



Second Sunday of Advent † Sunday 9th December 2018

Cycle of Prayer: Migrants, refugees and human life

Keynote: Prepare a way for the coming of God; being open to God's word

Prophet Baruch 5: 1-9

The Jewish people exiled for many years in Babylon, are excited, joyful, at the prospect of returning to their city of Jerusalem to worship once more at the restored Temple. The prophet urges them: *'Jerusalem, take off your dress of sorrow and distress, put on the beauty of the glory of God for ever, wrap the cloak of the integrity of God around you'*. Addressing the people of Israel as 'Jerusalem' the prophet describes the joyful procession as a royal progress, *'Arise, Jerusalem, stand on the heights and turn your eyes to the East ...for now God brings (you) back'*. Even the forests and every fragrant tree along the way home will provide welcome shade for the weary pilgrim. *'For God has decreed the flattening of each high mountain ...the filling of the valleys to make level ground so that Israel can walk in safety under the glory of God'*. As the Prophet Baruch urges the city of Jerusalem to cast aside the *'dress of sorrow and distress, and to put on the beauty of the glory of God forever'* so the Church in this season of Advent urges us to be suitably clothed to prepare for the coming and return of Christ.

Responsorial Psalm 125 (126) – The joyful song of returning exiles

First Letter of Paul to the Philippians 1: 3-6, 8-11

With echoes of the prophet Baruch, Paul writing to a Christian community in Greece, speaks of the *'Day of Jesus Christ'* that is still to come. Paul's words have a sense of joy and expectation of the time to come, and of the need to prepare now for the coming of the Lord. *'Every time I pray for all of you'*, he says, *'I pray with joy, remembering how you have helped to spread the Good News from the day you first heard it right up to the present'*. On this day when we reflect upon the word of God, we might renew our efforts to live up to the spirit of the Gospel and to spread that good news so freely given to us. As Christians who prepare for the 'Day of Christ', we, like the Philippians before us, are to improve our knowledge and deepen our perception. *'This will help you'*, says the apostle *'to become pure and blameless, and prepare for the Day of Christ'*. So we are to become open to the coming of God's word.

Gospel according to Luke 3: 1-6

Luke the evangelist setting his gospel against the real time backcloth of the Roman [universal world] and local [Palestinian] events, will emphasize that Jesus is not just a Jewish Messiah, but also the spiritual saviour of the whole world. Again there is an echo of the prophecy of Baruch – about the joyful return to Jerusalem, and how the rough roads are to be made smooth. Today the Church invites us to respond to the gospel, making a straight way in our lives, and in the lives of other – including migrants and refugees – for the coming of God. Luke takes us to the wilderness beside the river Jordan to hear the words of the last prophet, John the Baptist. *'A voice cries out in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth. And all peoples shall see the salvation of God'*. Yes! Here is the invitation to all peoples to heed the word of God. Maybe, the word welcome is 'keynote' this week? Welcome to God's Word, to Christ and to the needy stranger.