

Re-visioning the Lectionary Readings for the Sundays of Advent

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This is one of a series of studies of the lectionary and calendar. Others, also posted on this website, include:

Re-visioning the Lectionary Readings for Ash Wednesday and the Sundays of Lent

Re-visioning the Lectionary for the Sundays of the Easter Season and for the Ascension

Re-visioning the Lectionary Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures for Lent, Good Friday
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Introduction

This study has to do with the readings of the Roman Lectionary and the Revised Common Lectionary for the Sundays of Advent. Because these two lectionaries offer essentially the same readings for this season, I refer to them both under the singular term, “lectionary”.

At the present time, the gospel readings for the first Sunday of Advent in all three years of the lectionary cycle have to do with the Second Coming of Christ. Those for the second and third Sundays have to do with John the Baptist, and those for the fourth Sunday have to do with the immediate preparation for the birth of Jesus. The second readings for all four Sundays, from the epistles, have mostly to do with the Second Coming, though some refer to the birth of Jesus. The first readings, from the prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures, are mostly so-called messianic prophecies. The present lectionary readings are listed in the Appendix.

Aims and Intentions

In attempting this re-visioning of the lectionary readings for the Sundays of Advent, I have had five intentions or aims in mind. The first two have mostly to do with the choice of readings. The third has to do with the structure of the lectionary for this season. The fourth and fifth have to do with how worshipers imagine and understand the season of Advent.

Broaden the scope of Advent

One aim has been to broaden the scope of Advent and its readings. I have become aware that some medieval church communities celebrated two perspectives on Advent that were not used by the rest of the church and that have not been used at all in recent centuries. I feel that these are worthy of recovery today.

One of these alternative perspectives is the “recognition of the adult Jesus as the One sent by God.” This recognition is a surprise; it is unexpected; it is gift. The other alternative perspective is Baptism. If there are to be baptisms at Epiphany or on the feast of the Baptism of Christ (in early January), then Advent inevitably becomes a period of baptismal preparation.

Show greater respect

A second intention has been to show greater respect for Judaism and for the Hebrew Scriptures. The present readings from the Hebrew Scriptures were selected because they are considered to be “prophecies about the Messiah and the messianic age, especially from Isaiah”

(Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass, n. 91).

I am uncomfortable with the principle of “messianic prophecy” as a method of selecting liturgical readings, especially in this day and age. It lacks scholarly credibility and fails to reflect modern thinking about relations between Christianity and Judaism. For the purpose of this study, therefore, this principle and individual readings based on it have been set aside.

The following eight alternative principles for selecting readings for the Sundays of Advent are presented here. The first four are based on liturgical considerations, while the second four are based on modern thinking about the relationship of Christianity and Judaism.

- i. Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures will show an overall conceptual relationship to the season of Advent as a whole (as expressed below).
- ii. Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures will suitably “accompany” the several distinct perspectives found in the gospel readings for the Sundays of Advent (as expressed below).
- iii. Individual readings from the Hebrew Scriptures will not be tightly linked to individual gospel readings.
- iv. Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures will present perspectives on Advent that are relatively independent from those of the gospel readings.
- v. Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures chosen for the Sundays of Advent will reflect the view that the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is one of continuity, not of discontinuity and supersessionism.
- vi. The choice of readings will reflect the position that the Hebrew Scriptures are “source of faith with their own perpetual value” (Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations [1965 revision], published by the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relationships of the U.S. Catholic bishops, n. 10a).
- vii. The readings chosen will not regard Judaism in a negative manner and will not dwell on Israel’s shortcomings.
- viii. The readings chosen will explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the Jewishness of Jesus.

