



ONE MISSION, TWO PARISHES

Saint Timothy's & Saint Luke the Evangelist
Catholic Parishes, Forest Hill & Blackburn South

Parish Office for both Parishes: 17 Stevens Road Forest Hill Vic 3133

Parish Office tel: 03 9412 8499; Presbytery tel: 03 9877 2292

Email: foresthill@cam.org.au | Web: sttimothys.org.au

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WEEKLY BULLETIN: SUNDAY 10 DECEMBER 2023

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT - YEAR B

REACH OUT IN LOVE AND MERCY: MARK 6: 32 - 34



Readings this week: Is 40:1 – 5, 9 – 11; Ps 84; 2 Pet 3:8 – 14; Mk 1:1 - 8.

Gospel Reflection ~ Greg Sunter

This week's gospel captures beautifully the spirit of preparation and waiting that characterises the liturgical season of Advent. John the Baptist is portrayed as fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah and others as the one who comes before the Lord preparing the way. He is a messenger, sent by God to 'do the groundwork' preparing the people for the coming of the Christ. Although this passage is used during Advent as preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, we know that John was a contemporary (indeed cousin) of Jesus and the time of preparation was immediately prior to Jesus' public ministry.

John appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism for forgiveness of sins. It may seem odd to think of going to the wilderness to try to influence people. Today we might think that the city centre or street corner might be the better venue to preach something. What is it about the wilderness? Reference is made to the wilderness several times in scripture. It is used as a place of preparation and encounter with God. The wilderness referred to was a vast expanse of emptiness on the eastern side of the Jordan River. It was not uncommon for wandering preachers like John and Jesus to go out into the wilderness as a way of making a break from their previous life and getting themselves ready in body and spirit to begin their ministry. The wilderness to the east of the Jordan was also the place in which many of the rebels based themselves. There was a sense that challenge and unrest came out of the wilderness. In many ways that is what Jesus – heralded by John – brought out of the wilderness as well.

Historical Context – A Baptism of Forgiveness: The understanding that we generally have of baptism today has not always been the case. At the time of John and Jesus, the Jewish tradition used baptism as a ritual bath to cleanse a person who had become ritually unclean and make them able to participate in religious rituals. What John was preaching was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins – a new interpretation at the time. He emphasised that repentance was essential for forgiveness and that there needed to be a conscious returning to God. John's baptism was a symbolic act to signify the willingness of the person to renounce their sins and make a more conscious return to God.

Scriptural context – Mark: The gospel of Mark is sometimes portrayed as a 'no fuss' gospel. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in this week's passage. We have the first eight verses of the gospel and the author wastes no time in announcing the purpose, 'The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' The gospel of Mark does not give any infancy narrative or genealogy like Matthew or Luke, nor a theological foreword like John. It jumps straight in with a declaration that Jesus is the Son of God and almost immediately begins to explore his ministry.

Gospel Focus – Preparing the Way: The gospel passage quotes the prophet Isaiah (although text combines Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; and Exodus 23:20) and casts John the Baptist in the role of fulfilling the prophecy of the voice that cries in the wilderness, 'Prepare a way for the Lord'. The description of John in camel-skin and eating locusts and wild honey is designed to align him with Elijah, the great prophet of Jewish history. In a very short and sharp passage the gospel ties the coming of Jesus to the expectation of a messiah that has run through Jewish history and been foretold by the great prophets.

REACH OUT IN ...

Whitehorse Deanery
Eastern Region
Archdiocese of Melbourne

Rev Father Gerard

Parish Priest

Sonya O'Farrell

Part-time Parish Secretary

Wednesdays,

Thursdays & Fridays

10.00am – 2.00pm

SUNDAY MASS

ST: & SL: Saturday Vigil @ 6.00pm

Sunday ST: @ 10.30am *Australian*

5.00pm – *Vietnamese*

& SL: @ 8.30am

WEEKDAY MASS & SL: ROSARY

ST: Weds. & Thurs. @ 9.15am

Fri. @ 10.00am

1st Wednesday of the month

@ 10.00am Mass of Anointing.

