

## Second Sunday in Advent December 10, 2017

Year B – the Gospel of Mark

LUTHERAN

# LIVING THE ^ LECTIONARY

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.  
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the  
rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

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“Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Parma” or “Harold Weseloh”**

December 7, 2017 (Thursdays at 10:00 AM)

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, OH 44130

*Presented as a part of the bible study/worship at a weekday service (currently on Fridays at 7:00pm) in a house church setting, bi-weekly at an assisted living site, St. Philip Lutheran Church, Cleveland (First Sunday of the month at 11:00am) and used by Lutherans in Africa. Contact [puritaspastor@hotmail.com](mailto:puritaspastor@hotmail.com) for details.*



<http://bethlehem.org.nz/series/the-gospel-of-mark/>

### Hymn of the Day

**Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 344 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 63**

**“On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s (*Herald’s*) cry”**

“Scripture References: st. 1-2 = Isa. 40:3, 9, Matt. 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:3-4, st. 3 = Ps. 46:1, Isa. 40:7

John the Baptist's announcement "Prepare the way for the Lord" (Matt. 3:3, a quote from Isa. 40:3) is the primary basis for this Advent hymn. Stanzas 1 and 2 apply that message to people today; stanza 3 is a confession by God's people of their need for salvation; stanza 4 is a prayer for healing and love; stanza 5 is a doxology. This much-loved Advent text is laced with various scriptural phrases.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zq0f0Qo6A24> Canto Deo

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#) Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

**Isaiah 40:1-11, Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), the same reading (Next Week: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; RCL, the same reading)**

*“...Comfort ye, comfort ye—twice repeated to give double assurance. Having announced the coming captivity of the Jews in Babylon, God now desires His servants, the prophets (Isa 52:7), to comfort them. The scene is laid in Babylon; the time, near the close of the captivity; the ground of comfort is the speedy ending of the captivity, the Lord Himself being their leader.*

*my people ... your God—correlatives (Jer 31:33; Ho 1:9, 10). It is God's covenant relation with His people, and His "word" of promise (Isa 40:8) to their forefathers, which is the ground of His interposition in their behalf, after having for a time chastised them (Isa 54:8)...”*

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.x.xxiii.xli.html> “The mission of the Christian Classics Ethereal Library is to build up Christ's church by making classic Christian literature available and promoting its use.”

## Comfort for God's People

40 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her

that her warfare<sup>[a]</sup> is ended,

that her iniquity is pardoned,

that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries:<sup>[b]</sup>

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

### **The Word of God Stands Forever**

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, “Cry!”

And I said,<sup>[c]</sup> “What shall I cry?”

All flesh is grass,

and all its beauty<sup>[d]</sup> is like the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades

when the breath of the LORD blows on it;

surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades,

but the word of our God will stand forever.

### **The Greatness of God**

<sup>9</sup> Go on up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good news;<sup>[e]</sup>

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;<sup>[f]</sup>

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

“Behold your God!”

<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

behold, his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup> He will tend his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms;

he will carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead those that are with young.

- a. [Isaiah 40:2](#) Or *hardship*
- b. [Isaiah 40:3](#) Or *A voice of one crying*
- c. [Isaiah 40:6](#) Revocalization based on Dead Sea Scroll, Septuagint, Vulgate; Masoretic Text *And someone says*
- d. [Isaiah 40:6](#) Or *all its constancy*
- e. [Isaiah 40:9](#) Or *O herald of good news to Zion*
- f. [Isaiah 40:9](#) Or *O herald of good news to Jerusalem*

“Verse 1, with its command to comfort the people of God, sets the tone not just for this passage but for the whole of Isaiah 40-66.

Prior to chapter 40 the news spoken in God's name is a difficult word of judgment. The people have rebelled against God. The people have lived at the expense of their neighbors, putting their own desires above the needs of others. These chapters, mostly from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, point forward to a time when Jerusalem would be destroyed. In 587 BCE Jerusalem fell to Babylon, and a portion of Jerusalem's population went into exile.

From chapter 40 forward, this word of judgment is in the past. Jerusalem was destroyed, and a number of its citizens did go into exile. Now, circa 540 BCE, on the other side of this experience, a new word comes to the people of Judah -- a word of comfort and hope for a new future. Three proclamations build on the imperative to comfort God's people in verse 1, each expanding on what it means for the people of Jerusalem to receive comfort.