Increase accessibility

The third aim is to make the several “perspectives” (dimensions, themes) of Advent more

accessible or “digestible.” There are several considerations in this regard. First, the season of Advent is quite short, only four Sundays. Second, in this brief period the focus of celebration changes (so far as the gospel readings are concerned) abruptly from the first Sunday (Second Coming) to the second and third Sundays (John the Baptist) to the fourth (preparation for the birth of Jesus). Third, the first and second readings for a given Sunday may have to do with different perspectives than those of the gospels. Fourth, the present arrangement of readings obscures the unity of Advent. The result is that no focus is developed in any depth in any single year of the three-year lectionary cycle. I believe that this is too much, too fast; the richness of Advent is difficult to assimilate or digest. Broadening the scope of Advent as described above introduces even greater challenges in this regard.

Two proposals regarding the structure of the lectionary for Advent are made here. First, in any single year, all four Sundays will focus on and develop a single perspective. For example, the Second Coming will be the focus of the gospel readings for all four Sundays in year A of the cycle, John the Baptist for all four Sundays in year B, etc.

A consequence of this proposal is that a three-year cycle is not sufficient; four years is the minimum. “Preparation for baptism” would be used only when pastorally appropriate, and its readings would replace one “regular” set of readings when this perspective is used.

Integrate Advent’s temporal dimensions

The fourth intention of this revision is to better integrate the multiple dimensions of time (past, present, future) that are expressed in this season. There are several considerations in this regard. First, time and its several dimensions are particularly significant in Advent. Second, Advent is complex from a temporal point of view. Third, the relations between different dimensions of time are important and often oversimplified. Fourth, some important aspects of time often are ignored.

At the present time the gospels for the first Sunday are oriented toward the future (Second Coming). Those for the fourth Sunday, in contrast, are heavily oriented toward the past (preparation for the birth of Christ). I suggest that the gospel readings about John the Baptist, read on the second and third Sundays, are most commonly viewed in relation to the birth of Jesus (as if John were his uncle rather than his cousin). Chronologically, of course, they are related to the adult life of Jesus, not his birth – but in either case an event of the past. The so-called messianic readings from the Hebrew Scriptures are from the past and most often are thought of as foretelling a future (for the author) that is past for us (birth of Jesus). Of course they may also be related to the future (for us) – the Age to Come, though this dimension tends to be neglected. The second readings largely have to do with the future.

Simplistic emphases either on the past or on the future carry the danger of ignoring the

present – the “today” in which worshipers live. Contemporary liturgy attempts to be conscious of past, present and future in more sophisticated ways than sometimes was the case in the past. Certainly time in the liturgy is not considered in a linear, historical, either-or manner. Instead, past is brought into the present (*anamnesis*) and informs our view of the future. Future is already happening and signified in the present (*prolepsis*). The future is for today (“already”) but also for tomorrow (“not yet”). The idea that Advent has to do with “anticipation” also has its limitations. Whatever is only anticipated is future, not for “today”.

Balancing all three dimensions of time in the liturgy requires both understanding and imagination and may be a challenge for some. In addition, eschatology (the future dimension) generally speaking is not a strong suit in the churches that use the lectionary.

To some extent this concern and aim of re-visioning is handled through the choice and arrangement of readings. In addition, introductions and rationales that accompany the readings for each perspective touch on this matter.

Emphasize the unity of Advent

The fifth aim of the present re-visioning is to give better expression to the unity of Advent. To better demonstrate the unity of this season is not only a conceptual matter, but also will serve to increase the accessibility of the multiple perspectives of Advent for worshipers.

The General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar (March 1969, no. 29) does not even speak of unity within Advent, for example. It says simply that “Advent has a twofold character.” This document then names the Second Coming and the birth of Jesus, but does not explain where John the Baptist is in all this. On the other hand, the Introduction to the Revised Common Lectionary says that “Advent ... is basically eschatological.” Others too say that “Advent has a distinctive eschatological thrust, with an expectant longing for the coming of Christ’s kingdom in power...” (*The Promise of His Glory*). An emphasis on the Second Coming, of course, flies in the face of much popular appreciation of Advent, which focuses on the past birth of Jesus. These authoritative statements never speak of celebrating the Incarnation as a present reality, and also neglect to make clear the significance of John the Baptist.

