

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

⁵ *Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;*

⁶ *but you shall be called priests of the Lord,
you shall be named ministers of our God;
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,
and in their riches you shall glory.*

⁷ *Because their shame was double,
and dishonour was proclaimed as their lot,
therefore they shall possess a double portion;
everlasting joy shall be theirs.*

⁸ For I the Lord love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;

I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;

all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,

so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

John 1:6-8, 19-28

6 There was a man sent from God,
whose name was John.

⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light,
so that all might believe through him.

⁸He himself was not the light,
but he came to testify to the light.

⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

19 This is the testimony
given by John
when the Judeans sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem
to ask him,
'Who are you?'

²⁰He confessed
and did not deny it,
but confessed,
'I am not the Messiah.'

²¹And they asked him,
'What then?
Are you Elijah?'

He said,
'I am not.'

'Are you the prophet?'

He answered,
'No.'

²²Then they said to him,
'Who are you?
Let us have an answer
for those who sent us.
What do you say about yourself?'

²³He said,
'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
"Make straight the way of the Lord" ',
as the prophet Isaiah said.

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.
²⁵They asked him,
'Why then are you baptizing
if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?'

²⁶John answered them,
'I baptize with water.
Among you stands one whom you do not know,
²⁷the one who is coming after me;
I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.'

²⁸This took place in Bethany
across the Jordan
where John was baptizing.

Reading the Prophet This Week

We're back in Trito-Isaiah for this 3rd week of Advent
The last chapters, framing restoration and return,
Responding to 537CE Persian permission
Not victory of a warlike nation-state,
But survival of a people differently defined

The opening oracle sets expectations
The preferential option for the poor,
Good news of comfort and release
(Luke's gospel roots messianic mission here)

The lectionary omits verses 5-7
Qualifying the promise with continued occupation
All Judeans sharing priesthood formerly Aaronic/Levitic only
Providing spiritual centre for the scattered Israel
Ultimately enjoying a proportionately greater reward

The reading resumes with affirmations to diaspora
Ultimate compensatory justice, despite historic injustice
Recognition and respect from all who see them, as blessed
Even while remaining scattered among nations,
Bearing witness wherever they are found

Verse 10 shifts to a first person not divine,
Rejoicing, exulting, adorned –
Celebrating not retributive justice,
but compensations

Verse 11 extends that anticipation widely
Fruition of what was planted in sorrow
Witness in the face of all the nations
Another understanding of election, chosen purpose

Instead of 'build back better' –
'do it differently'

Reading the Gospel This Week

Since Mark has no Christmas,
We get John this week, Luke next week –
But again, a split reading – *omission in italics*

The prologue to John has integrity as a whole
From v1 'in the beginning' to v18 'made him known'
So what's the agenda in this slice-and-dice?

Verses 6-8 revisit John the Baptizer
Branded differently than last week in Mark
Here 'not the light' but 'witness to the light'
Distinguished from Jesus, till with an epiphany to share
See, recognize incarnation of spirit in flesh, light in darkness

The opening of the prologue, and v9-18, are omitted
Development of a 'logos' and 'light' Christology is skipped
Implied, perhaps, in the first 3 verses we will hear

We do hear a purported transcript of asking John
From Judean priests and Levites asking his identity:
Not the Messiah, not Elijah, not the prophet,

J-Bap is said to claim Isaiah 40 to name his own role
Messenger in the wilderness, preparing the way

Pharisees are added, as principals to priest and Levite agents,
Arguing that only Messiah, Elijah, or prophet can baptize

John claims baptism with water,
Without synoptic emphasis on repentance/forgiveness
Subordinated to Jesus, his patron/better
Without direct reference to empowerment or Spirit baptism

Is the point of faith enlightenment, moral repentance
Or is it empowerment with Spirit to do something more?