

## Introduction

These reflections on the Sunday Gospels of the Church's liturgical cycle have been kept since 2007. That means the Gospels belonging to the three designations of Year A, Year B and Year C have been gone through several times. While new inspiration is always available, there remains the possibility that some overlapping will occur. For this reason the liturgical year 2013 will focus upon the first reading which more often than not is from the Old Testament. Because the first readings may not be as familiar as Gospel excerpts, they will be inserted at the beginning of each entry (in italics). As with the other series of Reflections, the entire reading may not be commented upon but certain salient points. In most instances, to cover every detail would overburden the purpose of these entries. This has the advantage of allowing room for further reflections when the same passage rolls round again.

In several years the same problem of dealing with the same recurring texts will present itself. However, there remain the second readings which will continue the process after which a return can be made to the Gospels!

Please note that the Church's calendar begins approximately one month prior to the secular one on January first. With that in mind, this document, as is the case with the earlier ones, will be designated as the year 2013.

The diagram of the liturgical year can be found in many places, including calendars from parish churches. Here is a typical one lifted from the Internet to give an overall view of the major phases beginning with Advent. Note the large swath of green with a smaller one which comprise Ordinary Time, the bulk of any given year.



**2 December, First Sunday of Advent**

*"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'* [Jeremiah 33.14-16]

Today's first reading begins with "the days are coming" which is similar to "in those days," two groupings of words found often among many prophets. Almost never are they specified, just that they are coming, and that does not create false expectation. To understand such phrases means to have an appreciation of the meaning of "day" or *yom* which covers a wide range all the way from a twenty-four hour day to a day of creation. *Yom* stands outside modern designations of time and space and in many instances, isn't to be identified with them. The way to understand such talk is, of course, by paying attention to the crucial "when" which the English translation lacks but invariably is followed with "says the Lord." The idea being communicated is that *yom* ('day') and "says" are connected intimately and immediately minus temporal or spacial interval. In the case at hand, the verb *na'am* for "says" is used (sometimes the common *amar* and *davar* are used as well) means the giving of an utterance or declaration. So if you pay close attention to these opening words, you can see the intimate connection between divine speaking and time...not just regular time but sacred time which may be designated as *kairos*, the familiar Greek New Testament noun for event, special occasion.

The paragraph above recounts the way God speaking and time are related which is enhanced by the words that follow: "when I will fulfil the promise I made (etc.)." The verb for "fulfil" is *qum* ('to rise') used with *davar* (literally, 'word') and the verb "made," the verbal root of *davar* which has the same spelling. Thus literally these words read "when I make to rise the word which I have spoken."

For emphasis the Lord continues with "in those days" in conjunction with "at that time" or *heth* which signifies an opportunity much like *kairos*.

Compare the verb *qum* ('to rise' or in the verse at hand, "will fulfil") with *tsamach* ('will cause to rise') which fundamentally means to spring forth or as the form of the Hebrew verb has it, "cause to rise." Such causing implies an indirect relationship between divine action and the actual sprouting forth, that both will co-operate on behalf of King David. Of course, David had been dead for some time, but these words refer to his successor who is considered David incarnate, if you will, along with the same favor God had shown him.

Then there is a third phrase "in those days" with respect Judah being saved, the verb being *yashah* which is the root for the proper name "Jesus." As for Jerusalem, that city "will dwell securely" or literally "will dwell to (*l-* or 'to' being prefaced to the noun *betach* or "trust." As for "it," that is singular and refers to Jerusalem but includes Judah.

Finally, Jerusalem, seat of King David, will be called "The Lord is our righteousness" or *tsedeq*: not just righteousness in and by itself but belonging to Israel as a whole, "our righteousness." Note the verb *qara'* ('to call') which applies to Jerusalem, "will be called." I.e., Jerusalem will not claim this title, but it will be attributed to it... "in those days."

## **December 8, Immaculate Conception**

*After the man, Adam, had eaten of the tree, the Lord God called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?"*

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t. Frequent mention will be made about verbal roots. They are very important to have an understanding of what the Hebrew language is all about. Virtually every verb consists of three consonants from which many nouns are derived. Despite the paucity of three consonants, they offer a surprising range of possibilities or combinations and hence understandings of the text.

*He answered, "I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself." Then he asked, "Who told you that you were naked? You have eaten, then, from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat!" The man replied, "The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it." The Lord God then asked the woman, "Why did you do such a thing?" The woman answered, "The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you shall be banned from all the animals and from all the wild creatures; and on your belly you shall crawl, and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." Genesis 3:9-15 & 20*

NB: The following is excerpted from "Expansions on the Book of Genesis" on this home page. Usually excerpting material is not part of normal procedure but is done here because of an oversight, of not foreseeing in time material for today's solemnity.

