

**Second Sunday of Advent**  
**Cycle B RCL**  
**Revised**

**Isaiah 40:1-11**

We have long recognized Isaiah 40-55 have as coming from the time of Judah's exile in Babylon (586-539 BCE). Although the First Isaiah (1-39) preached about a coming great destruction of Jerusalem, the Second Isaiah (40-55), writing from exile in Babylon, predicted a second Exodus in which God would rescue the people from their bondage in Mesopotamia. In the present passage, the unknown author even predicts that God will change the topography of the Saudi desert in order to bring the Judahites joyfully into their homeland once again.

**Psalms 85:1-2, 8-13**

This *community lament* may stem from the exile in Babylon and express the hope that God would soon rescue the captives and establish them securely in their land. Like the Second Isaiah (see above on Isaiah 40), the psalmist expresses the belief that the divine judgment (exile) has brought Israel forgiveness of sin. All that is left now is to call upon God for deliverance.

**2 Peter 3:8-15a**

Although persecution at the end of the first century and into the second century CE may have been much more localized and occasional than researchers had earlier thought, both local authorities and the imperial government could often be quite hostile to Christians, depriving them of wealth, freedom, and even life itself. Many Christians could not understand how such opposition could arise time after time if the culmination of all history, the end of the age, were really at hand as they had been taught. This puzzlement led in the second Christian century to wild speculation about the end of the world and sometimes to bizarre religious beliefs and actions. This author counsels patience in the face of the historical enigma of persecution, reminding readers that tribulations such as these form signs of the end of time. The proper Christian responses will include a steady faith and perseverance in good works.

**Mark 1:1-8**

The biblical quotation in Mark 1:2-3 actually contains quotations from both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. The ascription of both quotations to Isaiah alone remains a puzzle. Within a Jewish context the appearance of a prophet such as John was a sign of the end of time because Jews of Jesus's day believed that prophecy had ceased in Israel and would return only with the advent of King Messiah. John's Baptism was a ritual washing away of the defilements of the present evil age in preparation for the coming new age, a ritual closely akin to the ritual washings of the Qumran sect described in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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