SL: Tues. @ 5.00pm

Weds., Thurs. & Fri. @ 9.30am

Sat. @ 9.00am

RECONCILIATION

SL: Saturday 9.30am – 10.00am &

5.30pm – 5.50pm

SL: EXPOSITION & BENEDICTION

The Blessed Sacrament is exposed
for Adoration Wednesday

Start: 7.00pm | End: 8.00pm

MACS Catholic Primary School

21 Stevens Road, Vermont, 3133 Vic

Tel: (03) 9878 4188

Ms. Anne Maree Jones **Principal**

Email: principal@sttims.catholic.edu.au

Website: <https://sttims.catholic.edu.au/>

MACS Catholic Primary School

46 Orchard Grove,

Blackburn South Vic 3130

Tel: (03) 9877 4023

Mrs. Clare Ryan: **Principal**

Email: principal@slblackburnstn.catholic.edu.au

Website: slblackburnstn.catholic.edu.au

Prayer to Saint Timothy

O God, who adorned Saint Timothy
with apostolic virtues, grant,
through his intercession that, living
justly and devoutly in this present
age, we may merit to reach our
heavenly homeland. Through our
Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who
lives and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for
ever and ever. Amen.

*Patron Saint of stomach and
intestinal disorders.*

Prayer to Saint Luke the Evangelist

O St. Luke, you were chosen to
reveal in preaching and writing
God's love for the poor. Moved by
the heavenly Spirit of Love, you
detailed the life of Jesus, showing
His divinity and His genuine
compassion for all human beings.
Help those who already glory in
God's name to persevere in one
heart and one mind and inspire all
people that they may hear the Good
News of Salvation. Amen

*Patron Saint of artists, physicians,
surgeons, students and butchers.*

WE REMEMBER IN PRAYER this weekend all who are sick, especially
Max Marino, Caratha McKerrow, Tony Keaney, Kathryn Holmes,
Therese O'Donoghue, Stewart Davis, Trevor Stowe, Jerry Donoghue, Veronica
and all those Parishioners unable to be among us this weekend. For all who
have died recently especially Anna Nolan, Loy Arciaga &
Geraldine McKeown, for the casualties of war in Ukraine, Israel and Gaza and
for those whose anniversaries occur about this time especially Franklin Estibeiro,
James (Jim) Joseph White, Anthony Estibeiro, Santan & Lucy Marques,
Sacha Soltys, Esme Brunton, Proserfina O'Raye, Timothy Le A Triet Nhan,
Paul Le A Triet Sinh, Paul Le Auh Triet, Theresa Taylor, Xiao Meiling, Renza Paglia,
Eunice Hasler, Betty Harrison, Doris Cochrane, Andrej Kawalevski,
Beck Moreland, Sonia Shaffon, John Carney, and Barry White. R.I.P.

LITURGICAL CALENDAR THIS WEEK: **Advent ~ Monday:** St Damasus I,
pope; **Tuesday:** Our Lady of Guadalupe; **Wednesday:** St Lucy, virgin, martyr;
Thursday: St John of the Cross, priest, doctor. **Masses this weekend:** Preface of
Advent I, Eucharistic Prayer II; Eucharistic Acc. No. II.

SL CHRISTMAS CARDS & 2024 COLUMBAN CALENDARS are still
available from the Counter in our Church Foyer/Narthex. Donations can be left
in the St V de P Poor Box adjacent to where they are available.

ST CHRISTMAS CARDS & 2024 COLUMBAN CALENDARS are now on
sale from the Piety Stall. St. Vincent de Paul Society cards are \$3.00 for a pack
of 5, Magellan Cards are \$7.00 for a pack of 10 and the 2024 Columban
calendars are \$ 9.00 each.

SL PRIMARY SCHOOL whole School Mass of Thanksgiving will be next Friday
at 9.30am. Parishioners are also invited to morning tea afterwards; please follow
the crowd.

ST PRMARY SCHOOL end of the year celebration will be next Friday at
10.00am. Parishioners will be joined by the School Community for Mass this day.