Thus I feel that any unity that Advent might have is either not stated at all, or not demonstrated convincingly. In practice, the multiplicity of perspectives is not appreciated, even intellectually; they are not meaningful or helpful to many worshipers.

Here I offer one possible view of the unity of Advent and locate the multiple perspectives expressed in the scripture readings and in the structure of the lectionary within this unity. I suggest that:

**Advent is the celebration of God’s Dream
for humanity and all of creation.**

“God’s Dream” is used here in place of more traditional political images such as kingdom, realm, reign, commonwealth, etc. “Celebration” is used here to indicate that all of Advent is “for today,” even while it also has to do with past and future.

Of course, every liturgical season and every Sunday could also be described in this way. It seems suitable, however, to express and emphasize this holistic view of God’s Dream for humanity and all of creation at the beginning of the liturgical year. This constitutes a summary and overview, which is then drawn out and contemplated at length and at leisure the rest of the year.

The three “perspectives” expressed in the present gospel readings of Advent, plus the two additional perspectives described above, may all be related to the unifying description just stated. Thus these five perspectives may be titled as follows:

God’s Dream:

- and the Second Coming of Christ
- and the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist
- and the unexpected and surprising recognition of the adult Jesus
as the one sent by God
- and the events leading up to the birth of Jesus
- and baptism.

When the first and second readings are taken into account, the five perspectives are broadened and may be set forth as follows:

God’s Dream and the Age to Come

God’s Dream in Judgment and Grace

God’s Dream in Surprising and Unexpected Events and Persons

God’s Dream in Human Lives and Relationships

God’s Dream in Baptism.

Perspectives and Readings

Each perspective will now be described in greater detail. Readings have been sought that will suitably express each one. Finally, lists of individual readings are set out.

1

God's Dream and the Age to Come

God's dream for humanity and all of creation is greater than any experience of God's presence and grace yesterday or today. It remains to be fulfilled, completed and perfected tomorrow – in the future. This experience of fulfillment and perfection is referred to here as the Age to Come.

From one perspective, we “cannot imagine” what this perfected dream of God might “look like”. Our ancestors in faith, however, did try to envision the Age to Come based on their own experiences of God's gracious presence with them and on their own hopes and dreams. We today continue to be inspired by these visions but also express our hopes and expectations for the future in new ways, based on our own experiences of God and our own imaginations.

The Age of Come is still some time in the indefinite future, and we do not know when it will be reached; it is “not yet”. But it was anticipated in part in the life of Israel, was encountered and expressed in a particular way in Jesus Christ, and has continued to be anticipated in part by faithful Christians and Jews. It is, therefore, “already” and “for today” in that glimpses and partial experiences of it are encountered in our daily lives today. These need to be expected and valued, but not confused with the ultimate reality that we still anticipate.

We hope for, yearn for, await and expect this Age to Come. We commit ourselves to it and seek to do what we can to prepare for it – while always acknowledging that it is gift and surprise.

Readings have been sought that express the perspective of God's Dream and the Age to Come.

Gospels

The Age to Come is imaged as the Second Coming of Christ. Individual passages speak of:

- the need always to be vigilant
- the coming of Christ and the need to discern the times
- bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom: some are prepared and some are not
- the great judgment; the criterion to be used is care for our neighbor

First Reading

The Age to Come is imaged in a variety of ways:

- a time when war is no more
- God leading God's people home from exile
- the great jubilee; the sabbatical year
- experiencing the fullness of holy wisdom

Second Reading

One set of readings, from the epistles, speaks of the Age to Come as the Day of the Lord and how Christians are to live as they wait for it:

- God wants all to come to repentance
- the Day of the Lord will come unexpectedly; we therefore ought to lead good lives
- we are urged to be ready for the Day of the Lord and to live with Christ
- we should lead good lives as we await the Day of the Lord

Another set of readings uses images from the Book of Revelation:

- the servants of God gather to praise God
- a new heaven and earth and God's dwelling with all peoples
- being invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb
- the river of life, and Christ saying "I am coming soon".

