

Second Sunday of Advent
Cycle C RCL

Baruch 5:1-9

This is the third and last poem of Baruch (4:30-5:9), reflecting Second Isaiah's expectation (Isaiah 40-55) of a cosmic restoration of the holy city of Jerusalem. This poem has some close parallels with a non-biblical book entitled the Psalms of Solomon. Notice especially the "fragrant tree" passage in Baruch 5:8 that is paralleled in Psalms of Solomon 11:5. Further, the paraphrase of Isaiah 40:4 in Baruch 5:3 is mirrored in the Psalms of Solomon 11:4. Interestingly, the parallels between Baruch 5 and Psalms of Solomon 11 all reflect verses from Isaiah 40-66. The Book of Baruch is styled as a letter to Jerusalem from Babylon by Baruch, the secretary of Jeremiah, who, according to Jeremiah 43:1-7, went into exile in Egypt with Jeremiah but who, according to other Jewish legends, went instead into exile in Babylon. We do not possess the Hebrew original of this letter, and our best text of the composition is that of the Septuagint (abbr. LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). The suggested dates for Baruch have ranged from the end of the third century BCE to the first century CE, with many interpreters favoring a date in the first century BCE, a date also suggested for the Psalms of Solomon.

OR

Malachi 3:1-4

The word "Malachi" means "my messenger" and is not actually a proper name in Malachi 1:1 and 3:1. The book is a collection of anonymous prophetic sayings from the period after the Exile in Babylon and, likely, after the rededication of the temple in 515 or 516 BCE. Temples in the ancient near east served as residences for the divinity worshipped there; and in the case of ancient Judah, its divinity had a name (Yahweh) and an address (Mt. Zion). In 586 BCE, the Lord left the temple just as the invading Babylonians were about to destroy it. The Lord's return to Mt. Zion would not, according to our passage, bring relief and happiness but shame and judgment. Yet this time the result of this judgment would not be the Lord's desertion of the temple but, rather, the Lord's continuing reproof until Jerusalem could finally offer sweet sacrifices to God unsullied by the stench of sin. While the unnamed "messenger" (*mal'axi*) may be Elijah in Malachi 4:5, "my messenger" in 1:1 and 3:1 is not the same figure.

Canticle 4 or 16 The Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79)

Canticles are songs/poems from scripture other than the songs of the Psalter. The word "canticle" has been extended in the west, though, to include the non-biblical *Te Deum* (Canticle 21 in the BCP). The BCP also inserts the equally non-biblical *Gloria in excelsis* (Canticle 20). In Greek usage and in the Septuagint (LXX) the Song of Zechariah is the second part of Canticle 9. The first part is the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). The BCP maintains this order but divides Greek Canticle 9 into Canticles 3, 4 (Rite I) and Canticles 15, 16 (Rite II). The beloved poems of Luke: the Magnificat, the Song of Zechariah, and the Song of Simeon have been placed in this gospel to interpret the events leading up to the birth of Jesus in the words of familiar religious songs. These poems may very well go back to Hebrew originals, for we now know from the Qumran Psalm Scroll of Cave 11 that other compositions besides the 150 psalms of our Psalter could be used as sacred hymns. Indeed, the Psalm Scroll contains a note that informs us that David wrote 4050 psalms, suggesting that the writer of the note knew a very large collection of psalms. That some of these psalms could end up in Greek translation in Luke does not stretch the imagination very far. Although the songs of Luke 1-2 are applied to the situations described in those chapters, there is

nothing in any of them that mentions specifically John the Baptist, Mary, or Christ, let alone any details of Christ's birth.

Philippians 1:3-11

Philippi was named for Philip II of Macedonia who established the city in 356 BC as a commercial center to serve his mining interests at nearby Mount Pangaeus. The population, as befits a mining town, was of mixed background and many cults flourished there. Paul established his first European church in Philippi near the middle of the first century CE (Acts 16:11-40). Typical Greco-Roman letters begin with words of pious thanksgiving and encouragement for the recipient. Paul on many occasions elaborated this traditional element, as he does here, to express confidence in his readers and thanksgiving for their support. References to imprisonment (1:7), to the "imperial guard" (1:13) and to the "emperor's household" (4:22) have led some researchers to believe that Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote Philippians and date the epistle in the early 60's CE. Against this date, however, is evidence that Philippians is a composite of three letters of Paul.

Luke 3:1-6

The anonymous author of Luke's Gospel takes special pains to locate the events of salvation within the political history of the Mediterranean world. The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius would be 28-29 CE. After the death of Herod the Great in 4 BCE, Herod's sons, Herod Antipas and Philip, ruled over portions of their father's kingdom; but Rome put the important province of Judea under a Roman governor who was Pontius Pilate during the ministry of Jesus. We know of a certain Lysanius of Abilene in the first century BCE. Perhaps the one mentioned here is another ruler who adopted the same name. The author quotes Isaiah 40:3-5 in Luke 3:4b-6 to compare the coming salvation with the national salvation promised by the Second Isaiah during the exile of the Jews in Babylon.

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