

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent, Year C
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Sunday, 10.xii.2006, 10:00, Holy Eucharist – LBW 2
Malachi3:1-4, Psalm126, Philippians 1:3-11, Luke 3:1-6

Jesu Juva!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who
was and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

*. . . as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,
"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of
the Lord, make his paths straight. 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.'"*

-- Luke 3:4-6

There are many commentaries on the Book of Isaiah,
but the most radical among these is the Gospel
according to Saint Luke. Both the Evangelist of the
Third Gospel and the Evangelist's subject, Our Lord
Jesus Christ, echo and amplify the prophecies of Isaiah,
the vision Isaiah had of a universal reckoning and
salvation which all the living, 'all flesh' would witness.

Luke believes that John the Baptist was that forerunner of God's fulfillment foretold by Isaiah. Both the prophet of the latter part of Isaiah, that prophet of Israel's return from captivity in Babylon, and John the Baptist, the prophet of the LORD'S return in power to Israel and His manifestation to *all* the world were men of God with a common experience. They both were 'like one crying in the wilderness.' What does that mean?

I suppose some of you hunters might have experienced something like this crying in the wilderness if you ever wandered away from your hunting party and missed a shot or injured yourself. You might have cried out, way out there in the wilderness, if only to utter a loud, 'Oh, my!' But, of course, the wilderness

and its inhabitants took no notice of your crying out, except perhaps to flee you and your rifle, to run away. The rest of us, who do not spend as much time in the wilderness as hunters, can think of other examples, experiences we may file under the general heading entitled, 'might as well have been talking to a brick wall.' In that case, there is a hearing subject there to listen, but hearing does not seem to pass on to comprehension.

The prophetic writer of the last third of the Book of Isaiah would have had that experience with the Jews in Babylon. God had now spoken through a great event. The King of Persia, Babylon's new ruler, wanted to release all the captives and to provide for their return home. But, this was seventy

years after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and the great captivity. Almost all of the Jews then alive were now dead. Their children and grandchildren had made a life for themselves in Babylon, and for most that had proven to be a good life, so good that there would be a continuous Jewish community life in Babylon and its successor capital, Baghdad, until the reign of Saddam Hussein. Who wanted to leave what had become home to return to a ruined civilization in a harsh land? 'But, the LORD will overcome all obstacles in your path,' Isaiah urges them, 'straightening all those crooked paths and leveling all those jagged mountains between Babylon and Jerusalem.' Who knows what they said to him, if anything, but I am sure that the looks of many, and

their silence, sent the message: 'Better the roads should remain crooked and the mountaintops be higher still! Why doesn't God just leave us alone!!' It must have been like 'crying out in the wilderness.' Obviously, there were some barriers in the hearts of those who did not return rougher than the roughest road, and higher than the highest mountains which needed to be smoothed out.

John the Baptist, born of royal and priestly lineage just like his cousin, Jesus, but now a wild man of the desert, a Bedouin prophet of the Kingdom of God, will summon thousands to hear his message, and thousands will come out. Very many will receive John's washing of repentance. Only a few will really believe that God is really going to keep His promise of

salvation to all the living, to save even *their* lives from death and the fear of death. Only a few will believe that God is really coming in One like them, like You and like me, in whom all injustice, all hurt, all bitterness and despair will be overcome forever. John knew what it was not only to *live* in the wilderness but also to preach to people, *his* people, and to find no more response to the Good News than he might have received from a rock or a scorpion living underneath that rock.

Do *we* really believe that God comes to live among us *as* one of us, making peace between God and mankind, making peace between enemies, making peace between you and me and God? Or, would we really prefer to leave things as they are,

friends as friends, enemies as enemies, and really without much hope at all?

Well, the Church declares to us in this and every Advent season, whether we believe the Gospel, whether we really do take seriously and trust this great and free offer of Himself God makes to us in Jesus Christ, *God is* coming to enter the spiritual and moral wilderness we inhabit. 'This *is* my Body, given for *you* . . . this *is* the Cup of the New Covenant, shed for *you* and for all for the remission of sins.' You and I had better prepare, not for a long journey we have to make, but for the One Who has made the longest journey of all to *us*. 'Stir up Your power, O LORD, in us and come! Free us from the crooked

paths away from You and the high barriers to Your grace we have built with our many sins!' ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and has made of us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. ✠ Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!