The following list contains the re-visioned readings.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Beat swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:1-5)

Second Reading

A. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief (2 Peter 3:8-15a)

B. The seal of the living God (Revelation 7:2-12)

Gospel

Need for watchfulness (Matthew 24:36-44; *or* Mark 13:32-37; *or* Luke 21:34-36)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

I will restore the fortunes of my people (Jeremiah 30:1-3, 8-11a, 18-22)

or I will lead them back (Jeremiah 31:1-14)

or God will lead Israel with joy (Baruch 5:1-9)

Second Reading

A. The coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

B. A new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1-6)

Gospel

Coming of the Son of Man and lesson of the fig tree
(Matthew 24:29-35; *or* Mark 13:24-31; *or* Luke 21:25-33)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**First Reading**

The year of jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-12, 23-24, 35-43; 26:3-13)
or The sabbatical year (Deuteronomy 15:1-11)

Second Reading

A. The day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)
B. The marriage supper of the Lord (Revelation 19:6-10)

Gospel

The bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**First Reading**

Eat your fill of Wisdom's fruits (Sirach 24:1-2, 13-17, 19-22)
or Holy Wisdom in her fullness (Sirach 24:1-22)

Second Reading

A. In the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11)
B. See, I am coming soon (Revelation 22:1-5, 12-14, 16-17)

Gospel

Judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46)

2**God's Dream in Judgment and Grace**

God's dream for humanity and all of creation includes judgment. We are aware that our world, our church and our selves do not fully live up to God's dream, that at times we impede or get in its way, that we are not as ready for this dream as we ought to be, that we do not do all that we can to facilitate the perfecting of God's dream. We therefore need to be called to conversion and re-commitment.

At the same time, God's dream and its fulfillment are purely God's gift and initiative; they are grace that cannot be earned or demanded. We respond to this grace with praise and thanksgiving in prayer and daily living. We remain open to receive this grace.

God's dream is appreciated and communicated especially by members of the community of faith whom we call prophets. They are seized by the dream and wholly committed to it; they care deeply about it; they communicate its immediacy and urgency. They help keep God's dream alive among humankind; they chide us with words of judgment; we are blessed with their message of grace.

There are prophets in every generation, but some, like Elijah and John the Baptist, are considered to be exceptional. Jesus also came as a prophet of particular distinction. There are prophets in our midst today; indeed the entire church is called to be prophetic.

Prophets remind us that God's dream is for today as well as tomorrow; they call us to recognize the grace of God's dream among us now; they call us to conversion now and urge us to prepare the way.

Readings have been sought that will express the perspective of God's Dream in Judgment and Grace

Gospels

John the Baptist is a messenger and instrument of God's judgment and grace. Individual passages speak of:

- John's birth, the miraculous events surrounding his birth, the recognition of his special role as agent of judgment and grace
- John as witness to Jesus; the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as an event of God's grace
- John as preacher, particularly enunciating words of judgment
- John as prophet, the messenger of God

First Reading

Prophets arose in Israel to speak and act as instruments of God's judgment and grace; Elijah is an apt example:

- Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elisha were called by God and responded to this call
- God's grace in the life of Elijah; the widow who shared her food with him
- God's gracious presence to Elijah at Mount Horeb

- God's judgment when Elijah and the priests of Baal were in conflict

Second Reading

God's grace is spoken of in various ways; references are also made to prophets.

- the grace of God that has been given in Jesus Christ
- grace as gift of God
- prophets are examples of suffering and patience in the times leading up to the coming great judgment
- the words of prophets are to be both honored and tested.