#### **A highway in the desert..**

This news of a metaphoric highway in the desert heralds a second Exodus, an easier one with flat ground and trouble-free travel (verse 4). Once more YHWH's people would follow their God out of captivity to a Promised Land. Anyone who had doubted God's presence in and devotion to Judah would see this and know that God had not only spoken a redeeming word but also had the power to fulfill it.

#### **The word of our God stands forever**

In verse 6 the punctuation marks in the NRSV communicate a short conversation between two voices. An anonymous voice, some sort of divine attendant, issues a command to "Cry out!" A second voice, "I," asks what is to be cried. Following this terse dialogue is commentary on the poor, unreliable constancy of the people, liable to droop like a flower in a field, and a final, triumphant claim that God is wholly other -- constant, reliable, and able to stand forever (vs. 6b-8). Punctuation marks, however, are decisions made by translators and interpreters. A number of scholars have suggested that the dialogue continues beyond the two lines shown in the NRSV.<sup>1</sup> In this view, the "I," speaking as the prophet, continues to speak to the end of verse 7. The words are an objection to the command to cry out. Why prophesy to a people with the constancy of grass? The anonymous voice responds in verse 8 with the very hopeful news that the constancy of the people is less important than that of God.

When read in this way, the passage echoes the pattern of a prophetic call narrative (introductory word, commissioning, objection, assurance) much like Isaiah's call in Isaiah 6. This is a new word for a new time but is in line with the prophecy of Isaiah the 6<sup>th</sup> century prophet...

#### **Do not fear, oh Jerusalem, herald of good tidings**

At the end of this passage the city of Jerusalem, also identified as Zion, is personified. This is a common trope in Isaiah 40-66 (cf 51:17-20; 52:1-2, 7-10; 54:1-17; 62:1-12). However, the place in the Old Testament in which Zion is personified most consistently is in the first two chapters of the book of Lamentations. In Lamentations 1-2 Daughter Zion cries out against the destruction wrought her. She speaks words of accusation against her human enemies and even God. The refrain that comes again and again is, "There is no one to comfort her" (Lamentations 1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21). At the end of her speeches -- and even the end of the book of Lamentations - Daughter Zion receives no response to her cry.

The response to Zion's laments comes, rather, in other biblical books. The response comes in verses such as Isaiah 40:1 "Comfort, O comfort my people." The response comes in verses such as Isaiah 40:9 in which the words for Jerusalem to speak are not those of lament but of good news. She is no longer told to wail but to raise her voice without fear. The message given is confident and hopeful, "Here is your God!" Here is a God who comes to feed the flock, to gather the lambs, to lead the mother sheep -- to bring comfort. Here is God in whom one may have hope."

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2254](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2254) [Kristin J. Wendland](#), Ph.D. candidate in Old Testament, Princeton Theological Seminary

**Why read it when you can sing it? Handel and the Messiah.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Pz9BCMFOp8>

**Psalm 85; RCL, Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 (Psalm 126; RCL, Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b-55)**

*"TITLE. To the Chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah. There is no need to repeat our observations upon a title which is of so frequent occurrence; the reader is referred to notes placed in the headings of preceding psalms. Yet it may not be out of place to quote Ne 12:46. In the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God.*

**OBJECT AND OCCASION.** *It is the prayer of a patriot for his afflicted country, in which he pleads the Lord's former mercies, and by faith foresees brighter days. We believe that David wrote it, but many question that assertion. Certain interpreters appear to grudge the psalmist David the authorship of any of the psalms, and refer the sacred songs by wholesale to the times of Hezekiah, Josiah, the Captivity, and the Maccabees. It is remarkable that, as a rule, the more sceptical a writer is, the more resolute is he to have done with David; while the purely evangelic annotators are for the most part content to leave the royal poet in the chair of authorship. The charms of a new theory also operate greatly upon writers who would have nothing at all to say if they did not invent a novel hypothesis, and twist the language of the psalm in order to justify it..."*

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=spur&b=19&c=85>

Charles H. Spurgeon's Treasury of David. [Try the "Hints to the village preacher" at this website.](#)

## Revive Us Again

**To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.**

85 LORD, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

<sup>2</sup> You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you covered all their sin. Selah

<sup>3</sup> You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.

<sup>4</sup> Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us!

- <sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
- <sup>6</sup> Will you not revive us again,  
that your people may rejoice in you?
- <sup>7</sup> Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,  
and grant us your salvation.
- <sup>8</sup> Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;  
but let them not turn back to folly.
- <sup>9</sup> Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
that glory may dwell in our land.
- <sup>10</sup> Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
- <sup>11</sup> Faithfulness springs up from the ground,  
and righteousness looks down from the sky.
- <sup>12</sup> Yes, the LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.
- <sup>13</sup> Righteousness will go before him  
and make his footsteps a way.

