

Messens Læsninger I Advent 2020

Adventstiden I

- 29 November - I. SØNDAG I ADVENT: Es 63, 16-17 & 64, 13-8. 1 Kor 1, 3-9; Mark 13, 33-37
30 November Mandag - Skt. Andreas: Rom 10, 9-18; Matt 4, 18-22
1. December Tirsdag i 1. uge: Es 1, 1-10; 10, 21-24
2. Onsdag i 1. uge: Es 25, 6-10; Matt 15, 29-37
3. Torsdag i 1. uge: Skt. Frans Xaver: Es 26, 1-6; Matt 7, 21,24-27
4. Fredag i 1. uge: Skt. Johannes af Damaskus: Es 29,17-24; Matt 9, 27-31
5. Lørdag i 1. uge: Es 30, 19-21,23-26; Matt 9, 35-10, 1,5,6-8
6. II. SØNDAG I ADVENT: Es 40, 1-5,9-11; 2 Pet 3,8-14; Mark 1, 1-8
7. Mandag i 2. uge: Es 35, 1-10; Luk 5, 17-26
8. Tirsdag - JOMFRU MARIAS UPLETTEDE UNDFANGELSE: 1 Mos 3, 9-15,20; Ef 1, 3-6,11-12; Luk 1, 26-38
9. Onsdag i 2. uge - Skt. Juan Diego Cuahtlatoczin: Es 40, 25-31; Matt 11, 28-30
10. Torsdag i 2. uge - Den Salige Jomfru Maria af Loreto: Es 41, 13-20; Matt 11, 11-15
11. Fredag i 2. uge - Skt. Damasus I: Es 48, 17-19; Matt 11, 16-19
12. Lørdag i 2. uge - Maria af Guadalupe: Sir 48, 1-4,9-12; Matt 17, 10-13
13. III. SØNDAG I ADVENT: Es 61, 1-2,10-11; 1 Tess 5, 16-24; Joh 1, 6-8,19-28
14. Mandag i iii. uge - Skt. Johannes af Korset: 4 Mos 24, 2-7,15-17; Matt 21, 23-27
15. Tirsdag i iii. uge: Ser 3, 1-2,9-13; Matt 21, 28-32
16. Onsdag i iii. uge: Es 45, 6-8,18,21-25

Adventstiden II

17. Torsdag i iii. uge: 1 Mos 49, 2,8-10; Matt 1, 1-17
18. Fredag i iii. uge: Jer 23, 5-8; Matt 1, 18-24
19. Lørdag i iii. uge: Dom 13, 2-7,24-25; Luk 1, 5-25
20. IV. SØNDAG I ADVENT: 2 Sam 7, 1-5,8-12,14,16; Rom 16, 25-27; Luk 1, 26-38
21. Mandag i iv. uge - Skt. Petrus Canisius: Højs 2, 8-14; Luk 1, 39-45
22. Tirsdag i iv. uge: 1 Sam 1, 24-28; Luk 1, 46-56
23. Onsdag i iv. uge - Skt. Johannes af Kenty: Mal 3, 1-4,23-24; Luk 1, 57-66
24. Torsdag i iv. uge: 2 Sam 7, 1-5,8-12,14,16; Luk 1, 67-79

Advent 2020

I think we hear it every year - advent is a time for waiting. Of course it is a time for waiting, because someone important is going to arrive. The important question is probably how you feel when you are waiting. And that will depend on how you feel about the person you are waiting to meet. In our Masses during Advent, there are some powerful and beautiful readings, and for those of you who cannot go to Mass every day, I can give you a list of them; all you need, then, is to find them in the Bible. If you do read them at home, or if you can attend Mass every day, you will hear several important prophecies about the Messiah from the book of the prophet Isaiah. Most of them were set to music by **George Frideric Handel** in his Oratorio called *The Messiah*, which is normally performed in churches or concert halls or schools or other, smaller places all over England, as Christmas approaches. For people who know about it, it is almost as important as Christmas itself, and it is a marvellous way of hearing what some of us will hear at Mass, set to beautiful music and all in two and a half hours! For the people who hear or perform Handel's *Messiah* every year, Isaiah's prophecies are as familiar to them as they are to us who hear them at Mass. But I think every one of us hears those prophecies differently - each hears them in her own way or in his own way. I think the way we hear the prophecies of Isaiah depends on lots of things but, most importantly, the way we hear the prophecies also affects the way we celebrate Christmas.

