

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

**Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

“Second Isaiah” (Isaiah 40–55) uses the miraculous salvation of Jerusalem as a sign to the nations of God’s power and faithfulness. Our poem, however, occurs within the bounds of what we call “Third Isaiah” (Isaiah 56–66), the portion of the book usually associated with the period after the Exile in Babylon. Nevertheless, although the editor of the Book of Isaiah has kept the exilic material largely contained within chapters 40–55, both First Isaiah (Isaiah 1–39) and Third Isaiah (55–66), contain poems like the present one that must be assigned to the Babylonian Exile and to the Second Isaiah.

**Psalm 126**

Psalms 120-133 are each labeled “A Song of Ascents” and were all likely *pilgrimage songs*, sung by those who were on their way to the Temple for various festivals. Although the psalm both gives praise for God’s help in the past and prays for a renewal of the nation’s fortunes, it does not fall into the category of a *thanksgiving psalm* or of a *lament*.

or

**Luke 1:46-55:** *Book of Common Prayer* Canticle 3 [= Canticle 15] *Magnificat*

Notice that this poem says nothing about Mary, her virginity, Jesus or the prospect of Messiah’s birth. The Magnificat represents an inclusion within Luke’s text of an older Hebrew psalm otherwise unknown to us but translated into Greek in time for the author to put it upon the lips of Mary. The Psalm Scroll from Qumran’s 11th cave informs us that David composed 4050 psalms. That implies that 150-psalm Psalter contains only a few of the psalms Jews ascribed to David in the first century CE. The Qumran document suggests that in the time of Jesus, many hymns like the Magnificat were known to Palestinian Jews and were available to the Third Evangelist as a way of expressing Mary’s response to the news brought by the angel.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

The principal issue in Paul’s letter is that of the resurrection, a belief some Thessalonian Christians had come to doubt because of their recent experience of the death of members of their church. Paul has shared his hope in the coming resurrection and judgment in 4:13-5:11 and now concludes his letter by encouraging a spirit of thanksgiving, counseling that the Thessalonians’ momentary discouragement should not lead them to suppress signs of the Spirit.

**John 1:6-8, 19-28**

John 1:1-18 comprises the Fourth Gospel’s *prologue*, designed to announce the major themes of the composition. Among the cosmic themes enunciated in that prologue, we find John the Baptist teaching that he was neither the Messiah nor a prophet. This differs from the understanding we find in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), all of which do portray John as a prophet. The conclusion of today’s Gospel might also surprise us because John does not baptize Jesus, as we might expect, another difference from the Synoptic tradition. Some interpreters explain these differences by claiming that the Fourth Gospel was written to Christians who were still attracted to the sect of John the Baptist.

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