ST ST VINCENT DE PAUL CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2023 - THANK YOU:

This is just a short note to thank you, the Parishioners of St Timothy's, for the great
compassion and generosity you have provided in response to our Christmas
Appeal over the last two weekends. This year so far, the Parish has provided a
total of more than \$2100 for our Christmas appeal, made up of cash, gift cards
and food donations. As usual, and again in these uncertain times of rising costs,
you have responded very generously to our appeal and provided the means
to offer thirty needy families and singles in the area a little Christmas joy. This
support is always very much appreciated by the people we assist. Thank you
all again and God bless. SVdP Conference Members - Forest Hill (St Timothy's).

SL CARE GROUP'S annual fund-raising Hamper Raffle for Parish Hospitality
continues this weekend. If you have anything suitable and appropriate for the
Hamper, please leave it in the Basket in our Church Foyer for collection. Raffle
tickets will be available for purchase this weekend.

SL SVdP is proud to acknowledge and gratefully receives the \$826.60
contributed by Parishioners last weekend for their annual Christmas Appeal.

VINNIES CHRISTMAS APPEAL: Aussie families are struggling to survive the
increasing cost-of-living pressures this Christmas. Your generosity can provide
urgent relief for a family who's doing it tough this Christmas, and give them hope
for a better future.

A VOCATION VIEW: John the Baptist stands as a sign of contradiction, calling
his contemporaries back to a relationship with the Living God. Perhaps you are
being called to follow in John's footsteps today. (Mark 1:1-8)

STEWARDSHIP CORNER: "Prepare the way of the Lord..." - Mark 1:3 We are
all called to live a holy life. We are all called to invite others to live holy lives.
Living a stewardship lifestyle, being grateful and generous with our gifts, puts us
on the path to holiness and is an example for others to be holy, too. We are
responsible not only for our own lives, but for the lives of others as well. How are
you helping others get to Heaven? (**ST:** Weekly First Collection Presbytery
Envelopes: \$200; Thanksgiving Stewardship Envelopes this week: \$220; Vietnamese
Donation: \$220.40; **SL:** Last week's Church Stewardship Envelopes: \$331; Last week's
Presbytery Stewardship Envelopes: \$281).

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS who have walked
upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the
continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of
Reconciliation.

WEEKEND PARISH MINISTRY ROSTER

MINISTERS OF THE WORD

SATURDAY **6:00 PM SL**
6:00 PM ST
SUNDAY **8:30 AM SL**
10:30 AM ST
5.00PM ST

9 AND 10 DECEMBER

Janice D Souza
 Patrick Kelly
 Kana Chelliah
 Ryan Yee & Joelle Roussetty
 Mai Le & Loc Le

16 AND 17 DECEMBER

Melina Barcellona
 Kelvin Chen
 Lucy Ferris
 Stephen Fan & Andrew Johny
 Thu Ngo & Hieu Nguyen

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF THE EUCHARIST

SATURDAY **6:00 PM SL**
6:00 PM ST
SUNDAY **8:30 AM SL**
10:30 AM ST
5.00PM ST

9 AND 10 DECEMBER

Melina Barcellona
 Mary Italiano
 Beryl Chelliah
 Daphne Hickman
 Hoang Nguyen

16 AND 17 DECEMBER

Olive Hammill
 Peter Naughtin
 Sonya O'Farrell
 Chin L Tay
 Hung Dinh

SLIDE OPERATORS

SATURDAY **6:00 PM SL**
6:00 PM ST
SUNDAY **8:30 AM SL**
10:30 AM ST
5.00PM ST

9 AND 10 DECEMBER

Tony Lobo
 Michelle Chen
 Rosemary Donaldson
 Manny Gonzalez
 Toan Tran

16 AND 17 DECEMBER

Choir
 Michelle Chen
 Anthony Fernandez
 Lee Min Yee
 Toan Tran

SL WELCOMERS 9/10 DEC

6:00 PM Edna Lee
8:30 AM Marie Pekish
10:30 AM Volunteer
HOSPITALITY

THE BASIC LITURGICAL MINISTRY

SL WELCOMERS 16/17 DEC

6:00 PM Volunteer
9:30 AM Janette Clark
10:30 AM Volunteer

SL CHURCH CLEANING

16th Dec. – Val's Team
 Val Fogarty, Jim Fogarty,
 Anthony Fernandez, Maureen
 Davis & Ellen Donoghue

