

**THE COMING LORD: HE IS COMING SOON**  
**Advent B2 – Isa 40:1-11; Ps 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Pet 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8**  
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Waiting . . . waiting . . . most of us dislike or even detest being made to wait. And the longer we wait, the worse waiters we become. Thanksgiving has passed and there are only two-and-a-half weeks until Christmas. Last minute shopping, tree decorating, food buying, travel planning, final exams for college students—on the one hand, so little time; on the other hand, the so little time passes so slowly. Just talk to kids: they don't think Christmas is ever going to get here! The more presents you put under the tree, the more slowly the clock seems to tick. Although my "to do list" pushes me at a hectic and hurried pace, the days are dragging by because I am anxious to have all my boys home for the holidays. How short days can last so long beats me.

Today begins the second week of the "Season of Advent": this time of year when preparation is made to commemorate Christ's first coming and to anticipate His second coming. As we witnessed last week, the season starts with a mood of lament and longing for the coming of God, *but today we shift to the good news that God is coming soon.* Despair gives way to hope as God's people come to terms with their own inability to save themselves and come to trust that God's mercy will soon show itself in marvelous ways. Isaiah 40 announces that Jerusalem has "served her term" in bondage to sin, and a new era is about to dawn. The voice in the wilderness is bringing a message of great joy: "Here is your God!" This God is both a powerful ruler who subdues all efforts to stifle the joy of His people, and a protective shepherd who tenderly cares for all the needs of His flock. There is no need to fear; there is every need to be grateful and glad. Let us read from Isa 40:1-11.

<sup>1</sup>"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. <sup>2</sup>"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and that her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her in full for all her sins"

<sup>3</sup>Listen! I hear the voice of someone shouting, “Make a highway for the LORD through the wilderness. Make a straight, smooth road through the desert for our God. <sup>4</sup>Fill the valleys and level the hills. Straighten out the curves and smooth off the rough spots. <sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!”

<sup>6</sup>A voice said, “Shout!”

I asked, “What should I shout?”

“Shout that people are like the grass that dies away. Their beauty fades as quickly as the beauty of flowers in a field. <sup>7</sup>The grass withers, and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the LORD. And so it is with people. <sup>8</sup>The grass withers, and flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.”

<sup>9</sup>Messenger of good news, shout to Zion from the mountaintops! Shout louder to Jerusalem—do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah, “Your God is coming!”

<sup>10</sup>Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in all his glorious power. He will rule with awesome strength. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes. <sup>11</sup>He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young (NLT).

Waiting . . . waiting . . . between the threat of Isaiah 39 and the promise of Isaiah 40, there has been a two-hundred-year wait, during which all of royal Israel was carried to Babylon (39:6). Isaiah chapters 40-55 were delivered among the Babylonian exiles of Judah sometime between 550 B.C. and 538 B.C. Jerusalem has lain in ruins since her destruction by the Babylonian armies in 587 B.C. *But there is good news: the waiting is soon to come to an end!* After the terrible silence of suffering, God speaks of salvation for His people. It is no wonder that part of this poem is quoted in all four Gospels.

God’s first word is “comfort”: He commands that comfort be proclaimed to His people. The proclaimed comfort is based on the divine decision that the people have paid the price for their sins. The time of punishment is done; the time of pardon has begun. A second voice issues an instruction to build a superhighway across the desert on which God will travel in triumph. The road will run from Babylonian exile all the way back to Jerusalem, and along with this triumphant God will come all the long-exiled Jews in a glorious, victorious homecoming. All the bystanders along the road will be astonished to see that the God who seemed to be defeated by the Babylonian gods will march in a wondrous show of unrivaled splendor and unrestricted strength. God is coming, and He is coming in majesty and power. The hope in Advent—the hope in the coming of God—is not grounded in humanity, for we are all frail and fickle, it is grounded in the faithfulness of God.