The following list contains the re-visioned readings.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

- Call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-13)
- or* Call of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1-10)
- or* Elisha took up the mantle of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-22)

Second Reading

- Not lacking any spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 1:3-9)

Gospel

- The birth of John (Luke 1:57-66, 80)
- or* Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79)
- or* The birth of John and song of Zechariah (Luke 1:57-80)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

- Elijah is fed by ravens and by the widow (1 Kings 17:1-16)

Second Reading

- By grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Gospel

- John the witness (John 1:6-9, 19-28; *or* John 1:29-34)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Elijah encounters God at Horeb (1 Kings 19:4-14)

Second Reading

The prophets who speak in God's name (James 5:7-10)

Gospel

John the preacher (Matthew 3:1-12; *or* Luke 3:1-17)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Elijah bests the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:17-46)

Second Reading

The words of prophets (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)

Gospel

John the prophet (Matthew 11:2-15; *or* Luke 7:18-29)

3

God's Dream in Surprising and Unexpected Events and Persons

God's dream for humanity and all of creation is revealed and experienced in unexpected and surprising ways: in persons and events where we are not looking for it; in times and places beyond our expectations. God's dream was a surprise to Israel, it was a surprise in the person and ministry of Jesus; it comes to surprise us today; and its completion in the Age to Come will also be a surprise.

We therefore need to expect the surprises of God's dream, to be always ready for unexpected graces. We need to learn to recognize God's surprises when they occur – and they occur every day; we need to accept that we cannot put limits on the creativity of God's dream or try to restrict its appearance in any way. This involves a letting go of control and rigidity and express a certain humility. But the experience of God's surprising dream should be of great joy and comfort to us.

God's dream in the unexpected can be a challenge to us individually and as church: Are we ready? Are our eyes wide open? Can we discern God's presence and action? We can be tempted to refuse or reject the surprises of God's dream; we can find them shocking and demanding, they can make us uncomfortable. God's dream is always reliable, but also a continuing surprise.

Readings have been sought that will express the perspective of God's Dream in Unexpected and Surprising Events and Persons

Gospel

In the course of his public ministry, Jesus was recognized as the One sent by God; this recognition was unexpected, a surprise. Individual passages tell us that:

- Jesus was recognized as a great prophet; it was appreciated that in Jesus the kingdom of God had come near
- Jesus was recognized as the Son of God; he was called the prophet
- Jesus was recognized by the nameless women, who anointed him with ointment
- Jesus was recognized as the "one who comes" in the "Palm Sunday procession."

First Reading

God's presence and action was manifested in exceptional or surprising ways during the life and history of Israel. Individual passages speak of:

- God's surprising presence in the burning bush; the amazing blooming of Aaron's staff
- the unexpected feeding of the people with manna; the falling of dew on Gideon's fleece
- God's holy wisdom in the life of Israel's forebears
- God's presence and action in holy wisdom, directing Israel during the exodus

Second Reading

The lives of Jesus' followers are marked by surprises, especially because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Individual passages speak of:

- the variety of gifts of the Holy Spirit that are found in the members of the community
- the mutual love and forgiveness that characterizes members of the church
- the wisdom of God that appears to be foolishness
- the life of the Spirit in the baptized, a spirit of life and adoption.

The following list contains the re-visioned readings:

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

The burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6)
or Aaron's staff blooms (Numbers 17:1-9)

Second Reading

Varieties of gifts but the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-13)

Gospel

A great prophet has risen among us (Luke 7:11-17)
or The kingdom of God has come near (Luke 10:1-12)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Manna in the desert (Exodus 16:4-8, 22-26)
or Dew falls on Gideon's fleece (Judges 6:36-40)

Second Reading

Bless those who persecute you (Romans 12:9-21)

Gospel

Rabbi, you are the Son of God (John 1:35-51)
or This is indeed the prophet who is to come (John 6:5-14)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Holy Wisdom in the life of Israel: Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Lot
(Wisdom of Solomon 10:1-8)

Second Reading

The wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5)

