

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 5, 2021

I would like to read the beginning of this gospel once again. Please indulge me.  
(Luke 3: 4, 6)

In the eighth year of the papacy of Francis, bishop of Rome, when António Guterres was secretary general of the United Nations, Archbishop José Gomez led the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Charles Baker was Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and Joseph Biden was president of the United States, the world, plagued by climate change and still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic, wondered where to find signs of hope.

Different names; different time and place; same reality. I think this is the way Luke would start writing his gospel for today.

In the first century, in Israel, God entered human history. The world was a mess. Tiberius was a dissolute Emperor. The people of Israel had corrupt leaders such as Pilate and Herod. The Word made flesh came to give people a blueprint for human living. He called it the kingdom of God. He did not clean up the mess. He found darkness and offered a light.

In the twenty-first century, in America, Christ lives among us in various ways. He does not clean up the mess but gives us the blueprint for human living. But, instead of following the path to the kingdom, many of us have chosen the culturally acceptable path to comfort and ego centered power and have neglected the poor, the outcasts, the racially groups we regard as inferior.

The Jews in Judea once were comfortable and had reached a national pride after David and Solomon had brought some stability and power.

Prophets, such as Isaiah, warned the people of impending doom but they didn't listen. Captivity into Babylon followed. They had put their trust in military might but they lost their souls in the process.

Our world today is threatened by powers beyond us - climate change is upsetting patterns of life everywhere. A world-wide pandemic keeps on gathering new strength.

And, here in Advent, we are taught to trust in the power of God, in the presence of the Christ and the Spirit in our midst. We don't have the resources to put everything right. But we know from history that light does shine in darkness and the power of God is really in our midst.

The prophet Baruch spoke to a people in exile. "Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of righteousness that comes from God." Yes, they were able to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Years later a voice in the desert once again called people to change their ways of thinking, of seeing, of acting. "Prepare the way of the Lord." Since then, for 2000 years, trust in God or trust in ourselves has marked Christian history.

In dark times it has often been people without power and might that have shown us the way. Settlers in this country drove out the Indigenous people from their homes. They drove them on a trail of tears over hundreds of miles, made treaties which they did not keep.

But these people kept their light glowing and even today show us another way of relating to the Creator and all the world. Capitalism and consumerism have given us a spirituality of scarcity - there is never enough; we always need more. Indigenous people say, no, there is a spirituality of abundance when we all share.

To build up the American empire, we enslaved black people from Africa.

We still try to enslave them. But the light has often shone in these people. In slavery the people sang their praise and trust in God in beautiful Negro Spirituals. They produced works of nobility. Recently I visited the Museum of Fine Arts. They have a wonderful exhibit of fifty quilts that reflect the development of America. One quilt was made by a girl born into slavery and then expressed her story in a marvelous two panel quilt. The Spirit moves people especially when we are not self-sufficient.

Advent calls us not to put our trust in ourselves or in riches or in possessions. We have been given a blueprint for life. Other religions have similar teachings. But we have neglected them. We have settled for a form of religion and Christianity that

expects God to bless us materially for maintaining some basic practices and being decent people. During this Advent time the voice of Isaiah, John the Baptist, and other modern prophets as well, tell us to make straight the winding roads, and make the rough ways smooth to prepare the way of the Lord. We look to Christmas as a day and season when we can rejoice in the presence of Christ in our lives.

Do you know the Bible well? Do you know the Christ well? One depends on the other. Take some this week to read from Isaiah or the gospels.

Put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. We can live in the midst of the mess of this world, in the midst of chaos and confusion. Our hearts must be one with Jesus.

With Saint Paul in our second reading, we read "This is my prayer: that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. "

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