Apart from the prophecies of Isaiah, the readings at Advent Masses introduce us to various people, but two in particular: *John the Baptist*, and *Mary the Mother of Jesus*. John the Baptist appears in the Gospel at Mass next Sunday, the second Sunday of Advent. The Gospel that day is the beginning of the Gospel according to Mark, which tells us that John "appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judæa and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit'." On the Third Sunday of Advent we hear more about John the Baptist, in the Gospel of John: the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John who he was. He made it very clear that he was only the one about whom Isaiah prophesied when he spoke of 'a voice crying in the wilderness "Prepare a pathway for the Lord"', and then went on to say that he was not fit to undo the sandal-strap of the one who was coming after him.

I wonder what John thought Jesus was like. We are told they were cousins, and we know Mary and Joseph brought Jesus from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the great festivals, so the two cousins may have met as children and known each other quite well, since they both had very religious parents. I have always imagined that, because of that relationship between their mothers Mary and Elizabeth, they must have been very familiar with each other. What we will hear on those two Sundays about John and the way he speaks about his cousin Jesus gives us a picture of someone who wants people to meet Jesus - and to be *ready* to meet Jesus. He realises who Jesus is in God's eyes, and he wants to share that with anyone who will listen to him. He wants the people to be cleansed of their sins before they meet Jesus, and he does what he can to help them.

On the fourth Sunday of Advent, we meet Mary, the young woman who is visited in her home by the angel Gabriel, a messenger sent by God to say God has chosen her to bring the Messiah into the world: 'You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end'. Mary is quite perturbed, but the angel goes on: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God'. The angel also told her that her cousin Elizabeth was six months pregnant - the woman who had been convinced she would never have a child, 'for nothing is impossible to God'. It seems that Mary never doubted that.

We know now that, when she discovered Elizabeth was expecting her child, Mary went to visit her in Ain Karim, just outside Jerusalem. That is a long journey, and don't forget there was no *Bygdaleiðir* or *Týrla*, no bus or helicopter, so she must have had a long, exhausting journey. When she headed back to the North, she herself would have been more than three months pregnant, so probably had an even more uncomfortable journey, but by then she would have become even more intrigued about the son she would have: what will He be like? how will he like Joseph and me? how shall we be able to do this amazing job God has given us? what will His life be like? will He love us? She probably had hundreds of thoughts and some of them may have worried her.

Here you have just two of the people who will be mentioned in the readings at Mass in Advent. They are the most important of all of the people we shall meet, so it is important to welcome them, too, into our hearts, as we pray that we shall be ready to welcome Jesus as we celebrate His birthday on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

What kinds of people are John and Mary?

John is a prophet, the last of the prophets pointing the way to Jesus. In England, people think that a prophet is someone who foretells the future, but that is not what a prophet is in the Bible. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God. Many people want God to speak directly, but that does not happen very often. I think I would be quite nervous if I suddenly heard the voice of God, so I am glad He does not speak to us directly frequently. No, a prophet reminds us what God wants of us in a particular situation. Usually a prophet is someone who is passionate about God and passionate about God's people, someone who wants God's people to walk along the right path. As Jesus said, a prophet is not usually heard in his own country, probably because people who knew the prophet as a child or as a teenager cannot believe that this man or woman has become so passionate about God.