ST CHURCH CLEANING

16th Dec. @ 8am
 Toan Tran, Dao Dinh,
 Hieu Nguyen, Dieu Nguyen,
 Hoang Nguyen, Anico Yee,
 Dzung Vu & Trong Nguyen

SL CHURCH FLOWERS

No flowers for Advent

ST CHURCH FLOWERS

No flowers for Advent

ST COUNTERS

This week Team 8:
 Fela Colasanti & Chin L Tay
 Next week Team 1:
 Owen Grealy & Anthony Yeo

ST & SL PARISHIONERS will be pleased to know that our combined **END OF YEAR BREAK-UP & THANKYOU** to all Parishioners of both Parishes who provide a service/ministry in any way, in either or both parishes occurred last Saturday evening; the rain didn't affect the occasion and those of us who gathered acknowledged our valuable contribution that keeps both communities functioning, enjoyed re-connecting before the Christmas season really gets underway and the opportunity to share each other's company.

ON THE JOURNEY THIS WEEK: Fr Chris Sarkis says only prayer, sacrifice, and graced personal holiness of life can straighten what has become twisted and buried in the moral and human turmoil. Mother Hilda says God is like the freezer repair man, checking the gas of grace that keeps us ticking over. Plus, Fr Tony Percy says Mark's Gospel prologue sets the scene for the remainder of his Gospel, Fr John Nguyen OFM Cap says on the eight hundredth anniversary of the creation of the nativity scene, choose to see the living Babe of Christmas, like Saint Francis did 800 years ago, and Br Lewis Harwood says the scripture readings this coming week contain a simple message: move out of the wilderness and return to the land of hope. Plus, more great music!



ADVENT: The second candle, which is also purple, represents faith. It is called the "Bethlehem Candle" as a reminder of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

MELBOURNE CATHOLICS: Advent begins!

AUSTRALIA 'PUNCHED WELL ABOVE ITS WEIGHT' AT SYNOD OF BISHOPS:

The Church in Australia played an outsized role in shaping the global consultation process for Pope Francis' Synod of Bishops, writes Christopher White. Source: [NCR Online](#). "Australia punched well above its weight," Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv told me last month during a visit to the country for a series of lectures sponsored by the Parramatta Diocese, Australian Catholic University, and Newman College, Melbourne.

MAJELLAN FAMILY MEDIA: [Being the voice in the wilderness](#)

ACNC COMMUNICATIONS: [Your latest news from the ACNC](#)

SAFETY STATEMENT: We are committed to a safe and nurturing culture for all children and vulnerable persons in our Church. Saint Luke the Evangelist Parish Blackburn South holds the care, safety, wellbeing of children and vulnerable persons as central and fundamental responsibilities of the Church. This commitment is drawn from and inherent to the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the Gospel.

Love and Mercy: Mark 6: 32 – 34

Parish Groups & Contacts

Lectors, Registrars, Collectors,
 Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist,
 Slide Projector Operator & Rosters

ST: Corrie Quimbo 9412 8499

SL: Margaret Gearon 0409 807 135

Baptism Preparation

ST: Mary Italiano 9412 8499

Vietnamese Community

Hoang Nguyen 0422 400 116

Andy Tran 0422 382 109

Vietnamese Youth

John Dinh 0448 977 037

Parish Collection Preparers

ST: Barry Silvester &

Michael Kawalevski

Stewardship Counters

SL: Dale Dixon - 0433 885 087

Steve Kilroe-Smith - 0404 864 232

Parish Pastoral Council

As we are one Mission now, it has been suggested that we require only one Chair?