Vs. 8 just prior to this excerpt reads: "And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." Did they hide from his voice, rather, God and Moses talking, or did they hide from the *ruach* which was blowing at evening, a signal of their approach? Both *qol* and *ruach* go together, for *ruach* signaled that someone was near, not unlike the rustling of leaves. Surely the rustling created by God and Moses, along with the *ruach* of evening, must have created a fairly loud noise. Of course, this is the first instance when the man and woman showed fear towards God, something they had not experienced before. No question it was disconcerting, this sudden fright swelling from within and lacking rational explanation. The first sign of their fear was their making of "aprons" and the second was hiding among the trees. *Betok* is the word for "among" which, as noted earlier, can apply to "the midst of." The man and woman wanted to put as much distance as possible between them and the tree from which they had eaten, another sign of fear and trying to protect themselves. As for God, this is the first time we have him localized though no description is given except that *qol* or sound (voice) coupled with "cool" or *ruach*. Both words don't pertain to sight but to sound...listening...and that is how the man and woman recognized him and continue to do so down to the present day.

"The Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" Note that God calls (the simple word *qara*) man alone, not the woman. This summons differs from previous evening strolls when God had met the man and woman, greeted them and passed on. This evening he got no response, hence his calling out. To that instance of God saying "Where are you?," the only response was that *ruach* ('cool') heard rustling among the trees. Awareness of that sound at evening as is the case at hand was more disconcerting than at other times. The rustling is more than a simple noise, for it highlights the absence of response and gives a foreboding sense that something is wrong. After what for God must have seen a terribly long interval came the response (it isn't recorded but is intimated), "I heard the sound of you...and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself." We must give the man credit for responding quickly compared to the woman of which nothing is reported. The words "I heard the sound of you" is telling. Emphasis is upon hearing as opposed to seeing God which is not the case here. The text presents God only as *qol* and *ruach*, voice and cool, which call out to the man.

Immediately God gets the drift of the man's response which, as the last paragraph noted, was courageous of him. However, this quickly shifts to a blame game when he pins responsibility on the woman. The words "the woman whom you gave to be with me" are the nub of that insult which must have angered God; it was almost as insulting as the serpent or *nachash* speaking as a sorcerer (*nachash*) and mimicking God. Up to this point God was ready to let the man off with a reprimand and send him away. While God was considering this, we don't hear a word from the serpent, too busy slithering away to a safe distance to continue listening in on this conversation from a safe distance. So what about Moses who was walking with God? He was right there and just as indignant. However, we can attribute more control over the situation to Moses than God because he resolved to use the serpent as a means of healing which happened later in the desert. It was a revenge just as

sweet as God's promise to the woman about her bruising the serpent's heel (cf. vs. 15...though serpents lack heels as well as any other protruding body parts). As for the woman who was present with the man, God asks what she had done. Again, an effort to pass off the blame: "The serpent beguiled me." The verb is *nasa'* which means to go astray, deceive. Avoiding the temptation to consider this in visual terms, it's best to realize that the woman, as was the case regarding the man, is not addressing God as a person standing in front of her. Rather, she was addressing the *qol* (voice) which was enhanced by the *ruach*, cool (of the evening).

After the woman attempted to pass the blame onto the serpent, God speaks to it. Although we can assume the serpent slithered away to a relatively safe distance, he was close enough and must have been surprised when God spoke directly to it. The first words out of God's mouth (let's call it his *qol* or voice as described above) is "cursed" or *'arar* which is placed in the context of cattle and wild animals (literally, animals of the field). The first type of animal is *behemah* or more generally beasts of burden, among the most common though important animals. However, as of this point there was no need for their service in the garden. They, along with the "animals of the field," are superior to the serpent who must crawl upon the ground as opposed to standing on its feet. Thus it's easy to visualize God as *qol* or voice speaking down to the serpent while both the man and woman watch on, again, their eyes fixed downward to the serpent. As for the curse itself, *'arar* is used with the preposition *min* (from) prefaced to "cattle" and "wild animals" reading literally "cursed from all cattle and from all wild animals." Thus *min* serves to make the curse all the more powerful by means of separation.

God's curse upon the serpent is twofold: it goes...slithers...upon its belly or *gachon*, the only other biblical reference being Lev 11.42: "Whatever goes on its belly and whatever goes on all fours or whatever has many feet, all the swarming things that swarm upon the earth you shall not eat, for they are an abomination." There the category is broadened to include "swarming things that swarm," the verb being *sharats* which was noted in 1.20 as meaning to creep or crawl: "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures." During that day of creation such creatures were deemed good and not deserving of a curse. However, one unattractive image conjured up by *sharats* pertains to frogs, especially their invasion of private spaces: "The Nile shall swarm with frogs which shall come up into your house and into your bed chamber and on your bed" [Ex 8.3/7.28]. Because the serpent and other animals like it live close to the ground, they do not eat grass but dust or *haphar* which is readily available. We encountered that word in 2.7 where it had a positive connotation: "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground." While this was going on, the man, more so than the woman who was fashioned from his rib, must have listened breathlessly because he was taken from the same *haphar* or dust. He must have thought to himself, will I be like the serpent and crawl on the ground eating the same *haphar* from which I had been taken? Not a happy prospect. God's curse to the serpent was re-enforced by the words "all the days of your life." That is to say, an intimation of mortality for the serpent which soon would apply to the man and woman.

