



Bible Study Second Sunday in Advent Year B

St. Maria Goretti and
St. Peter Claver
Parishes

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“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.” Mk. 1:5

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

What are you looking for? Are you looking for forgiveness? Each Christmas we remember that forgiveness, reconciliation and love are the center of this holy season. During this Season of Advent, we observe that the purpose of Christmas is forgiveness and reconciliation. Through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ — His passion, death, and resurrection — God’s mercy flowed into the world. The breach of original sin was repaired, and fellowship between God and man was restored. During the Second Week of Advent, we embrace the sense of waiting and searching for forgiveness. The many meanings of forgiveness include: pardon, mercy, clemency, amnesty and absolution. The Season of Advent combines the emotions of waiting and seeking. In anticipation of the celebration of the birth of



**Forgiveness
makes this
mountain low.**

the Messiah at Christmas, we prepare ourselves by both seeking forgiveness and by forgiving. The Lord’s Prayer is instructive during this week’s preparation. We should forgive as God forgives us. Our daily and eternal well-being depend upon it.

“Your sins are forgiven, your exile is over” (v. 2). These are the words of comfort that are given to Jewish exiles in Babylon by Isaiah. They are comforting to us today, as well. These verses are chosen for the Second Sunday in Advent, because the Church has recognized their prophetic character. They predict the true liberation of mankind through Jesus the Christ. Comfort and forgiveness are the words that are prominent. (vv. 1-2) The good news is that a Mighty God, whom the Jews had abandoned, now shows His mercy and forgives them. (v. 10) He, personally, cares for them once again like a Shepherd cares for His sheep. (v. 11). The extent of His forgiveness is illustrated by the straightening of the roads and the lowering of the mountains. We are obligated to imitate the extent of God’s forgiveness. What are you looking for? If we seek forgiveness, we first must forgive. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What words in these verses give you the most comfort? Is it necessary to forgive?

The Messiah

The word Messiah comes from a Hebrew term that means “anointed one.” Its Greek counterpart is Christos, from which the word Christ comes. Messiah was one of the titles used by early Christians to describe who Jesus was. In Old Testament times, part of the ritual of commissioning a person for a special task was to anoint him with oil. The phrase “anointed one” was applied to a person in such cases. In the Old Testament, Messiah is used more than 30 times to describe kings (2 Sam 1:14, 16), priests (Lev 4:3,5, 16), the patriarchs (Ps 105:15), and even the Persian King Cyrus (Isa 45:1). The word is also used in connection with King David, who became the model of the messianic king who would come at the end of the age (2 Sam 22:51; Ps 2:2). But it was not until the time of Daniel (sixth century B.C.) that Messiah was used as an actual title of a king who would come in the future (Dan 9:25-26). Still later, as the Jewish people struggled against their political enemies, the Messiah came to be thought of as a political, military ruler. Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers

Reading II: 2 Peter 3:8-14

What are you looking for? Are you looking for forgiveness? These verses point to the need to forgive and to seek forgiveness, as we prepare to receive the Christ at Christmas. We are instructed to prepare in the same way for both Christmas and second coming of Jesus Christ.

This letter is attributed to St. Peter. It tells us that since we are awaiting the coming of the Messiah, we should be eager to be found spotless, that is, holding no grudge, harboring no ill will, and standing in the holiness of forgiveness (vv. 11-12).

Quoting Psalm 90:4, he reminds us that God is infinite and so is His mercy. The virtue of patience, which is produced by an active longing, is a source of the ability to forgive. Are you looking for forgiveness? Where will you find it? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What is patience? Is there such a thing as “Holy Anger”?

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Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? ARE YOU LOOKING FOR FORGIVENESS?

"Forgiveness is the remission of sins. For it is by this that what has been lost, and was found, is saved from being lost again." These words from Saint Augustine of Hippo, remind us of the infinite nature of God's forgiveness and mercy. As Christians, acts of forgiveness should dominate our way of life. The first step for those seeking forgiveness is repentance. Repentance is a turning away from sin, disobedience, or rebellion and a turning back to God (Matt 9:13; Luke 5:32).

In a more general sense, repentance means a change of mind (Gen 6:6-7), or a feeling of remorse or regret for past conduct (Matt 27:3). True repentance is a "Godly sorrow" for sin, an act of turning around and going in the opposite direction. This type of repentance leads to a fundamental change in a person's relationship to God.

The opening verse, *"The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,"* is the title of the entire Gospel. It is the "good news" that Christ has come to rescue all nations from sin and destruction and to reveal the inner life of God to the world (v. 1). The title, "Son of God" is prominent in the Gospel of Mark (3:11, 5:7, 9:7). The teachings of Jesus and His works reveal that He is the Son of God. St. Mark outlines the ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist by stitching together the image of the Exodus from Egypt and a blending of the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi. (v. 2, Mal 3:1, Ex 23:20, Is. 40: 3)

John the Baptist's appearance personified forgiveness. John's wardrobe may have been unusual, even for desert nomads (Lev 11:22). It reflected a lifestyle of repentance. His camel hair clothing showed he turned away from worldly trappings. His belt showed the discipline of faith. His diet showed his total dependence on God. His life was a sign of God's infinite mercy and forgiveness for those who repent. His preaching of a baptism of repentance signified the need for inner purity. "Baptize" was an ordinary Greek word which meant to dip, plunge, or immerse. The Jews were familiar with the priestly washings that reflected purification. The Jordan River was a symbolic location for baptism. Israel entered the Promised Land by crossing the Jordan on dry land led by Joshua. (Josh 3) Note that the baptism by John was not the Sacrament of Baptism. John points to a greater baptism with water and Spirit that is the sacrament inaugurated by Jesus (v. 8). People came to John the Baptist seeking inner purity and forgiveness. What are you looking for? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Do you need inner purity? How do you find forgiveness? What verses show the mission of John the Baptist? What is your mission on earth?

Pray About It!

Monday

Read Isaiah 40:1-5. Speak words of comfort to someone.

Tuesday

Read Matt 9:13. Pray for those with addictions.

Wednesday

Read Gen 6:6-7. Ask God's forgiveness for past conduct.

Thursday

Read Mark 1:1-8. Ask someone to pray with you.

Friday

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Attend Mass and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Spirit of Christ in the Fullness of Time

-John, precursor, prophet, and Baptist

717 "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." John was "filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb" by Christ himself, whom the Virgin Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary's visitation to Elizabeth thus became a visit from God to his people.

719 John the Baptist is "more than a prophet." In him, the Holy Spirit concludes his speaking through the prophets. John completes the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah. He proclaims the imminence of the consolation of Israel; he is the "voice" of the Consoler who is coming. As the Spirit of truth will also do, John "came to bear witness to the light." In John's sight, the Spirit thus brings to completion the careful search of the prophets and fulfills the longing of the angels. "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.... Behold, the Lamb of God."

Resources: The Gospel of Mark, Mary Healy, Baker Academic Grand Rapids, Mi. pp 28-34; 2 Peter, Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, Ignatius Press 2010. San Francisco. CA. pp 464-465; Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year B, 20185, Joyce Zimmerman, C. PP. S. Kathleen Harmon, S.ND. de N., John W. Tonkin, Liturgical Press Collegeville, Mn. pp. 6-9; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic>; The Messiah Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson

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