Gospel

A woman anoints Jesus' head (Matthew 26:6-13; *or* Mark 14:3-9)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Wisdom with Moses, at the passage through the Red Sea, and with the People of Israel in the desert (Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21; 11:1-14)

Second Reading

Led the Spirit of God (Romans 8:11-17)

Gospel

Blessed is the one who comes (Matthew 21:1-11; *or* Luke 19:29-40)

4

God's Dream in Human Lives and Relationships

God's dream for humanity and all of creation is revealed and experienced precisely in human lives and in relationships among humans, between humans and God, and between humans and the rest of creation. It is expressed in the unfolding of God's creation in humankind, in all love and life-giving, pregnancy and childbirth, growing up, growing old, and dying.

God's dream is experienced in the persistence and growth of the human community over so many generations; in the lives of those whose names are remembered and in the lives of all whose names are forgotten. The lives and relationships of every person, past, present and future, are significant for God's dream.

Israel and the Jewish people, and their relationship with God, are an important part of God's dream, as is Jesus and all who have followed him in the church through the centuries.

Readings have been sought that will express the perspective of God's Dream in Human Lives and Relationships.

Gospels

Individual passages speak of the Jewish and the human context leading up to the birth of Jesus.

- selected forefathers and foremothers of Jesus are named
- God's invites Mary to bear Jesus, and she accepts
- God's invites Joseph, through dreams, to accept Mary's pregnancy
- The pregnant Mary visits the pregnant Elizabeth

First Reading

Individual passages speak of the lives of the people of Israel through the ages.

- Israel is propagated through many generations through parents and offspring
- the history of Israel included many wonderful births
- Israel dreamed and interpreted dreams
- bold women in Israel were faithful to God's call

Second Reading

Individual passages speak of members of the church community and their relationships.

- Paul speaks of the origins of his ministry and of his relationship with the apostles; all who believe are considered to be descendants of Abraham; relationships between Jews and Gentiles in Christ
- within families of believers, mothers and grandmothers pass on the faith; women and men work together in serving the church
- good relationships should exist between ministers of the church, both within their families and in the Christian community
- Paul had great affection for the community that he founded; our relationship with God as adopted children

The following list contains the re-visioned readings.:

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Genealogy of Israel: Descendants of Adam, Abraham, Israel, David
(1 Chronicles 1:1-10, 28-37; 2:1-4; 3:1-4)

Second Reading

God called me through grace (Galatians 1:11-24)
or Descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9)
or For Jews and Gentiles (Romans 15:7-13)

Gospel

Genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Annunciation of the birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16:7-12)
or Annunciation of the birth of Isaac (Genesis 17:5-22 *or* Genesis 18:1-15)
or Annunciation of the birth of Samson (Judges 13:2-25)
or The birth of Samuel; his parents and the song of Hannah
1 Samuel 1:1 - 2:10)

Second Reading

The faith of grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1:1-7)
or Acknowledge Phoebe, Prisca, Junia (Romans 16:1-7)

Gospel

Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

The dream of Jacob (Genesis 28:10-17)
or The dream of Job (Job 33:13-18)
or Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh (Genesis 40:1-23 *or* 41:1-36)
or Daniel interprets the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2)

Second Reading

How bishops and deacons are to live (1 Timothy 3:1-13)
or How bishops are to live (Titus 1:4-9)

Gospel

Annunciation to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Tamar (Genesis 38:6-30)
or Rahab (Joshua 2:1-21; *and/or* Joshua 6:15-25)
or Ruth (Ruth 4:9-22)
or Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2-5, 26-27; 12:15b-18, 24-25)

Second Reading

You are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:17 - 3:13)
or Adoption as children and heirs (Galatians 4:4-7)

Gospel

Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth and song of Mary (Luke 1:39-56)

5

God's Dream in Baptism

God's dream for humanity and all of creation continues after the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. One expression of God's dream continues in Judaism; another expression is in Islam; others in other religions and peoples.