Parishes Safeguarding Committee

Theresa Nguyen, Mary Italiano,

Darren McLean - 0417 774 504

Janette Clark - 9877 2292

Fr Gerard - 9877 2292

Parish History

SL: Margaret Gearon - 0409 807 135

Whitehorse Deanery - Fr Gerard

Finance Committee

Bernard Negline

Parish Accountant

SL: Hall Hire

Sonya O'Farrell @ the

Parish Office - 9877 2292

Church Sacristan

ST: Margaret King & Hoang Nguyen

SL: Greg Grant - 0401 644 474

Church Housekeeping

ST: Margaret King 9412 8499

Church Cleaning & Flowers

SL: Megan McLean - 0419 347 693

Church Linen

SL: Beryl Kanagalinggam

Parish Garden Maintenance

ST: Des Connors, Leo Watson,

Anico Yee & Vietnamese Community

SL: Darren McLean - 0417 774 504

Holy Communion to the

housebound - Fr Gerard

Parish Choirs

ST: Mary Italiano & Theresa Nguyen

SL: Lina & Maria Mafi

0411 136 043

Parish & School Fete Committee

SL: Mrs. Clare Ryan - 9877 4023

School Advisory Council

ST: Ms. Anne Maree Jones 9878 4188

SL: Mrs. Clare Ryan - 9877 4023

School Parents' Association

ST: Ms. Anne Maree Jones 9878 4188

SL: Mrs. Clare Ryan - 9877 4023

St Vincent de Paul Conference

For Assistance: 1800 305 330

(Freecall: Monday to Friday 10am-3pm)

Parish Contacts:

ST: John McCoy

SL: Tony Lobo &

Steve Kilroe-Smith

Raise your voices ... Entrance Antiphon: O people of Sion, behold, the Lord will come to save the nations, and the Lord will make the glory of his voice heard in the joy of your heart.

Response to the Psalm: Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths: all people shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia!

Eucharistic Acclamation: When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

Communion Antiphon: Jerusalem, arise and stand upon the heights, and behold the joy which comes to you from God.

Make a straight path for the Lord

2nd Sunday of Advent, Year B

The prophet Isaiah wrote:

"I am _____ my
_____ ahead of you,
who will _____ your way;
the _____ of one _____ out
in the _____:
'Prepare the _____ of the _____,
make his paths _____'"



crying
straight
way
voice
sending
prepare
wilderness
messenger
Lord



What are three things you can do to be ready for Jesus during this second week of Advent?

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by telling people to turn back to God and baptising them. He wore clothes made from camel's hair and wore a leather strap around his waist. For food he ate grasshoppers and wild honey. Draw a picture of John baptising someone in the Jordan River.



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SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Second Sunday of Advent

Year B

10 December 2023



Collect

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.

Readings and Commentaries

If the first Sunday of Advent serves as a bridge between Ordinary Time and Advent, then the second Sunday is a stepping stone towards the feast of Christmas. Our horizon changes. Without losing sight of the end times that lie before us, we begin to shift focus to the event that transformed human history: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We don't home in immediately on the story of Jesus' birth; that will come later. We first allow ourselves to be drawn into ancient Israel's deep and patient longing for the Messiah. We retell the story of John the Baptist whose preaching echoes the prophets of old and whose baptising ushers in a new era of grace. There is good news to be heard, if we can find the time and space at this busy time of the year to listen to the whisper of the Spirit in our hearts.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11

'Console my people, console them'
says your God.
'Speak to the heart of Jerusalem
and call to her
that her time of service is ended,
that her sin is atoned for,
that she has received from the hand of the Lord
double punishment for all her crimes.'
A voice cries, 'Prepare in the wilderness
a way for the Lord.
Make a straight highway for our God
across the desert.
Let every valley be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low,
let every cliff become a plain,
and the ridges a valley;
then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed
and all mankind shall see it;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'
Go up on a high mountain,
joyful messenger to Zion.
Shout with a loud voice,
joyful messenger to Jerusalem.
Shout without fear,
say to the towns of Judah,
'Here is your God.'
Here is the Lord coming with power,
his arm subduing all things to him.
The prize of his victory is with him,
his trophies all go before him.
He is like a shepherd feeding his flock,
gathering lambs in his arms,
holding them against his breast
and leading to their rest the mother ewes.