In vs. 15 God continues to address the serpent by saying that he will put "enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed." The word for "enmity" is *'evah* which has just three other biblical references which can translate readily as hatred. *'Evah* is similar sound to *'ishah* or "woman," the one who obeyed the serpent which must have registered in her mind quite strongly, more so than the man who was standing nearby listening in horror to all this. Furthermore, the Hebrew "I will bring" (*'eyvah*) is similar to the two words just mentioned which enhance the drama: *'evah*, *'ishah* and *'eyvah*. The enmity God is doling out is between the serpent and woman as well as future generations; nothing is said of the man though that is implied by the word "seed."

Finally God intimates future trouble between the woman and serpent: "he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." The verb for "bruise" is *shuph* which has just two other occurrences, Job 9.17 and Ps 139.11, and means to attack, fall upon. That would account for the second biblical reference: "Let only darkness cover me (i.e., fall upon) and the light about me be night." Some of what that Psalm verse says can apply to the Genesis situation insofar as despite the dreadful situation, it can and will be reversed later with Jesus Christ: even if night falls upon (*shuph*) one and the light become dark, it will not matter. As for the woman, the serpent will *shuph* her head which means he must leap up a considerable distance from the ground. As for the

serpent, he is more vulnerable though has the attribute of a heel which is not possible physically speaking. So instead of a literal heel sticking out from the sleek, slender body of the serpent (if it had this heel, there would be specific mention in Moses' image of it on the pole), we may take "heel" in the verbal sense of supplanting, of coming from behind in stealthy fashion. The classic example is the birth of Jacob and Esau who were at odds directly from their birth. "Is he not rightly named Jacob (i.e., supplanter)" [27.36]? Thus we can view the relationship between the woman and serpent as not unlike the troubled one between Jacob and Esau.

## 9 December, Second Sunday of Advent

*O Jerusalem, and put on for ever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. For God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. For your name will forever be called by God, "Peace of righteousness and glory of godliness." Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height and look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east, at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went forth from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him. [Baruch 5.1-9]*

This passage is taken from the Apocrypha of the Septuagint or the Greek translation of the Bible.

*Stole* is the noun for "robe," a general term for a garment and can apply to armament, of being prepared for battle. Here it applies to "mourning" and "misery" (*penthos* and *kakosis*). The former applies to sadness as well as grief at one who has died whereas the latter is akin the adjective *kakos* ('evil') and means ill-treatment as well as distress.

In contrast to the robe of *penthos* and *kakosis*, the Lord bids Jerusalem to assume not so much a *stole*—and obviously that means covering one's entire body—but the following three pieces of clothing:

1) Divine "splendor" or *euprepeia*, a noun which derives from the verb (*prepo*) meaning to shine forth, to appear, with the preface *eu-* ('good' in the sense of 'well'). Because this *euprepeia* consists of *doxa* ('glory') from the Lord, it does not require a *stole*. Automatically this makes one think of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden who "were both naked and were not ashamed" [Gn 2.25].

2) "Robe" or according to the LXX, a double-garment (*diplois*) of "righteousness" (*dikaiosune*). This robe comes "from" God or is *para* God, that is, from beside him which implies Jerusalem receiving the robe from alongside the Lord.

3) A diadem according to the LXX or *mitra* which can apply to a head-band worn by women as well as a belt or girdle. This *mitra* is to display the "glory" (*doxa*) of the "Everlasting" or *aionios*, this adjective being derived from the noun *aion* which also means a period of existence as well as forever.

*Lamprotes* is the noun for "splendor" and can refer to the virtuous way a person conducts himself, that is, in a shining fashion which imitates the *euprepeia* or "splendor" of vs. 1. The realm of such brightness is "under heaven," that is, upon earth and does not especially belong to the divine realm.

In vs. 4 note the second use of the preposition *para* ('by God') which implies a being beside him from which Jerusalem will derive her name, and that name remains "forever," the preposition *eis* ('into') with the noun *aion*. The name at hand is twofold:

1) "Peace of righteousness" or *eirene* coupled with *dikaosune* which forms the "robe of righteousness" of vs. 2.

2) Glory of godliness" or *doxa* coupled with *theosebeia*, the service (*sebas*: fear, reverence which is akin to the Latin *pius*) prefaced with *theos* (God).

In vs. 5 the Lord says to Jerusalem "arise," that is, arise but only insofar as her natural limit designated as "under heaven" in vs. 3. Thus the "height" on which she is bidden to stand is midway, if you will, between earth and heaven.

"Look toward the east" or *periblepo* which literally means to look (*blepo*) around (*peri-*), to scour the direction of the east or sunrise, the east or from where the first man had been banished from Eden (cf. Gn 3.24). This verb is used with the preposition *pros* signifying direction towards-which. The object of this looking-around is Jerusalem's children gathered not only from the east, the direction she is looking, but from behind her, that is, from the west. Nothing is said of the other two cardinal directions, north and south, because east is connected with Eden.

The divine "word" or *rhema* does this east-west gathering, this term meaning that which is said or the subject of speech compared with *logos*, more the expression of speech. What this *rhema* says is not given as though its presence is sufficient to gather Jerusalem's children. However, it is tied into their faculty of recollection (*mneia*) which also translates as mention.

