

Readings: *Baruch 5: 1 – 9; Psalm 125 (126); Philippians 1: 3 – 11; Luke 3: 1 – 6.*

Two of the recurring themes of Advent are blended in today's reading from Baruch. In one theme the Church is personified as the desolate city of Jerusalem, thinking of the joy of the past and longing to be rebuilt so that it can again be filled with the glory of the LORD. In the other theme the members of the Church are compared to the people of Israel, exiled from their homeland, and looking forward to their return.

Baruch calls on the city of Jerusalem to exchange its *dress of sorrow and distress* – the dress of a widow – for *the cloak of integrity and the diadem of the glory of the Eternal* – the dress of a bride. For she is no longer to be bereaved of her children: *Now God brings them back to you, like royal princes carried back in glory.*

We Christians, living in the world of time and space, are exiled from our homeland, just as the people of Israel were exiled in Babylon. We are not at home here: we are, as Peter says in his first letter, *strangers and pilgrims*, and we want to be taken to our true home in heaven.

As Peter Abelard's hymn says:

Now in the meanwhile, with hearts raised on high, we for that country must yearn and must sigh, seeking Jerusalem, dear native land, through our long exile on Babylon's strand.

That is the theory – but, if we are honest, we shall have to admit that we often forget *our true homeland* and have for much of the time we've settled down quite comfortably in the everyday world of time and space. So the Church gives us Advent as a season calling us to remember our true home, the destination of our earthly journey.

In today's Gospel we hear again of John the Baptist calling the forgetful people of his own generation to *prepare a way for the LORD*, whose coming will ensure that the whole human race shall see *the salvation of God*. And in the reading from the letter to the Philippians Paul speaks of the preparation needed for *the Day of Christ*. He prays for an increase in *love*, an improvement in *knowledge* (that is of the truth) and a deepening of perception (that is of the implications of that truth for daily living).

Our Advent task is to give ourselves more wholeheartedly to preparing for *the Day of Christ*.