First Reading

All who are familiar with Handel's *Messiah* will recognise much of the first reading. He uses the first verses for the opening aria and draws on others later in the first section of the oratorio, matching text and music marvellously to convey the joy of the prophetic message. Those who know the gospels well will be ready to hear this passage used to situate the preaching of John the Baptist.

The text is taken from the chapter which begins the second book of the prophet Isaiah, often called the Book of Consolation. It is indeed a word of comfort and consolation, declared to a people who have suffered exile, promising them home-coming and the return of their glorious shepherd king. It is filled with the imagery of ancient imperial power. A royal highway will be prepared across the forbidding terrain, and the splendour of the divine ruler will be displayed for all to see. Messengers announce the good news from hilltop to hilltop. This triumphant sovereign is Israel's God; his victorious parade offers the guarantee of loving pastoral care for his people.

The whole reading is in the form of a solemn declaration and should be proclaimed with deliberation. It is filled with positive energy; each element needs to be allowed to have its dynamic impact. Readers need to help the congregation hear the different voices that speak during this reading (God and the prophet) and to convey emotions that range from tender comfort to powerful joy.

The familiarity of the text to both reader and hearers may be a mixed blessing. It may help the congregation tune in readily, but it challenges the reader to enable everyone hear it afresh and to thrill again with its joy.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 84:9–14

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

I will hear what the Lord God has to say,
a voice that speaks of peace,
peace for his people.

His help is near for those who fear him
and his glory will dwell in our land. **R.**

Mercy and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth
and justice look down from heaven. **R.**

The Lord will make us prosper
and our earth shall yield its fruit.
Justice shall march before him
and peace shall follow his steps. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm complements the first reading directly. It expresses the people's acceptance of God's word of peace, with all the blessings this implies: mercy, justice and fruitfulness. On its own, the response could be heard as a cry of distress, but in this context it serves as a prayer of confident trust.

Psalm 84/85 may have originated as a prayer for deliverance from exile; the verses that are prayed today constitute its second half. Their content and character invite the reader to proclaim them in a spirit of sure faith. The short lines should not be hurried through, but allowed to communicate the assurance they express. Readers will note that the first verse consists of five lines rather than the more usual four.

A reading from the second letter of St Peter 3:8–14

There is one thing, my friends, that you must never forget: that with the Lord, 'a day' can mean a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not being slow to carry out his promises, as anybody else might be called slow; but he is being patient with you all, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to change his ways. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then with a roar the sky will vanish, the elements will catch fire and fall apart, the earth and all that it contains will be burnt up.

Since everything is coming to an end like this, you should be living holy and saintly lives while you wait and long for the Day of God to come, when the sky will dissolve in flames and the elements melt in the heat. What we are waiting for is what he promised: the new heavens and new earth, the place where righteousness will be at home. So then, my friends, while you are waiting, do your best to live lives without spot or stain so that he will find you at peace.

A reading from the Gospel according to Mark 1:1–8

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
he will prepare your way.
A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight,

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

Second Reading

This is the only Sunday in the whole three-year cycle on which we hear from the second letter of Peter. Opinions differ as to who wrote the letter (whether Peter himself or a later disciple invoking his name), when it was written (perhaps as early as the year 65 or as late as 150), and to whom it was sent. The work is short and sharp. In response to "false prophets" it offers a vigorous defence of Judaeo-Christian moral norms in the light of hope for "new heavens and a new earth".

In this passage the author draws on conventional apocalyptic imagery to depict the Day of the Lord: "with a roar the sky will vanish, the elements will catch fire and fall apart . . . the sky will dissolve in flames and the elements melt in the heat". Frightening language like this may have contributed to the thirteenth century poem known as the *Dies irae* that used to be prayed at Catholic funerals.