Vs. 6 contrasts two verbs, *exerchomai* and *eisago* ('went forth' and 'will bring back'). The preposition *eis* ('into') prefaced to *ago* suggests a fuller return, of being "into" you or Jerusalem.

The horizontal direction of east-west, if you will, is made level in vs. 7 so that Israel may "walk safely," the verb being *badizo* which suggests walking at a slow pace, one that is *asphales*, literally as safe from falling. Such a slow-paced walk is to be done (*hegeomai*, to lead in the sense of to conduct) in divine glory, that is, back to Jerusalem or again, from both east and west. Such conducting will have both divine "mercy" (*eleeo*, verb being used) and "righteousness" (*dikaosune* as noted in vs. 2 as consisting of Jerusalem's robe) and one of two names in vs. 4, "peace of righteousness." *Para* or "beside" is used with respect to "him" or God, again suggesting that those from the east and west will be right alongside him.

## 16 December, Third (Gaudete) Sunday of Advent

*Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival." [Zephaniah 3.14-18]*

Note four similar verbs:

1) "Sing aloud" or *ranan* which is a shout for joy.

2) "Exult" or *ruah* which pertains to making a loud noise and in another verbal form which is called *niph'al* means to become evil.

3) "Rejoice" or *samach* which means to be cheerful.

4) "Exult" or *halaz* means to exult.

These four similar verbs of exultant joy which pertain to Zion/Israel are paralleled by referring to the Lord:

1) "Gives victory" or *yashah*, a verb which means to save, the verbal root for the proper name "Jesus." The Lord here is a *gibor* or "warrior," so *yashah* has a military connotation.

2) "Rejoice" or *sus*, a verb which implies gladness and is used with the noun *simchah*, the verbal root of *samach* noted in #3 above.

3) "Renew" or *charash* which means to refrain, to cut or engrave.

4) "Exult" or *gyl* which means to dance in a circle. The suggestion of dancing fits in well with the "day of festival" which a footnote in the RSV designates as "obscure." The noun is *rinah* which means singing and the verbal root for *ranan* in the first #1, "sing aloud."

There are two reasons for this joyous outburst:

1) that the Lord has removed judgments against Zion/Israel and defeated her enemies but more importantly

2) "ins in your midst" or *qerev* which means in the very center. It is within this *qerev* that the second list of four elements take place.

### 23 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

*But you, O Bethlehem Eph'rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.*  
Micah 5.1.4

Eph'rathah has five other biblical references: Rt 4.11, 1Chron 2.24, 50, 4.4 and Ps 132.6. The last verse can be expanded by taking into consideration David's words of that psalm, "How he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty one of Jacob, 'I will not enter my house or get into my bed...until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.'" Such words can be applied to the birth of Jesus or more specifically the "wise men from the east" [Mt 2.1] in their search for him. Surely they must have consulted these words of Micah prior to setting forth on their journey as well as Ps 132. While they must have had some familiarity with Hebrew texts, the ones at hand jumped out at them, so it was now a matter of discerning whether or not to follow their lead. One can only imagine the heated discussion among the three as how to proceed.

The verb "come forth" or *yatsa'* is the root for the noun "origins" or *motsa'* and that origin is "from of old," *miqedem*, literally as from before. Compare it with "ancient days" or days which are *holam* or literally of time long past meaning antiquity. In order to perceive this identity of a yet unnamed person's *motsa'*, a certain familiarity with scripture is required as with the wise men. They did not attempt to divine the future but read the scripture the lines of what we call now *lectio divina*. This sensitivity is found in someone like John who perceived Jesus Christ as *Logos* or word-as-expression of the Father which begins his Gospel.

In the passage at hand, Mich is speaking of some kind of exile which is clear by "the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel." This return is bound up with the unidentified woman "in travail" or when the "time" for her to give birth arrives, *heth* being the noun which means a time of opportunity or special occasion not unlike the Greek *kairos*.

A division of peoples had existed up to this point: those belonging to Israel and those who return to the people of that nation...in other words, a partial exile seems to be the case here.

Finally the unidentified person to be born in Bethlehem Eph'rathah will have access to divine "strength" and majesty" or *hoz* and *ge'on*. The former implies splendor and protection whereas the latter, sublimity and glory as well as arrogance which stems from such exultation. As for the people who will "dwell secure," the verb *yashav* is used which fundamentally means to sit down while the unidentified person's renown will reach the "ends of the earth," *'ephes* applicable to anything which is extreme. How this greatness (*gadal* is the verb used) is not indicated but lies in the future, something the wise men from the East noted above could foresee.

## 25 December, Christmas

The first reading is from the Vigil Mass.

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62.1-5*

This year we have an interval of only two days between the end of the Advent season and that of Christmas...in effect, more like one day if we take into consideration Christmas Eve.