"The psalm assigned for last week (Advent 1) included a thrice-repeated refrain that included the petition, "Restore us, O God" (80:3, 7, 19).

This week's psalm expands on the motif of restoration. In v. 1, the psalm recalls that God had "restored the fortunes of Jacob" in the past. In v. 4 it renews the plea, "Restore us again, O God of our salvation." The epithet given to God is especially telling: "God of our salvation." Philip Melancthon famously taught that to know Christ is to know Christ's benefits, rather than his natures. That is, true knowledge of God is more than the granting of intellectual assent to ideas about God. True knowledge also includes having one's being grasped by God's promises and knowing that one's life flows from God's blessings. Psalm 85 and Melancthon sing in the same choir. For Psalm 85, to know God is to experience God's saving acts, to know that we are caught up in the melody of God's saving acts, and to know that the Lord is the "God of our salvation."...

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=189](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=189) [Rolf Jacobson](#)  
Professor of Old Testament and Alvin N. Rogness Chair in Scripture, Theology, and Ministry,  
Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn

**2 Peter 3:8-14; RCL, 2 Peter 3:8-15a** (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; RCL, the same reading) *Verses 15 and 16 included to show complete section.*

*"Sermon preached at a Lutheran congregation last week. I was guest preaching, so I had to make more general context assumptions than usual. I enjoyed exploring advent waiting in regards to Christ's second coming, but continue to wonder how such ideas are best put into practice..."*

*Advent means “coming.” I don’t need to tell good Lutherans that. This is a season of waiting, of expectation, for Christ’s coming on Christmas Day. So with the whole church, we wait: lighting candles, singing services, counting down each Sunday until, with Christmas joy, we celebrate God’s incarnation. Waiting, faithfully, for Christ’s coming at Christmas.*

*But there’s another side to Christ’s coming, one that, generally speaking, us mainline Christians get a bit nervous to discuss...*

*Advent means “coming” in another way: Christ’s “second coming.” Christ’s return. –and it’s not all elves and reindeers, and would you believe this: my Bible doesn’t have one mention of snow flakes falling while chestnuts roast over an open fire?!..” (continued after the reading)*

<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you,<sup>[a]</sup> not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies<sup>[b]</sup> will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! <sup>13</sup> But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

### **Final Words**

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. <sup>15</sup> *And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*

- a. [2 Peter 3:9](#) Some manuscripts *on your account*
- b. [2 Peter 3:10](#) Or *elements*; also verse [12](#)
- c. [2 Peter 3:10](#) Greek *found*; some manuscripts *will be burned up*

“...Tonight’s lection from 2 Peter is all about Christ’s coming again, “The day of the Lord” Peter calls it, but that day isn’t December 25th at all.

It’s that other day, the timing of it is rather fuzzy, after all “with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day” but its that day, that second-coming-day, about which Peter is concerned.

If we read our Bibles carefully, we’ll notice how often New Testament texts speak of that coming day. Author Phyllis Tickle did just that last year, she published a book called *The Words of Jesus* that snipped out all the words of Jesus in the gospels and set them on the page without transitions or context or the rest of the story—just Jesus’ words—sort of a red letter edition of the Bible with only the red letters.

Tickle said what surprised her most about the project was how much Jesus spoke about the end days, the coming day when God would reconcile all to Godself. We forget about these sayings of Jesus. Though we pray them every week: thy kingdom come, thy will be done, we don't always take them to heart.

I've heard told a story about one New Testament scholar who every day would wake up, stretch, and walk to the window of his bedroom and open the blinds. Then he'd pray the same prayer every morning. Short, succinct, longing. Every morning he'd pray: "Is it today Lord? Is it today?"

These aren't new questions, they're the questions Peter's community were struggling with when he wrote 2 Peter. It was then several generations after Jesus' death, and the people were met with the hard truth: Jesus had not yet returned...

At the end of the day, though, Peter is more worked up about disposition than details. Between the already of Christ having come, and the not yet of Christ's return, Peter tells his community:

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting, strive to be at peace. Peace?! When God is coming to dissolve the earth with fire? Peace?! When we do not know the time or the hour. Peace?! When wars rage, and disease lingers, and jobs are lost, and famine reigns, and Christmas is coming but we're not ready and we're not even sure we want to celebrate.

