israel were far from home. Babylon was due east of Jerusalem, and the poet here envisions God leading the exiles back across the desert.

Jerusalem is being personified here. Look to the East, look and see what is happening. Look to the road laid out in the desert, Jerusalem is told, for that road will be filled with those coming home.

This book presents vignettes from the history of the exile and reflections of that history to Jews. The main point has to do with how the New Jerusalem is described. The Jerusalem to be restored is not the Jerusalem of the exile, but the New Jerusalem of the end time. It is a vision of a new beginning, a new future.

Someone dared to envision a better future. What about today, what about us? Who will dare to believe in a better future?

The people at the time of Baruch had enough foresight to envision a New Jerusalem, coming from the East. These passages have been interpreted in a messianic sense—Jerusalem will rise from the ashes, so look East. Jesus Christ is the light from the East. Splendor will be restored to the ancient city. It will be rebuilt with splendor.

In this context, splendor is the effect of God's saving presence on Israel. God is Israel's light. The implication is that Israel's neighbors will see the glorious and resplendent salvation God will bring Israel. "The light of his glory," mentioned at the end of the reading again paints the visual image of God accompanying the returning exiles.

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It is time for us to speak loudly and clearly, lest the growing secularization continue to metastasize. Will we let it happen without even a word of protest? Perhaps some think it is useless to try, but it is not. We have all but accepted this wall between Church and state, yet nowhere in any of the documents is that image used.

We need people of vision, as in the time of Baruch to see a future better than the present. No, this is not a call to institute a state religion but rather an acknowledgement of the Judeo-Christian convictions that have been held in esteem for more than two centuries. They are being stripped before our eyes- or perhaps should I say “striped” before our eyes.

Perhaps you heard about the Nebraska elementary school principal who advised her teachers not to use Candy canes in their classrooms because the “J” symbolizes Jesus, and the red stripe symbolizes his Blood, while the white stripe recalls his resurrection. This is where we have arrived!

This is hardly unique to America. While the charter for the European Union makes mention of “enlightenment values” responsible for modern Europe, yet nowhere is there any mention of the Christian heritage of the continent, an historical fact beyond any possible dispute. It is set aside.

May Advent awaken in each of us a spiritual hunger for what is authentically Christian, motivating us to a greater sense of witnessing to our faith in our daily lives. But it is not only here in Church—quite honestly, we need your witness much more outside of these walls.

The season of Advent is indeed a season of looking forward, of looking to the East, from where our salvation comes. St. Paul assures us that the good work begun in us will be brought to fulfillment and completion, right up to the day of Christ Jesus.

To make ready the way of the Lord, we must clear away the brambles and weeds, which block his way. We begin by examining our own consciences, for some of that resides in our own hearts through sin. Advent is a great time to make a sacramental confessions, and we offer many opportunities here at the Cathedral between now and Christmas.

We do all this in the strong and firm hope that our Savior is coming to conquer sin and death, he who comes as the light of the world into our midst to transform us into his likeness, dispelling the darkness of sin and death.