Note two similar verbs, *chashah* and *shaqat*, "will (not) keep silent" and "will (not) rest." The former implies being still, at rest, and the latter implies physical rest, of laying down. In the larger context of Isaiah, this isn't spelled out directly which means that the Lord prefers to reveal himself in a more subtle fashion and by allowing Zion/Israel to be his manifestation. Such *chashah* and *shaqat* are formative later on for being attentive to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, all down in silence, while a commotion is created around him, notably by King Herod. Then we hear nothing for some thirty years of obscurity until Jesus appears on the banks of the Jordan River with John the Baptist.

*Yeshuhathah* is the noun for "salvation," a variation of the verbal root for the proper name Jesus which is likened to a "burning torch" or *laphad*, a means for providing light while walking about in the darkness.

While the noun *yeshuhathah* is more obvious for intimating the coming of Jesus (*Yeshuah*), Isaiah records that the nations do not see this. Instead, they see divine "vindication" (*tsedaqah*) which more properly is taken as righteousness. The same apply to kings regarding divine "glory" or *kevod*. So this not-seeing of salvation makes it all the more mysterious and requires greater sensitivity to perceive.

Usually a crown and diadem are worn by kings and queens whereas here both remain in the Lord's hands, as though waiting for a future time to crown Zion/Jerusalem.

Note the pair of contrasts for Zion/Jerusalem: "forsaken" and "desolate" (*hazuvah* and *shemamah*) vs. "my

delight” and “married” (*chephtsy-vah* and *behulah*). The first pair suggests abandonment and having been laid waste. The second pair suggests sheer joy through marriage (to the Lord). While the first pertains to the relationship with the Lord (*chaphats* for ‘delights in you’), Israel’s land will be “married” or *bahal*, the root for *behulah*. The notion of “land” is important for Israel and pertains to her identity, for it something she had been absent from for four hundred years in Egypt and returned to as Canaan after the Exodus. Thus *’erets* is a concept, and to be “married” to the Lord is fulfilment of Israel’s dreams. This marriage of *’erets* to the Lord is further described as one between a young man and a virgin, in terms of “rejoicing over” or *sus* with the preposition *hal* which is an expression of gladness put in sexual overtones.

## 26 December, St Stephen, Protomartyr

Please note a brief remark as to the verb *atenizo* which means to gaze intently and consists of the verbal root *teino* (to extend) with the alpha privative rendering it literally as not extended or not stretched out. It occurs twice in Acts with two difference implications. First consider 6.15 with regard to the council of Jews: “And gazing at him (Stephen), all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.” Secondly, 7.55: “But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” In other words, two difference uses of *atenizo*, of showing the intensity of the members of the council and Stephen. Both examples of gazing are not extended, if you will.

## 30 December, Feast of the Holy Family

*For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother; O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you. Sirach 3.2-6, 12-14*

Note the importance of “honor” which occurs three times: by the Lord with regard to the father, the person who honors his father and the one who also honors his father which will carry over into his children. Obviously the second and third belong to the same person. The verb in the first instance is *doxazo* (Sirach is in the Apocrypha, written in Greek), more specifically as to give honor or *doxa*. *Doxa* is an attribute of God and here is transferred to the father, head of the household who acts in God’s stead. The other two instances have the verb *timao* which means to fix the value on someone or on something as well as to venerate. The significance of *doxazo* concerning the Lord is mirrored by “whoever glorifies his father will have long life.” While *timao* is certainly important, it is secondary to *doxazo* here, being derived from it. Interestingly, *doxazo* applies to the mother (‘whoever glorifies his mother’). Such glorifying of the mother results in the person’s prayers being heard, the verb being *eisakouo* or literally to hear into (*eis-*), a thorough paying attention of the prayer offered by God.

As for the mother, the Lord confirmed her right over her sons, *krisis* being the noun for “right” which fundamentally means selection, separation or judgment. The verb at hand is *stereo*, to make firm or strong. Recognition of this by a son or daughter results in one “who lays up treasure” or *apothersaurizo*, a verb which suggests hoarding. The process of such hoarding seems to continue indefinitely, a result of that glorifying (*doxazo*) the mother.

The verb in the last verse (14) which pertains to one’s father is *prosanoikodomeo*, “will be credited” (to you).

It consists of the root *demo* (to build) to which is prefaced the noun *oikos* (house). Then to these two are added two prepositions, *pros* and *ana* (to or towards and above). Thus the literally sense is building a house up-towards. Such is the result of *eleemosune*, pity or mercy.

## 1 January, Solemnity of the Virgin Mary or Octave of Christmas

*The Lord said to Moses: "Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them: This is how you shall bless the Israelites. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace! So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them."* Numbers 6.22-7

The notion of the first day of a new calendar month viewed as an octave puts the common method of telling time in its proper place instead of exalting it as a new beginning. Being an octave means that today is the eighth day after Christ's birth and has nothing to do with the year 2013 nor any other measurement of conventional time. At first the liturgical way of telling time appears static, of returning to an event over and over again compared with the forward looking movement of passing from one calendar year to another. Not so because the cyclic one of the liturgical cycle is moving upwards, round and round, with the starting point always as Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega. And Christ as Alpha and Omega includes everything in between.

The blessing at hand in Numbers is familiar and one adapted for all sorts occasions. It has a general feel about it, kind of prosaic and close almost borders upon the secular by reason of our acquaintance with it. That's its appeal...no one can find harm in a general sort of blessing.

The blessing itself commences with the Lord speaking with Moses who, in turn, speaks with Aaron and his sons. That means any divine speaking (*davar*) is mediated by Moses and deliberately so. No one, not even Aaron, could bear the one-on-one communication enjoyed by Moses. Despite the close proximity of Aaron to his brother, he is not of the same caliber; unfortunately, his sons are further down the scale. Later in Lev 10.1-2 these sons by the names of Nadab and Abihu "offered unholy fire before the Lord" which "came forth...and devoured them." Thus the mediation of Moses, powerful as it was, could not have a positive effect upon his brother's two sons. However, that lays in the future.

The blessing at hand consists of three elements:

1) "Bless" and "keep" or *barak* and *shamar*. The latter implies close protection and is used of ten with regard to reading the divine Torah.

2) "Shine" and "be gracious" or *'or* and *chanan*. The former means to give light and the latter, to be inclined to take pity. 'Or is associated with God's face which spills over, if you will, into being *chanan*. Thus there is a transition from the divine face to taking pity, a stream of light.

3) "Look upon" and "peace." The former reads literally "may lift his face to you" and the latter as "may place to you peace" (*shalom*).

The verb *sum* ('invoke') means a putting, a laying down. The normal way of representing it is a person looking heavenward for God to look downward, that is, for his *sum* which in the verse at hand pertains to his "name" (*shem*). Thus there is a play on words, *sum-shem*. And the sum at hand is to be "upon" or *hal* the Israelites resulting in God blessing them through the mediation of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu.

## 6 January, Epiphany of the Lord

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.* Isaiah 60.1-6

A major feature of this passage concerns references to brightness, all in the following order: shine, light, glory, glory, light, brightness and be radiant. Because this is the dominant theme of the Isaiah passage as well as for today's feast, these six words ('shine' and 'light' being the same) will be outlined as follows:

1) *Or*: both the verb and the noun for "light" which is equivalent to the first light of creation as in Gn 1.3: "Let there be light, and there was light." Intimately bound with *or* in the verse at hand is the divine command to "arise" or *qum* meaning that Israel had been laying down either prostrate due to defeat or simply fast asleep.

2) *Kevod* or "glory" which fundamentally means that which is heavy or weighty. It too is linked with a verb related to *qum*, *halah* and differs from the former by having a broader connotation such as to increase, to be strong.

3) *Halah* is used a second time after mention of darkness followed by second mention of *kevod*. Note that "it will be seen:" not by Israel upon whom this *kevod* will rest but by those nations around her.

4) *Or*: another mention of "light" to which nations will come.

5) *Nogah* or "brightness" which applies to splendor or anything glorious. "The path of the just is as the shining light" [Prov 4.18]. In the verse at hand, it applies to Israel's "rising" or *zerech* which applies to light only, the scattering of rays as at sunrise.

6) *Nahar* or "be radiant" which fundamentally means to flow as a river. "And all the nations shall flow to it and many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord'" [Is 2.2]. Such radiant flowing follows upon having seen: in the verse at hand as well as vs. 4. The seeing of vs. 4 results in Jerusalem's heart to "thrill" and "rejoice" (*pachad* and *rachav*). The former more specifically means to tremble and the latter, to be broad, wide or spacious.

Gold and frankincense are mentioned in the Isaiah passage which automatically makes one think of the three wise men. However, the third gift of myrrh is lacking, symbolic of Christ's future death. That means one of these men picked up on this missing element and knew from the star that he was destined to bring this spice in order to fulfill the text. Chances are these wise men read the Isaiah passage at hand not only upon having seen the star, but found it essential for sustaining them on their long trek. Although this scripture may have not been native to their land, they must have had access to it by Jews who had lived there and were intrigued by Isaiah's words about a future savior, not only by the text but by contact with Jews in exile.

## 2 December, First Sunday of Advent

*"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'* Jeremiah 33.14-16

Today's first reading begins with "the days are coming" which is similar to "in those days," two groupings of words found often among many prophets. Almost never are they specified, just that they are coming, and that

does not create false expectation. To understand such phrases means to have an appreciation of the meaning of “day” or *yom* which covers a wide range all the way from a twenty-four hour day to a day of creation. *Yom* stands outside modern designations of time and space and in many instances, isn’t to be identified with them. The way to understand such talk is, of course, by paying attention to the crucial “when” which the English translation lacks but invariably is followed with “says the Lord.” The idea being communicated is that *yom* (‘day’) and “says” are connected intimately and immediately minus temporal or spacial interval. In the case at hand, the verb *na’am* for “says” is used (sometimes the common *amar* and *davar* are used as well) means the giving of an utterance or declaration. So if you pays close attention to these opening words, you can see the intimate connection between divine speaking and time...not just regular time but sacred time which may be designated as *kairos*, the familiar Greek New Testament noun for event, special occasion.

The paragraph above recounts the way God speaking and time are related which is enhanced by the words that follow: “when I will fulfil the promise I made (etc.)” The verb for “fulfil” is *qum* (‘to rise’) used with *davar* (literally, ‘word’) and the verb “made,” the verbal root of *davar* which has the same spelling. Thus literally these words reads “when I make to rise the word which I have spoken.”

For emphasis the Lord continues with “in those days” in conjunction with “at that time” or *heth* which signifies an opportunity much like *kairos*.

Compare the verb *qum* (‘to rise’ or in the verse at hand, “will fulfil”) with *tsamach* (‘will cause to rise’) which fundamentally means to spring forth or as the form of the Hebrew verb has it, “cause to rise.” Such causing implies an indirect relationship between divine action and the actual sprouting forth, that both will co-operate on behalf of King David. Of course, David had been dead for some time, but these words refer to his successor who is considered David incarnate, if you will, along with the same favor God had shown him.

Then there is a third phrase “in those days” with respect Judah being saved, the verb being *yashah* which is the root for the proper name “Jesus.” As for Jerusalem, that city “will dwell securely” or literally “will dwell to (l- or ‘to’ being prefaced to the noun *betach* or “trust.” As for “it,” that is singular and refers to Jerusalem but includes Judah.

Finally, Jerusalem, seat of King David, will be called “The Lord is our righteousness” or *tsedeq*: not just righteousness in and by itself but belonging to Israel as a whole, “our righteousness.” Note the verb *qara’* (‘to call’) which applies to Jerusalem, “will be called.” I.e., Jerusalem will not claim this title, but it will be attributed to it...“in those days.”

### **December 8, Immaculate Conception**

*After the man, Adam, had eaten of the tree, the Lord God called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself." Then he asked, "Who told you that you were naked? You have eaten, then, from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat!" The man replied, "The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it." The Lord God then asked the woman, "Why did you do such a thing?" The woman answered, "The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you shall be banned from all the animals and from all the wild creatures; and on your belly you shall crawl, and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." Genesis 3.9-15 & 20*

NB: The following is excerpted from “Expansions on the Book of Genesis” on this home page. Usually excerpting material is not part of normal procedure but is done here because of an oversight, of not foreseeing

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t. Frequent mention will be made about verbal roots. They are very important to have an understanding of what the Hebrew language is all about. Virtually every verb consists of three consonants from which many nouns are derived. Despite the paucity of three consonants, they offer a surprising range of possibilities or combinations and hence understandings of the text.

in time material for today's solemnity.

Vs. 8 just prior to this excerpt reads: "And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." Did they hide from his voice, rather, God and Moses talking, or did they hide from the *ruach* which was blowing at evening, a signal of their approach? Both *qol* and *ruach* go together, for *ruach* signaled that someone was near, not unlike the rustling of leaves. Surely the rustling created by God and Moses, along with the *ruach* of evening, must have created a fairly loud noise. Of course, this is the first instance when the man and woman showed fear towards God, something they had not experienced before. No question it was disconcerting, this sudden fright swelling from within and lacking rational explanation. The first sign of their fear was their making of "aprons" and the second was hiding among the trees. *Betok* is the word for "among" which, as noted earlier, can apply to "the midst of." The man and woman wanted to put as much distance as possible between them and the tree from which they had eaten, another sign of fear and trying to protect themselves. As for God, this is the first time we have him localized though no description is given except that *qol* or sound (voice) coupled with "cool" or *ruach*. Both words don't pertain to sight but to sound...listening...and that is how the man and woman recognized him and continue to do so down to the present day.

"The Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" Note that God calls (the simple word *qara'*) man alone, not the woman. This summons differs from previous evening strolls when God had met the man and woman, greeted them and passed on. This evening he got no response, hence his calling out. To that instance of God saying "Where are you?" the only response was that *ruach* ('cool') heard rustling among the trees. Awareness of that sound at evening as is the case at hand was more disconcerting than at other times. The rustling is more than a simple noise, for it highlights the absence of response and gives a foreboding sense that something is wrong. After what for God must have seen a terribly long interval came the response (it isn't recorded but is intimated), "I heard the sound of you...and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself." We must give the man credit for responding quickly compared to the woman of which nothing is reported. The words "I heard the sound of you" is telling. Emphasis is upon hearing as opposed to seeing God which is not the case here. The text presents God only as *qol* and *ruach*, voice and cool, which call out to the man.

Immediately God gets the drift of the man's response which, as the last paragraph noted, was courageous of him. However, this quickly shifts to a blame game when he pins responsibility on the woman. The words "the woman whom you gave to be with me" are the nub of that insult which must have angered God; it was almost as insulting as the serpent or *nachash* speaking as a sorcerer (*nachash*) and mimicking God. Up to this point God was ready to let the man off with a reprimand and send him away. While God was considering this, we don't hear a word from the serpent, too busy slithering away to a safe distance to continue listening in on this conversation from a safe distance. So what about Moses who was walking with God? He was right there and just as indignant. However, we can attribute more control over the situation to Moses than God because he resolved to use the serpent as a means of healing which happened later in the desert. It was a revenge just as sweet as God's promise to the woman about her bruising the serpent's heel (cf. vs. 15...though serpents lack heels as well as any other protruding body parts). As for the woman who was present with the man, God asks what she had done. Again, an effort to pass off the blame: "The serpent beguiled me." The verb is *nasa'* which means to go astray, deceive. Avoiding the temptation to consider this in visual terms, it's best to realize that the woman, as was the case regarding the man, is not addressing God as a person standing in front of her. Rather, she was addressing the *qol* (voice) which was enhanced by the *ruach*, cool (of the evening).

