

## John the Baptist and the Mystery of Advent 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent (Year B)

### Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11—The New Exodus

1. Forgiveness of Sins: forgiveness of the “iniquity” of God’s people (40:1-2)
2. New Exodus: “make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (40:3)
3. Good News: herald of “good tidings” (Gk LXX *euangelizomai*)
4. Coming of God: “Behold, *your God!*” and “The LORD *comes...*” (Latin *veniet*)

### Psalm 85—Salvation is at Hand

1. Salvation is Near: God’s “salvation” is “at hand” (v. 9)
2. Preparation: “righteousness” will “make” “a way/path” (Gk *hodos*) (v. 13)

### 2 Peter 3:8-14—The New Heavens and the New Earth

1. The Day of the Lord: “heavens” and “earth” will be dissolved (3:10-11)
2. Response: live lives of “holiness” and “godliness” (3:11-12)
3. New Creation: we await “a new heavens and a new earth” (3:13)

### Mark 1:1-8—John the Baptist Prepares for the “Coming” of God

1. Good News: “the beginning of the gospel (Gk *euangelion*) (1:1)
2. John the Baptist and the New Exodus:
  - a. Isaiah 40: prophecy of the New Exodus
  - b. The Desert: John appeared “in the wilderness”
  - c. River Jordan: where the first exodus had ended (cf. Joshua 3-4)
3. The Coming One:
  - a. Notice John does not say anything about “the Messiah”
  - b. Obviously, he is speaking of *the coming of Jesus* (cf. Mark 1:9)
  - c. However, Mark quotes Isaiah 40: “good news” of the coming of “God”!
  - d. He will baptize you with “the Holy Spirit”

### The Priene Inscription and the “Good News” of the Birth of Caesar (9 B.C.)

Since the Providence which has ordered all things is deeply interested in our life has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit mankind, sending him as a savior (*sōter*), both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (*epiphanein*), surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus (*hē geneulious tou theou*) was the beginning for the world of the good tidings (*euangeliōn*) that came by reason of him” (trans. in HCNT 1995, 169; cf. R. Hays, 2016, p. 92)

### The Catechism of the Catholic Church

*When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year... By celebrating the precursor’s [John the Baptist’s] birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his*

*desire*: “He must increase, I must decrease...” (CCC 524; cf. feast of the Nativity John the Baptist [June 24<sup>th</sup>] and feast of the Nativity of Christ [Dec 25<sup>th</sup>])

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent, Year B)

1. Before studying Isaiah 40 carefully, were you aware of the biblical idea of a New Exodus? How does this ancient Jewish hope illuminate what we are hoping for during the Advent season?

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2. What exactly is the “good news” or “gospel” that Mark begins by proclaiming? What would the “good news” have meant a Jewish context (Isaiah 40)? What might “good news” have meant in a pagan context (the Priene Inscription)?

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3. Why is John the Baptist so prominent in the Sunday Readings for Advent? What significance should imitation of John have for us during the Advent season? Practically speaking, how can we follow the Church and make John the Baptist’s “desire” for the coming of Christ our own? (CCC 524)

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### For Further Reading

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: St. John the Baptist: his mission and message (CCC 523-24, 717-720)
2. Edith Barnecut, *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels Year B* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1993), 10-11. Excellent commentaries from the Church Fathers on the specific readings of each Sunday.
3. Mary Healy. *The Gospel of Mark*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.