In spite of the fearful nature of the images – "the Day of the Lord will come like a thief" – the overall tone of the reading is one of encouragement and hope. It speaks of the Lord's promises and patience, it looks forward to "the new heavens and new earth", and it encourages right living in peace.

Readers should take advantage of the vivid imagery to proclaim this text with energy and conviction, but without allowing their delivery to become theatrical. In the end the reading is meant to persuade listeners to live by the gospel in the hope of a new world.

Gospel

The gospel writer Mark wastes no time with the start of his gospel. He bluntly declares what he is writing and plunges straight into the story. While Matthew, Luke and John concern themselves at length with Jesus' origins (whether from Abraham, Adam, or God respectively), Mark abruptly names Jesus Christ as Son of God. Then he cuts to the chase, identifying the Baptist with the prophetic words of Isaiah and Malachi.

His description of John and his ministry is typically vivid and engaging. He paints a picture that is easy for us to imagine in concrete detail. We can visualise the wilderness, the Jordan, the crowds, and above all the Baptist himself, garbed in camel-skin, living off the land, preaching the word, and thrusting sinners into the water.

But for all that, the focus is not the Baptist himself but the greater one who is to baptise with the Holy Spirit. Thus the reading serves as a prelude for what is yet to come. It stirs our hope and expectation that the long-awaited one will appear in our midst.

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her
that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.
A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"
See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the second letter of Peter 3:8–15

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved,
that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years,
and a thousand years are like one day.
The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness,
but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish,
but all to come to repentance.
But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,
and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise,
and the elements will be dissolved with fire,
and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.
Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way,
what sort of persons ought you to be
in leading lives of holiness and godliness,
waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,
because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved,
and the elements will melt with fire?

But, in accordance with his promise,
we wait for new heavens and a new earth,
where righteousness is at home.
Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things,
strive to be found by him at peace,
without spot or blemish;
and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark 1:1–8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
And people from the whole Judean countryside
and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him,
and were baptized by him in the river Jordan,
confessing their sins.

Now John was clothed with camel's hair;
with a leather belt around his waist,
and he ate locusts and wild honey.

He proclaimed,
"The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me;
I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.
I have baptized you with water;
but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing for Advent

May the almighty and merciful God,
by whose grace we have placed our faith
in the First Coming of his Only Begotten Son
and yearn for his coming again
sanctify us by the radiance of Christ's Advent
and enrich us with his blessing.

Amen.

As we run the race of this present life,
may he make us firm in faith,
joyful in hope and active in charity.

Amen.

So that, rejoicing now with devotion
at the Redeemer's coming in the flesh,
we may be endowed with the rich reward of eternal life
when he comes again in majesty.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, come down on us
and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Advent, *The Roman Missal* p. 709)

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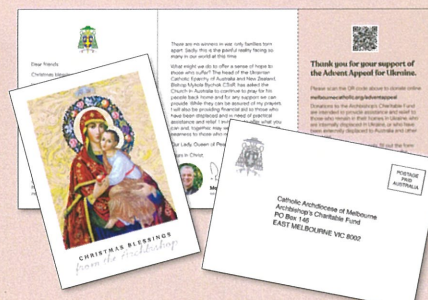
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Dear friends

In these Advent days of preparation, we are invited to open our hearts and make a home within us for the child Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He is indeed *Emmanuel*—‘God with us’.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to visit our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. While there I attended the funeral of a fallen soldier at the Garrison Church of Sts Peter and Paul in Lviv, where they host upwards of 12 funerals a day. The image that has stayed with me is that of three generations of women—a mother who lost her son, a wife who lost her husband and a daughter who would never see her father again.

There are no winners in war, only families torn apart. Sadly, this is the painful reality facing so many in our world at this time.

What might we do to offer a sense of hope to those who suffer? The head of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Australia and New Zealand, Bishop Mykola Bychok CSsR, has asked us to continue to pray for his people back home and for any support we can provide. I invite you to offer what you can and, together, may we too be a sign of God’s nearness to those who need it most.

Yours in Christ,



P. Comensoli

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE

Image: Church of the Nativity of Mary, Irpin, Ukraine.



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