

ADVENT: A TIME OF HOPEFUL EXPECTATION

Second Sunday of Advent
December 4, 2011

Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1, 2, 8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

How Shall We Prepare?

Last week's Gospel text, for the first Sunday of Advent, confronted us with Mark's "Little Apocalypse" from one of the concluding chapters in his Gospel, reminding us of Jesus' Second Advent and his coming at the close of the age. We were admonished to watch and be ready.

This week's text brings us to the very first chapter in Mark's Gospel, where we hear the voice of a messenger, calling us to prepare for the Lord's coming by getting the road ready. We are introduced to John the baptizer, the one "shouting in the desert" (Mark 1:3a, *GNT*) and proclaiming the fulfillment of God's promise – the coming of one greater than he – God's promised Messiah.

The author of Mark's Gospel has John quoting the prophet Isaiah, signaling that a new "exodus" is about to take place with the coming of the Messiah. Through the use of figurative language, we hear that the path is being cleared for our deliverance from sin. John entreats those who will listen to his voice to turn away from their sins, be baptized and receive God's forgiveness (1:4b).

Isaiah's words (40:1-11) spoke God's message of comfort and hope to those living in exile (586-538 B.C.), assuring them of an exodus from Babylonian captivity. So, too, does Mark depict John as God's messenger, chosen to proclaim the "Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1, *GNT*) who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:8) and provide us with an "exodus" from sin. Couched in that eighth verse, can we discern a hint of the Pentecost event when God's Spirit will be poured out on everyone (Joel 2:28)?

John, the messianic forerunner, admonishes us to prepare for our Lord's coming. How shall we prepare? The writer of 2 Peter tells us that our "lives should be holy and dedicated to God" (3:11b, *GNT*) as we await the Day of the Lord. And we are given the gift of God's patience – a gift extended to us in love because God "wants all to turn away from their sins" (3:9b, *GNT*). God promises us a future where God's justice will reign and "where righteousness will be at home" (3:13, *GNT*).

How shall we prepare? Like John the baptizer, we, too, are called to be God's messengers to proclaim "the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." In this Advent season, let us "get the road ready for the Lord" and hearken to the words of Isaiah in announcing that our "God is coming" (40:9).

This week's Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel who served, until retirement, on the staff of American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship. Barbara continues as a valued consultant to ABS.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Society in: Libya – with thanks to God for Bible work in this region; and with prayers for a peaceful settlement of the political situation, good relationships and cooperation between Christian expatriates worshiping in churches of different confessions, and that there will be enough Bibles for them to grow in their discipleship and witness in this unsettled time; **Egypt** – with thanks to God for Bible work in this region; and with prayers for the creativity and means to encourage Bible engagement via satellite and new media technology; also pray concerning the challenge to provide an oral community with audio and dramatized Scriptures in new formats, and for many opportunities to make God's Word more widely accessible, year-round, to thousands in the public sphere, to masses of people, in a welcoming atmosphere of open interaction; **Malta** – with thanks to God for the completion of the audio New Testament in Maltese; and with prayers for ongoing work to promote Bible reading, especially among children and young people; also pray for God's guidance in overcoming funding problems in order to secure a future in translating, publishing and distributing the Bible; **European Migrant Ministry** – with thanks to God for Bible work in this region; and with prayers for the tens of thousands of migrants across the entire Europe Middle East area who are marginalized, find life very different from their expectation, and regret leaving home; also pray concerning the famine, drought, war or persecution that propels migrants to leave their homes; for the three to four million displaced Iraqis; and for God to reveal himself to migrants wherever they are, giving them hope and peace in their hearts.

Activity Corner: Advent Mobile

Supplies needed: Bible; wire coat hanger; dove pattern (about 3" wide); white construction paper; scissor; pencils/pens; marker; hole puncher; yarn, narrow ribbon, or string.

The second Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of Peace. Trace and cut out seven doves; on five of them write the letters **P E A C E** (the other two doves will remain blank). Punch a hole at the top of each dove. Each day, throughout the week, a dove will be added to the wire hanger to create a *mobile. Use various lengths of string for each dove to create a mobile effect. Read the Scripture passage indicated for each day of the week, and then add a dove to the mobile. On the back of each dove, write the Scripture citation. Conclude with a prayer and invite everyone to respond at the end, "AMEN! COME LORD JESUS!" (If you are using an Advent Wreath during family devotional time, light the first and second candles prior to the Scripture reading for the day.)

Scripture Readings for the Second Week of Advent:

Sunday Isaiah 40:1-11
Monday Isaiah 11:1-9
Tuesday Isaiah 54:9-17
Wednesday Ezekiel 34:25-31
Thursday Micah 4:1-5
Friday Psalm 85
Saturday 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

*A new “mobile” will be created each week during the Advent season, and each week will have a different symbol. At the end of the Advent season, the mobile symbols can be removed from the wire hangers and used as Christmas tree decorations.