A prophet does not speak about the future. A prophet tells us what needs to change in the present. If you or I did that, we would probably discover that most people do not want to be challenged if it means they have to change, even if it is only changing their routine schedule. When it is something more serious, like challenging a government about how it is treating poor people, or old people, or people who are not yet born, a prophet can lose friends. A prophet can lose a job. A prophet can sometimes lose his or her life.

John the Baptist challenged people to change their lives, to stop committing the sins that have become part of their way of life. He also challenged people by the way he lived, and even by the clothing he wore and the food he ate. He may well have had a frightening look in his eyes, and probably made lots of people a little bit nervous. He really made King Herod's wife angry, and she made sure the king cut off his head, because he reminded her that she should never have become Herod's wife. John belonged to a very dangerous club of people who make other people uncomfortable, and he is one of this who paid the price. Being faithful to God can cost us so much.

We do not hear very often that there were women prophets in the Old Testament. Here are a few names: Miriam, Deborah, Hulda, Noadiah and other women whose names have not been handed down to us, including the wife of the prophet Isaiah. I say this just because when Jesus said when he said that a prophet is not heard in his own country, that is because people presume the person speaking on God's behalf could not be a prophet, and in many societies there are still people who would insist that no woman could ever be a prophet. The Old Testament tells us of a few, so there can be female prophets.

Mary was not a prophet; her relationship to Jesus is the most normal one in the world, the relationship of a mother to her child. I have heard some very strange ideas about motherhood, and even stranger ones about Mary as our mother and so on, but it seems to be wise to keep our image of Mary sober and ordinary. I was once in a hotel in Israel, and at breakfast one morning a little family came in. It was an Israeli hotel, so many people looked around when a man came into the dining room in a flowing garment typical of the ones Arabs wear; his wife wore a garment that went down to her ankles and a headscarf, and their baby boy was running behind them: he suddenly said the Hebrew word "Abbà", which means "Daddy", or "papa", and is the first word of the Lord's prayer in the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic. I have to admit I was very struck by this little family group. They obviously reminded me of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, but the lady was not at all pretty - please forgive me for saying that, but it is true. I suddenly realised that I had always seen pretty statues of Our Blessed Lady, and I had always presumed Mary, the Mother of Jesus, would be beautiful. The lady I saw in that hotel was not beautiful in her outward features, but of course she may be the best mother in Israel today, and she could be the kindest woman in the world. It made me realise that Mary may have been a much more ordinary woman than we think. Ever since then, I have looked at Mary in a different way, and what it means to me is that any woman could imitate her perfectly, whether or not she is beautiful. As the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard wrote in *Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, feminine beauty has nothing to do with age and probably very little to do with physical features.

I think Mary's motherhood gives us a clue about Advent. We celebrate Christmas on 25th December and therefore the Annunciation - which refers to the conception of Jesus - is fixed on 25th March. That means we believe that, like all mothers, Mary had 9 months to wait for Jesus to be born. Perhaps pregnancy is the perfect image for Advent, or at least the closest thing we can imagine. Many times in Advent we hear the word 'joy', and I imagine joy is a good word to describe how a woman feels about her first child. I suspect there is also fear, and if I think of Advent that means there is room for anxiety - if we feel anxious, we are not disqualified from being part of Advent. There can be doubts in a mother-to-be. Quite normal. So if we doubt that we are really committed to our faith, Advent is a good time to focus on our doubts, or rather to place our doubts before God and ask God to help us overcome them. If we are not even sure we still believe in God, this is a good moment of calm in the Church year for us to go back to the basic fact of our faith, which is that God chose to become one of us, and Christmas is the day when we celebrate Emmanuel, 'God-with-us', so just reflecting on that fits perfectly into Advent, the way a mother wonders about the child who is coming into the world.

I want to make a suggestion.