Based upon the unfailing promise of God, the prophet goes forth to preach. Here in vv. 9-11 we have the first mention of an evangelist in the Bible; that is, one who is a herald of good tidings (cf. 52:7). God, the conquering King, raises His mighty arms in victory and then lowers them in tenderness, so that He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in His bosom, and gently leads the mothers with their children.

More than a half-millennium later another voice is heard in the wilderness. Let us read from Mark 1:1-8. (Realize that while it will only take you seconds to turn to Mark, you are paging through almost six hundred years of history.)

<sup>1</sup>Here begins the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup>In the book of the prophet Isaiah, God said,

“Look, I am sending my messenger before you,  
and he will prepare your way.

<sup>3</sup>He is a voice shouting in the wilderness:

‘Prepare a pathway for the Lord’s coming!  
Make a straight road for him!’”

<sup>4</sup>This messenger was John the Baptist. He lived in the wilderness and was preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. <sup>5</sup>People from Jerusalem and from all over Judea traveled out into the wilderness to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup>His clothes were woven from camel hair, and he wore a leather belt; his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He announced: “Someone is coming soon who is far greater than I am—so much greater that I am not even worthy to stoop down and untie his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!” (NLT, footnote translation used for v. 7).

As far as we know, the opening verse of Mark is the first use of the word *gospel* (*good news*) to refer to a written account of the story about Jesus Christ. And where does one begin “the beginning of the good news”? Mark does so by beginning with the prophets of Israel. Although the coming of Christ is a new thing God is doing, it is not without a past. John’s preaching is news, good news, but it has a history. And that history is the soil in which hope survives, for it is the history of a faithful God. The revelation of God in Israel is the conceptual cradle for the coming of Christ. If Jesus had simply showed up and announced that He was the Son of God, how would we know who His Father was without the history of Israel?

John, he is an extraordinary audiovisual aid. He is “PowerPoint” in person. He had a point to make, and he made it powerfully. He does not show up with glitz, glamour, or grandeur. He does not arrive in a limousine or an army tank; he does not dine at the best

restaurants; and his wardrobe is not that of the brightest and best. He represents a reversal of all earthly expectations; and by so doing, he clears the way for a clean and uncluttered look at the one who is to come, Jesus Christ. John preached that the Messiah is at the door and that repentance is essential as preparation to receive the Messiah. *In other words, John gave his listeners hope, and he gave them a way to enter into that hope.*

John, the voice in the wilderness—the forerunner to the Messiah, his proclamation painfully pricks my heart. Why? *Because the very sermon that God’s people had been preaching to the pagan world—repentance and submission to washings of cleansing—this very sermon is now addressed to God’s people.* And since we believe ourselves to be the people of God today, John’s preaching is, therefore, addressed to us today. Like first-century Israel, we need to repent of the arrogant assumptions that we have exclusive ownership of God and that we alone are his faithful and favored people. We need to take the medicine that we prescribe, to practice what we preach, and to stop exempting ourselves from the spiritual demands we impose on others. We need to stop considering ourselves acceptable to God because we see ourselves as being better than others, as though God grades on a curve. We need to repent and open up our lives to the Holy Spirit in which Jesus desires to baptize us. *We need to realize that we cannot find our way to the manger of the Messiah without first passing through the desert where John is preaching.* Repent!—therein lies the good news—repent, confess, be baptized, and be forgiven. The LORD God is a God who saves, and the good news is He even saves His own people!

If you or I think that we can ignore John because Christ *has* come, we need to listen and learn that Christ *is* coming. Christ is coming, and we need to prepare ourselves. The Apostle Peter in his discussion of the return of God in Christ and the coming new heavens and new earth, writes:

<sup>14</sup>And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to live a pure and blameless life. And be at peace with God. <sup>15</sup>And remember, the Lord is waiting so that people have time to be saved. . . . (2 Pet 3:14-15a, NLT).

Waiting . . . waiting . . . God is waiting so that you and I have time to be saved. That is good news. That is the gospel. But, as Peter warns, God will not wait forever; therefore,

we must make peace with God *now*. God is waiting on us. What are we waiting for?

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