

Second Sunday of Advent – December 10, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD double for all her sins. A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up onto a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by his strong arm; here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

Psalm: 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what God proclaims;
the LORD-for he proclaims peace to his people.
Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him,
glory dwelling in our land.

R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Kindness and truth shall meet;
justice and peace shall kiss.
Truth shall spring out of the earth,
and justice shall look down from heaven.

R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

The LORD himself will give his benefits;
our land shall yield its increase.
Justice shall walk before him,
and prepare the way of his steps.

R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-14

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out.

Since everything is to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be, conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved in flames and the elements melted by fire. But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

God made planets and black holes and galaxy clusters and who knows what else and then bestowed the God-self upon every microscopic atom of this exhaustive creation. What a sharing. Surely this would have been enough. But the planets and asteroids were not able to know they were receiving God. They were unable to willingly love God in return for this creation. Their manner of reception was only their rough, craggy existence. They were (are) able to be only exactly what they were (are). So God made a new beginning. God thought up a miraculously intricate trail by which something called life could come about. He chose (at least) a diminutive blue planet which circulated insignificantly around a very small star. This was what would later be understood—millions of years later—as residing in the Milky Way. God then caused life to eke its way out of the seas onto the shore of this planet, into amoebae, trees, chimps, underwater creatures, and more. Life chose as its home the highest mountains, the coldest specks of ice, the hottest flaming deserts, and even these original depths of oceans. As a mother loves her children, God loved this abundant “life.”

God enwrapped them in love, in which they basked—but did not know it. If you had taken one look at the dinosaurs and apes and fishes and birds, you would have seen that such a miraculous creation would have been enough. But still there was room. God’s overflowing love discovered more space within all this. So God scooped out “openness” in various living creatures. These now could receive knowingly the affectionate love God was bestowing upon them, and, if they chose, could begin to give love back to God! As a result, the human race—slowly, cumbrously inched into being. Don’t ask me the number of Cro-Magnon species that came about, or how hunting turned into farming and cooking, how weaving and building and fences and fire came onto the scene. They did. And God took time to deepen out the spiritual hollow inside these newly fashioned humans in which they could, even in fear and distraction, actually receive God’s love—not passively like a stone in the sun, but actively and knowingly, welcoming into themselves the beautiful gratuity of God’s life, love and presence.

You know the rest. We are those human beings. Each of us is able to “open” in this way, each standing at the apex of such a long history of God’s Spirit. So, Advent is the treasured time to ask quietly, humbly, how we too can love in return. Will we take time to treasure this depth within ourselves? Will we let it thrive? It would mean bringing the virtue called “patience” to bear on our nervous, often inconvenient, life. It would mean letting God’s presence be enough for us. It might even signify finding a new way of life. At a local level, couldn’t it mean celebrating at Mass in a new way, a way of patient listening and receiving instead of holding ready our watches so we can time the homily. And that would be enough, would it not? Maybe, but suppose that God’s tender love wanted to make its way out of the church and into the world? Wouldn’t that be a birth of the child Jesus in our lives? We would carry the love placed in our hearts out to families, friends, neighbors—whether poor or rich—because of God’s love. And that would be enough.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Left to human management, world history can seem to be a wasteland, or at best a rough road. What about your personal history? Has it been it smooth all the time? Could this reading help to smooth out rough spots? How?
2. This reading says that the Lord “is patient with you.” Granting this, are you patient with others? For instance, how do you react when a car cuts you off, or when you are blamed falsely? With holy anger or with forgiveness? Is there a line between holy anger and patience? Are you patient with yourself?
3. How do you share John the Baptist’s mission to proclaim Christ’s coming into the world? Do you do this with words or by the way you live? How is John’s message of repentance and judgment different from that of Jesus?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen