

■ 63rd Session of Sharing the Word of God

● First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9

This passage describes the liberation of Jerusalem and Israel from the Babylonian exile. It calls for casting off mourning clothes (sorrow) and clothing oneself with the glory (salvation) of God, signifying the end of exile and the realization of hope. The dignity and honor lost during the exile are restored through God's salvation, which extends to the entire world. God's peace is eternal, and Jerusalem glorifies God, thereby becoming an eternal symbol of God's special presence.

The "east" symbolizes God's presence and calls people to witness His salvation. Jerusalem, personified as a mother, is reassured that her children are not forsaken, and the realization of salvation based on God's covenant is a source of joy for the people. The exiled and scattered will be gathered from the ends of the earth through the Word of God or the Messiah sent by Him, affirming God's promise to watch over His people without fail.

Despite the hardships and humiliations experienced during exile, God's plan guarantees restoration and glory. His word of salvation is certain. Through Israel's repentance, the proud mountains and hills (arrogance and power) will be lowered, valleys (oppression) will become level, and distinctions before God will be erased. God's mercy will lead Israel in joy and peace, conveying the importance of repentance and holding onto hope during hardships.

【Jerusalem】

1. Jerusalem is a special city emphasizing God's presence and salvation (Exodus 25:22, Isaiah 60:1-3).
2. Its personification expresses a deep bond and intimate relationship with God.
3. The restoration of Jerusalem symbolizes salvation for the entire world and represents the center of hope and salvation.

● Second Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

Paul shares a deep relationship with the Church in Philippi, expressing joy and gratitude for the believers. His intercessory prayer aims for their spiritual growth and actions to glorify God. This life of glorifying God results in the fulfillment of His work and serves as spiritual support for one another. The "first day" refers to the time when faith was first embraced in Philippi, such as the conversion of the jailer (Acts 16:30).

"Sharing in the Gospel" involves believing and accepting the Word, receiving God's grace, practicing it in daily life, supporting missionary work, sharing the joy and hope of the Gospel with others, and fulfilling the mission of evangelism.

"Good work" refers to:

The work of salvation achieved through God's grace and gifts (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The transformation of believers into Christlike individuals (sanctification, 1 John 3:2), as they are called to this purpose (Romans 8:29).

Paul is confident that this work will be completed when Christ returns, grounded in God's faithfulness to His promises (Hebrews 10:23).

Paul's overflowing love for the believers, inspired by Christ's sacrificial and unconditional love, is sincere and visible to the omnipotent God (Hebrews 4:13). It fosters understanding of God's Word and discernment of what is right and excellent, enabling believers to focus on the most important things and prepare for Christ's return.

The "harvest of righteousness," which includes spiritual fruit and good deeds, glorifies God. It underscores the importance of both faith and practice in Christian life.

● Gospel Reading: Luke 3:1-6

Luke establishes the historical credibility of John the Baptist's ministry, dating it to the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar's reign (AD 28-29). John, the son of Zechariah, receives God's Word in the wilderness and fulfills his prophetic role as

the forerunner of Jesus. His mission is to prepare for the coming of the Lord by preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins, symbolized through the baptism of water.

The words from Isaiah 40:3-5, "Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness... Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill made low... All flesh shall see the salvation of God," highlight repentance and the leveling of distinctions before God. God's plan of salvation is universal, available to all humanity, and transcends divisions.

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