**2021 to 2022**

**Advent 2 Year C - 5th December 2021**

**First Reading Baruch 5:1-9**

Baruch contains many short ‘oracles’ first delivered around 200 B.C. The one we read to-day looks back three hundred years to the Exile (586-538 B.C.) and is addressed to the Jews of the Dispersion that resulted. It personifies Jerusalem as a bereaved mother, telling her that her children are being restored to her. The mountains and valleys around Jerusalem are to be levelled for ease of travel and the light of the presence of the Lord in person will guide them home.

Such a message comes in various other places, and with the same imagery (such as Isaiah 40:3-4) but whereas they were written in Hebrew for the domestic market, Baruch was addressed to the Greek speaking Jews around the eastern Mediterranean.

This reading is a magnificent choice for this second Sunday of Advent. It catches the mood of Luke’s use of Isaiah 40 in the gospel and captures the Church's Advent hope in the thrilling words: "Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height and look toward the east."

The symbolism of salvation coming from the east like the dawn is deeply embedded in the Church's art and history. The freed slaves would return home from Babylon in the east. The sun rose in the east, from where the Messiah would also come and Christians were buried facing east so that they would have the earliest possible glimpse of him. It was also why mediæval churches had the altar under the east window to provide the earliest light for the priest saying Mass.

**Responsorial Psalm: 126:1-6**

This psalm celebrates the exiles’ return from Babylon. It is equally appropriate as a response to the reading from Baruch since the author of that poem pictures the deliverance of the Diaspora in terms of the return from Babylon as foretold by II-Isaiah.

**Second Reading Paul’s letter to the Philippians 1:3-6 & 8-11**

This is the conventional opening for a typical letter of the time, after which the writer would commonly broach the principal subject. Permeated by the deep affection that bound him to Philippi it is, after Philemon, the most personal of all Paul's letters. Paul's remembrance of the Philippians leads to thanksgiving on their account: for the fervour with which they have accepted the gospel from the beginning.

In his assurance of prayer for them he strikes the note of joy that resonates throughout the whole epistle. Paul is confident that God will bring to perfection the good work he has begun in them; they will have their reward - to be 'with the Lord' (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:10) - at the glorious coming of Christ, the Parousia.

Last week Paul expressed a hope that his readers would be ‘blameless .......... when Our Lord, Jesus Christ comes’ This week, he also clearly expects the ‘saints’ to reach perfection by the Day of the Lord. This represented a common assumption that when the Lord returned his followers would have achieved sinlessness.

Of course, Paul had thought that he and most of his readers would still be alive on that day and that therefore all spiritual growth would take place entirely within this earthly existence. At Christ’s return all Christians would be fit for heaven. Yet, by the time of this letter he had already faced the problem of Christians who had died before the Parousia.

It was recognised that they had not achieved perfection before death, and so with the passing of time they were imagined as continuing to mature beyond the grave in a state later named after the Latin word ‘purgare’ meaning to purify. Purgatory was never in the beginning a place of punishment but of spiritual growth. It acquired its negative image during the middle ages.

It is interesting that Paul describes Christian maturity in the ethical language of Stoicism: "knowledge," "discernment," and "approve what is excellent"

**Gospel Luke 3:1-6**

The infancy narrative of Luke (chapters 1-2) had introduced the Messiah and his cousin/herald (John) and had recorded a private meeting of the two before their births. Now the time has come to go public; a proclamation that the age of fulfilment has begun. So John steps forward to prepare the way, to open the hearts of men and women.

Luke is at great pains to date exactly the birth of Jesus (2;1-2) and the ministry of the Baptist (3:1-2) We are guessing as to why, but I think it was to rule out any later suggestion from those who had not been present that Jesus was a legend. Luke’s real purpose, I believe, is to establish the physical life, death and resurrection of the man Jesus. His elaborate synchronization, which illustrates the confused political situation in Palestine, serves to set the gospel event in the framework of world history (see 1:5).

The fifteenth year of Tiberias is, likely to be 27/ 28 AD, and Pilate was procurator 26-36 AD. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and Malthake, was tetrarch of Galilee (and Peraea), 4 BC to 39 AD. under whom, John was beheaded. Philip, son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra (not the famous Egyptian queen) was tetrarch of territories north-east of the sea of Galilee from 4 BC to 34 AD. Lysanias (not of Herod's family) was tetrarch of Abilene (north-west of Damascus) until 37 AD.

Caiaphas was high priest from 18 to 36 AD; he was son-in-law of Annas who had been high priest from 6-15 AD. The latter's influence was very great (five of his sons and his son-in-law had been high priests) and that is why Luke can associate him with Caiaphas and speak of 'the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas' (see John 18:13-24; Acts 4:6).

In the manner of the Old Testament prophets, John (who had already been marked as a prophet, 1:15) is now solemnly called to his Mission (see Jeremiah 1:1,5,11; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1).

The 'wilderness' and 'all the region around the Jordan' (vv. 2-3) most likely refers to the district where the river enters the Dead Sea, in the neighbourhood of Jericho. The alternative is due north, at the point at which the river leaves Lake Galilee. Both sites have their advocates fully backed by souvenir shops.

John is presented as an itinerant preacher whose message was repentance with a view to forgiveness of sins, an anticipation of the Christian message (24:47).

The inserted paragraph in the Gospel is a quotation from Isaiah 40;3-5, dated 540 B.C. in anticipation of the returning exiles. The voice is a prophet and the Lord for Isaiah is Yahweh who is leading his people home to Jerusalem. In Luke’s use, the voice becomes the Baptist and the Lord becomes Jesus.

Unlike Jewish Mark and Matthew, the Gentile Luke, continues the quotation of Isaiah on to verse 5 (Isaiah 40:3-5) which includes the phrase ‘all mankind’ This expands the Jewish origins of Christianity to a universalist perspective. (see 2:30-32). It is by such deliberate alterations that we can identify the author’s interests and convictions.

Apart from universalism, Luke’s other interests include the contribution of women, the importance of prayer, social justice and the historical events which witnessed this new movement in the world.