

Advent Sunday

Year C



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John the Baptist in the Wilderness

Jeremiah 33.14-16

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

What's going on?

The prophet Jeremiah gives the people of Israel a message of hope. God promises his peoples of the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah) that a holy leader (a righteous Branch) will come out of the line of the great King David. This person will be God's representative and bring justice and holiness to the lives of the people. The history of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) has been filled with stories of Israel and Judah being attacked by the peoples living round about, but now the two kingdoms will not be attacked by enemies any more and so the people will believe and be shown that God saves and takes care of them.

This passage is read in Advent to remind us that God keeps his promises. Just as promises were made to the people of Israel after their many times of trial, so God promises to send his son Jesus to be the saviour of all people.

Psalm 25

Of David.

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

do not let me be put to shame;

do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;

teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

What's going on?

The psalmist speaks of his trust in God and the fact that God never stops loving human beings or gives up on them no matter what they do. For people who seek God, God is always willing to lead and teach people how to live.

So this passage is read because in Advent, we are especially offered the chance to trust God and wait for God to reveal his purposes for us. Advent is both a time of waiting and of preparation to meet God.

1 Thessalonians 3.9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.

And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

What's going on?

This is part of a letter written by St Paul to his friends in Thessalonica (the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia) not long after the first beginnings of the Christian church. St Paul thanks God for his Christian friends and longs to see them again so that they can be encouraged in the new faith. He hopes that the whole Christian community will stay strong in a loving fellowship ready for Jesus' return. Many Christians in those early days thought that Jesus would return immediately and so being prepared to meet him was very important. So St Paul's letters are an important part of the Advent readings because of the focus on what it means to be ready to meet God, as individual believers and as a community. As Christmas approaches, we need to concentrate on the same things.

This passage is read because St Paul's love and hope for the Thessalonians is still the same love and hope the church holds for its people today. In Advent, looking towards the birth of Jesus, Christians should hold together in faith and love.

Luke 21.25-36

'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

What's going on?

Year C is the year running from Advent Sunday to the Feast of Christ the King at the end of November when the gospel readings at the principal service are taken from St Luke's gospel (there are four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). This passage describes what the world will be like

when Jesus returns. The earth and the universe will be disturbed and people will be terrified by all the disturbances in nature. These things will point to the return of Jesus and so Christians need not be terrified but start to look out for God coming to his people. It was understood that the end of time would be marked by an ending and remaking of the universe by God and so when things began to fall apart that would be a sign that God was getting ready to do this. So this passage too looks towards the importance of being ready to meet Jesus and to be strong in faith in preparation for that time.