

BCP Lectionary  
Baruch 5:1-9  
Philippians 1:1-11  
Luke 3:1-6

I speak to you in the name of One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All throughout my childhood every year, right about this time began one of the most epic games I have ever been a part of. Well, my brother and I would call it a game, while my mother might call it the most obnoxious part of Advent. My mother had a very beautiful nativity set that I was drawn to. As a young child, like most children, I treated the pieces of the set as if they were action figures. I would use them to act out the Christmas story in with a level of creativity only a child's imagination can produce. As I got older I would simply stare at the crèche in a bit of a meditative wonder thinking about what I knew of God and what didn't make sense to me. Here's where the epic Broadbent battle of advent came in - My mother was a firm believer that we were not allow to put the baby Jesus in the manger until Christmas Day. She would tell my brother and me that we were practicing our patience and waiting for Jesus.

Apparently we weren't very patient, because we would search high and low, all over the house for my mom's secret location of the baby Jesus. Eventually we would find it and we would sneak it into the manger. We would then watch and wait to see how long it took for her to recognize that Jesus had come prematurely – It's amazing how much patience we had then. Eventually she would notice and

remove him. She would reprimand us, find a new location for the baby. I'm sure you can see the pattern that ensued.

While we definitely had fun with this little "game" I absolutely remember having arguments with my mom about how I thought she was wrong for waiting to give Jesus his place in the manger. I knew that we weren't actually waiting for Jesus to be born every year – He had already been born. He had lived. He had died and he had risen. It didn't make sense to me that we couldn't engage with Advent as if Jesus was already born – why did we have to pretend? I think it was actually an astute theological observation at such a young age to look at the nativity and think that something was not quite right if Jesus was not sitting comfortably in his hay bed.

This is a very interesting tension that is inherent to our experience of Advent isn't it? We are very much people of advent. Many assume that advent is really about waiting, that perhaps even Advent means to wait, but that is not true at all. Advent means "coming" and isn't just about the coming of God incarnate although we deeply remember and celebrate that God chose to engage with creation within a human body – but it is also about the "coming" of God that is happening every single day all around us. Jesus remains present in our world – through scripture, in the Eucharist and in this very community. Advent helps to slow us down to recognize that, as Joan Chittister says, "Jesus is present in our own lives, eternally

enlivening, eternally with us.”<sup>1</sup> The final coming that Advent draws our attention to is the Second Coming. Marantha – the greek word that can mean both “Come, Lord Jesus, Come” as well as “The Lord has come”! This is our true Advent coming that we await – the past, the present and the future coming of God.

I think that our lectionary readings do a very good job of reminding us exactly what is coming. Every year I’m always caught off guard by what the advent gospel readings are throughout the four Sundays of advent. For some reason I still expect the four week – slow telling of the birth narrative – the angels engaging with Mary and Joseph – their journey to Bethlehem and so forth. More along the lines of what happens in Sunday School. Rather in all three liturgical years, A, B & C, we have the same formula – the first Sunday is about the apocalypse and this promise of the second coming, the second week is an introduction of John and the incorporation of the Isaiah verse we have today which helps to anchor us in the Messianic hope that was focal of the Old Testament prophets, the third is helps to orient us to where we should be looking to see Christ – among the poor, the needy, the outcast and the oppressed AND finally on the fourth Sunday we focus on how Mary and Joseph make sense of the unacceptable, how they struggle with their doubts and yet say, “I will.”

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<sup>1</sup> Chittister, J. (2009). *The Liturgical Year: The Spiritual Adventure of the Spiritual Life*. Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN. (Pg. 65).

Turning our focus to today's readings – There's something quite beautiful in the make-up of what we are assigned for today. We have this extremely beautiful passage from Baruch – Baruch is thought to be the Prophet Jeremiah's scribe and is deuterocanonical, not considered part of the canon for most protestants, which is a shame. Our portion is written to the Israelites in captivity with a strong promise that they will be brought out of exile to Jerusalem.

*“...but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make the level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.”<sup>2</sup>*

Then in our Gospel reading we have John, the son of Zechariah, quoting the prophet Isaiah:

*“Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”<sup>3</sup>*

We can see why the creators of the lectionary paired these two together – but what I find extremely fascinating is what is different between them. Specifically *“and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”* Each of the Gospels include John the Baptist quoting this portion of Isaiah, but Luke is the only one to include this

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<sup>2</sup> Baruch 5:6b-7

<sup>3</sup> Luke 3:5-6

portion – the others stop following “*make his paths straight.*” This is a very inherently Lukean thing to do – It absolutely demonstrates the overwhelming inclusivity of Jesus’ redeeming work that we see throughout Luke’s Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. In Baruch we see God’s intervention for a specific nation and tribe – and in Luke we see God’s salvation for all flesh.

Luke is positioning John in this very Old Testament tradition of prophets – he’s being introduced to readers and speaking like he is Moses, David or Elijah – and yet he is pointing to something very different. He is like the prophets of old and yet is placed as the last prophet of his kind. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – John’s words have been fulfilled. This prophetic tradition ends here and yet a new one begins.

We are in a world in which the prophetic voice is still very much needed and that voice, I believe must come from us. We are now the ones who now look into nativity sets and acknowledge that it is incomplete without the baby Jesus, because of the Incarnate One has come. We are the ones we can look around the world and see that God is very much present and active all around us – even acknowledging ourselves as the ones transformed into the Body of Christ to actively engage in bringing forth the Kingdom of God and We are the ones who look to the horizon of time eagerly and actively waiting for Jesus’ coming again.

Advent is not a passive liturgical season of our church – it is not the space in which we are to sit and wait staring at an empty manger. It is a time in which our eyes open a little wider we explore the past differently, we look at the present a bit more inquisitively and we cast our vision expectantly for Christ coming again.

Maranatha