Strive to be at peace. Peter was certainly one for setting demanding goals.

But that's what he says, strive to be at peace, without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation...

And Peter's instructions are simple (dare I say Lutheran even?—Peter points to God. "Wait in peace," Peter says, "regarding the patience of our Lord as salvation; the patience of our Lord."

<http://www.adamjcopeland.com/2008/12/13/sermon-wait-on-the-lord-2-peter-38-15/> Adam J. Copeland teaches... at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, as well as and direct(s) the Center for Stewardship Leaders...and as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Hallock, Minn."

## "The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 1st Chapter"

**Mark 1:1-8; RCL, the same reading** (*John 1:6-8, 19-28; RCL, the same reading*)

*"Beginnings are important. They set the tone for what is to come. They clue us in on what to expect.*

*The Gospel text for the second Sunday of Advent gives us the beginning of Mark's Gospel which is like no other. Consider the beginnings of each of the Gospels. Matthew: "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Luke: "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us..." John: "In the beginning...". These are really different beginnings for very different theological reasons. How is Mark's beginning different and what difference does this make? (continued after the reading)*

## John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,<sup>[b]</sup>

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,  
 who will prepare your way,  
<sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
 ‘Prepare<sup>[c]</sup> the way of the Lord,  
 make his paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup> John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

- a. [Mark 1:1](#) Some manuscripts omit *the Son of God*
- b. [Mark 1:2](#) Some manuscripts *in the prophets*
- c. [Mark 1:3](#) Or *crying: Prepare in the wilderness*

**“This is the Gospel of the Lord”      “Praise to You, O Christ”**

Beginnings also make us consider endings and one cannot consider the beginning of Mark without thinking of its ending. "They said nothing to anyone for they were afraid..." This unsatisfying ending had the scribes and scholars scrambling for alternate closings and theoretical explanations. Yet, the real ending of Mark is not really the ending at all. "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." "He is not here," is perhaps the best "good news" of all. Not even a tomb can hold God, not even death...)

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1146](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1146)

**Karoline Lewis** Associate Professor of Preaching and the Marbury E. Anderson Chair in Biblical Preaching, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

“John the Baptist is best known as the forerunner of Jesus, the one who calls on people to prepare the way of the Lord's coming.

In Series B, the Advent season devotes two consecutive Sundays to the ministry of John the Baptist, presenting back-to-back parallel texts from the Gospels of Mark and John.

The text for Advent 2 introduces us not only to the figure of John the Baptist but also to the Gospel of Mark, from which a majority of Gospel texts will be selected in the coming year.

The first verse is probably intended as the title of the book. At this point in history, no one had ever written "a Gospel" before. Mark probably thought he was writing a biography, but when he chose to call his work "the good news (*gospel*) of Jesus Christ" he gave a name to a new genre of literature.

The book differs from biographies of other heroic individuals in that it does not simply claim to recount the inspiring tale of a noble man. Mark wants to tell us about the beginning of a new era, a time and place in which God has entered human history in an unprecedented way...

But first -- a preface. Yes, it begins with Jesus, but before Jesus there was John, and before John, there was Isaiah..."

So, when Advent comes around every year, we are reminded that God is coming to find us. We have our ways of hiding. But on Advent 2, when John the Baptist shouts, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" it is as though God has just called, "Ready or not, here I come!" And we remember: this is the God who always finds us."

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2266](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2266) [Mark Allan Powell](#) Professor of New Testament, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, OH

<https://www.onemansweb.org/theology/a-difficult-day-of-the-lord-mark-13-24-37/the-pumpnickel-gospel-of-mark---mark-1-1-8.html> [Read an interesting commentary at "The Pumpnickel Gospel of Mark"](#)



*Agnus Day appears with the permission of <http://www.agnusday.org/>*

"When Mark wrote his gospel he begins with what I believe is a phrase that has layered meanings for us if we listen closely - "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ!" It is the beginning of Mark's telling of the story of Jesus. Now right from the start of his gospel Mark let's us into the secret - Jesus is God's Son.

If you sit and listen to the whole book from beginning to end it's as though we as listeners are privy to a bit of a joke. Jesus is God's Son but most of the rest of the characters in the story don't get it..."

<http://revplockhart.blogspot.com.au/2014/12/its-good-news-of-jesus-son-of-god-for.html>

**Challenge yourself to produce a handwritten copy of the book of Mark by  
Christ the King Sunday, November 25, 2018.**

**How you do it is your choice, actually doing it is also your choice.**