Each of us could try to imagine that we are talking to John the Baptist or talking to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, every day during Advent. In our minds we could ask them questions. We could ask them to tell us about Jesus. We could ask them what He was like when they spent time with Him. We could ask them what He sounded like, and what He looked like. We could ask them to suggest to us what it will be like when we meet Him. We probably all had conversations like this with the people who first taught us about Jesus, and that means we may have clear ideas about all those things. But for some people it is difficult to imagine Jesus and hard to understand what He taught, so I think it is a good idea to ask people who know him well to help us to prepare properly for meeting Him on that holy night when we remember His birth in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is not far from the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, so it is possible that Joseph and Mary went to see them and show them the child Jesus before they set off on the long journey home. Luke's Gospel tells us that the baby leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb, when Mary came into her house carrying Jesus in her womb. It is very likely that the two babies met in Ain Karim just a day or two after Jesus was born, possibly the first of many visits.... We can all have ideas about what happened, but we are not told many details in the Gospels, so we need to use our imagination. We are allowed to do that, and Saint Ignatius of Loyola suggested that it is a good way of becoming closer to the Gospel stories, even becoming part of them. Some people do not have a clear picture in their mind of Jesus, so I hope my suggestion could be helpful to someone who has no idea what to think of Jesus, or someone who has forgotten Jesus and wants to meet Him again.

Basically, my suggestion is not to walk the path of Advent alone, but to ask John the Baptist or Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to walk with you towards Christmas. Talk to them and let your imagination be guided by the Holy Spirit, so that, in a way, you can hear what John or Mary might say to you. I also suggest it is good to ask them to be with you as you pray and even to be with you when you come to Mass.

The readings from Scripture are one of the ways God speaks to us, and it is important to *listen* to God, not always to be talking and chattering. There is much to learn, even if we think we know a great deal about our faith. Let God speak to your heart, so that Advent this year will be a little bit different from Advent in other years. That would be enough to make Christmas feel different, because so many other things distract us every year.

I would like to mention something else, which you may already know, and if you do I apologise.

Advent is divided into two parts. The first part ends on 16 December, and from 17 December the tempo or the pace gathers speed. We receive an unusual gift from the monks of ancient times, and I hope to tell you about that another week, but now I shall simply say what it is. Every day, as they celebrate Evening Prayer, monks and nuns, religious sisters and brothers, priests and nowadays also many lay men and women introduce the prayer of Our Blessed Lady, the *Magnificat*, with a special Antiphon or refrain. From 17 to 23 December, they use very special antiphons, called *the 'O' Antiphons*. Each one is related to some aspect of the character and the mission of Jesus, and they create a remarkable pattern - but, as I have said, I hope to say more about that in another talk.

Another difference between the first part of Advent and the second part of Advent concerns the readings at Mass. In the first part of Advent the readings refer to the promised *Messiah*. They are often read by Jews and they would hear them as we do, except that we think that Jesus is the Messiah. In the second part of Advent, the readings are much more closely linked to Jesus and events connected to His birth. We believe that what we read in the second part of Advent is the fulfilment of what we read in the first part of Advent. This is because we believe Jesus is the Messiah.

Your preachers and teachers often forget to tell you something very important. The Hebrew word Messiah - מָשִׁיחַ - means 'the anointed one'. The Greek word Christ - Χριστός - means 'the anointed one'. They mean exactly the same thing! I don't know what happens in the translation of the Bible into Faroese, but in English I know it would be better if the translators had made it more obvious that these two very important words - Messiah and Christ - are saying exactly the same thing. The Messiah is Christ. Christ is the Messiah. We have to be careful and kind how we say it, though. As Saint Peter said, "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence" (*1 Peter 3, 15f.*).

In Christmas the First part of Advent and the Second part are joined together in the one person of Jesus Christ. You will also find that *the 'O' Antiphons* on those 7 days before Christmas do the same job. They very much link the prophecies of the Messiah with the role Jesus has in the world.

If anyone has any questions about what I have said, or any suggestions about Advent, please share them now.