The expression of God's dream that is of particular significance for us is the church, Christ's body alive today in the Holy Spirit. Its life of community, worship, witness and doing justice are signs of God's dream – already but not yet. Women and men, girls and boys are embraced by God and themselves embrace God and enter into the Christian expression of God's dream through baptism, which is not just an event but also a way of living.

The baptism of adults may suitably be preceded by a period of preparation that includes discernment and learning what baptismal living is by seeing how baptized persons actually do live. When baptism is celebrated on the Epiphany or feast of the Baptism of Christ (in early January), the period of preparation will naturally include December and the liturgical season of Advent.

Readings have been sought that will express the perspective of God's Dream in Baptism.

Gospel

Individual passages tell how Jesus speaks of the water of life, and how he himself is baptized by John:

- Jesus told the Samaritan women that he is the source of the water that gives eternal life
- Jesus spoke of the necessity of being reborn of water and the Holy Spirit
- John the Baptist baptized people in the Jordan, spoke of the One to come who was greater than he, and baptized Jesus
- disciples followed Jesus after his baptism.

First Reading

The Christian imagination sees a variety of images that may suitably be related to baptism.

- the flood; the healing of Naaman in the Jordan
- the anointing of Aaron as priest; the anointing of David as king
- holy wisdom, which is likened to a splendid robe one wears; wisdom is water that is drunk
- holy wisdom, which is likened to entering into a relationship with God that is described as friendship.

Second Reading

Characteristics of baptism are named, as are some of the consequences of baptism in our lives.

- the baptized should strive for unity and peace
- the baptized are described as the “first fruits of salvation” through sanctification, belief and proclamation
- the baptized are “destined for adoption as children [of God] through Jesus Christ”
- Christ is the basis for unity among humans; how the baptized should live.

The following list contains the re-visioned readings.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

The flood (Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; *or* 8:6-19; *or* 9:8-19)
or The cleansing of Naaman in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:1-14)

Second Reading

There is one baptism (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Gospel

Source of living waters (John 4:5-42)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

The anointing of Aaron (Leviticus 8:1-12)
or The anointing of David (1 Samuel 16:1-13)

Second Reading

Chosen by God (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17)

Gospel

Born of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-21)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

You will wear wisdom like a glorious robe (Sirach 6:18-31)
or She will give the waters of wisdom to drink (Sirach 15:1-10)

Second Reading

God destined us for adoption (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Gospel

Baptism of Jesus by John (Luke 3:15-22)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading

Those that get wisdom obtain friendship with God (Wisdom of Solomon 7:1-14)

Second Reading

No longer slaves and free (Colosians 3:9-17)

Gospel

Call of the first disciples (John 1:35-42)

Appendix

Present Lectionary Readings for the Sundays of Advent, A, B, C

Gospel

First Sunday

*Matthew 24:37-44

*Mark 13:31-37

*Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Second Sunday

*Matthew 3:1-12

Mark 1:1-8

*Luke 3:1-6

Third Sunday

*Matthew 11:2-11

*John 1:6-8, 19-28

Luke 3:10-18

Fourth Sunday

*Matthew 1:18-24

*Luke 1:26-38

*Luke 1:39-45

First Reading

First Sunday

*Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah 65:16b-17; 1:3-8; 64:3b-7

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Second Sunday

Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

*Baruch 5:1-9

Third Sunday

Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Fourth Sunday

Isaiah 7:10-14

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a-16

Micah 5:2-5a

Second Reading

First Sunday

Romans 13:11-14

*1 Corinthians 1:3-9

1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2

Second Sunday

Romans 15:4-9

2 Peter 3:8-15

*Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11

Third Sunday

*James 5:7-10

*1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Philippians 4:4-7

Fourth Sunday

Romans 1:1-7

Romans 16:25-27

Hebrews 10:5-10

* Asterisks indicate passages retained in the re-visioning (in whole or in part), though not necessarily used on the same day.