

## **Homily for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent Year C**

**By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD**

**Readings: Bar 5:1-9; Ps 125(126); Phil 1:4-6,8-11; Lk 3:1-6**

**Theme: Put on the Cloak of Holiness!**

On this second Sunday of Advent, there is a call to holiness, to be pure and blameless and make straight the paths for the Lord. The first reading is from the book of Baruch, one of the books categorised as the so-called deuterocanonical books. Baruch, whose name means 'blessed,' is described in the book of Jeremiah as the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah of a noble family (cf. Jer 32:12). Baruch is also introduced as the secretary of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 36:4) and assisted Jeremiah in purchasing a field in Anathoth (cf. Jer 32:12ff). We know that he went to Babylon during the exile (cf. Bar 1:1-9) and that he was a strong character (cf. Jer 43:3). His book is divided into three major parts. Today, our reading is from the third part, a consolatory message to the exiles.

Here we find a message of hope. The exiles are to take off the garment of sorrow and affliction. In its place, they will be clothed with the beauty of God's glory, the robe of God's righteousness, and the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. The Babylonians had taken the people into exile. Still, God will change their destiny and show the splendour of Israel to the whole world. Jerusalem, once destroyed, will arise to become a gathering once again of her children scattered all over the world. But God himself will clothe his people. He will put the cloak of holiness on them again. The most beautiful part of the reading referenced in the gospel is 'that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.' The people of Israel awaited this promise of restoration for years, even after returning from exile. John the Baptist tells us in the gospel that the coming of Jesus fulfils those prophecies.

In the gospel, Luke gives a background to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, mentioning specific persons to show that it was indeed a historical event that cannot be contradicted. He mentions the political and religious leaders at the time. Tiberius Caesar was the emperor, Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judaea, and Herod and his brother Philip were tetrarchs. In the religious circle, Annas and Caiaphas were the High priests. The word of God came to John, son of Zechariah. The phrase 'the word of God came' underscores the prophetic role of John the Baptist (cf. Isa 1:10,12). The prophet John went around preaching what is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah. Those words are echoed in the first reading from the prophet Baruch. 'Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.' Preparing a path for the Lord is a call to conversion and holiness of life to enable God space in the people's hearts.

In the second reading, Paul invites the Philippians to the same life of holiness. In his prayer for them, he says, 'may (you) increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception so that you can always recognise what is best.' The life of holiness seeks to know God more profoundly and deeper. Knowing God deeply, one lives above sin and becomes pure and blameless. The pure and blameless heart is that who is prepared for the Day of the Lord.

Jesus came into the world to bring us salvation and clothe us with holiness, which ordinarily we cannot attain by ourselves. However, we need to cooperate with the grace by offering our hearts ready to receive the good news. That entails purging ourselves of sin. Advent is a time to return from the exile of sin to be clothed anew in holiness to welcome Jesus anew at Christmas.