After the woman attempted to pass the blame onto the serpent, God speaks to it. Although we can assume the serpent slithered away to a relatively safe distance, he was close enough and must have been surprised when God spoke directly to it. The first words out of God's mouth (let's call it his *qol* or voice as described above) is "cursed" or *arar* which is placed in the context of cattle and wild animals (literally, animals of the

field). The first type of animal is *behemah* or more generally beasts of burden, among the most common though important animals. However, as of this point there was no need for their service in the garden. They, along with the “animals of the field,” are superior to the serpent who must crawl upon the ground as opposed to standing on its feet. Thus it’s easy to visualize God as *qol* or voice speaking down to the serpent while both the man and woman watch on, again, their eyes fixed downward to the serpent. As for the curse itself, *’arar* is used with the preposition *min* (from) prefaced to “cattle” and “wild animals” reading literally “cursed from all cattle and from all wild animals.” Thus *min* serves to make the curse all the more powerful by means of separation.

God’s curse upon the serpent is twofold: it goes...slithers...upon its belly or *gachon*, the only other biblical reference being Lev 11.42: “Whatever goes on its belly and whatever goes on all fours or whatever has many feet, all the swarming things that swarm upon the earth you shall not eat, for they are an abomination.” There the category is broadened to include “swarming things that swarm,” the verb being *sharats* which was noted in 1.20 as meaning to creep or crawl: “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures.” During that day of creation such creatures were deemed good and not deserving of a curse. However, one unattractive image conjured up by *sharats* pertains to frogs, especially their invasion of private spaces: “The Nile shall swarm with frogs which shall come up into your house and into your bed chamber and on your bed” [Ex 8.3/7.28]. Because the serpent and other animals like it live close to the ground, they do not eat grass but dust or *haphar* which is readily available. We encountered that word in 2.7 where it had a positive connotation: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground.” While this was going on, the man, more so than the woman who was fashioned from his rib, must have listened breathlessly because he was taken from the same *haphar* or dust. He must have thought to himself, will I be like the serpent and crawl on the ground eating the same *haphar* from which I had been taken? Not a happy prospect. God’s curse to the serpent was re-enforced by the words “all the days of your life.” That is to say, an intimation of mortality for the serpent which soon would apply to the man and woman.

In vs. 15 God continues to address the serpent by saying that he will put “enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed.” The word for “enmity” is *’evah* which has just three other biblical references which can translate readily as hatred. *’Evah* is similar sound to *’ishah* or “woman,” the one who obeyed the serpent which must have registered in her mind quite strongly, more so than the man who was standing nearby listening in horror to all this. Furthermore, the Hebrew “I will bring” (*’eyvah*) is similar to the two words just mentioned which enhance the drama: *’evah*, *’ishah* and *’eyvah*. The enmity God is doling out is between the serpent and woman as well as future generations; nothing is said of the man though that is implied by the word “seed.”

Finally God intimates future trouble between the woman and serpent: “he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” The verb for “bruise” is *shuph* which has just two other occurrences, Job 9.17 and Ps 139.11, and means to attack, fall upon. That would account for the second biblical reference: “Let only darkness cover me (i.e., fall upon) and the light about me be night.” Some of what that Psalm verse says can apply to the Genesis situation insofar as despite the dreadful situation, it can and will be reversed later with Jesus Christ: even if night falls upon (*shuph*) one and the light become dark, it will not matter. As for the woman, the serpent will *shuph* her head which means he must leap up a considerable distance from the ground. As for the serpent, he is more vulnerable though has the attribute of a heel which is not possible physically speaking. So instead of a literal heel sticking out from the sleek, slender body of the serpent (if it had this heel, there would be specific mention in Moses’ image of it on the pole), we may take “heel” in the verbal sense of supplanting, of coming from behind in stealthy fashion. The classic example is the birth of Jacob and Esau who were at odds directly from their birth. “Is he not rightly named Jacob (i.e., supplanter)” [27.36]? Thus we can view the relationship between the woman and serpent as not unlike the troubled one between Jacob and Esau.

## 9 December, Second Sunday of Advent

*O Jerusalem, and put on for ever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. For God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. For your name will forever be called by God, "Peace of righteousness and glory of*

godliness." Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height and look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east, at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went forth from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him. [Baruch 5.1-9]

This passage is taken from the Apocrypha of the Septuagint or the Greek translation of the Bible.

*Stole* is the noun for "robe," a general term for a garment and can apply to armament, of being prepared for battle. Here it applies to "mourning" and "misery" (*penthos* and *kakosis*). The former applies to sadness as well as grief at one who has died whereas the latter is akin the adjective *kakos* ('evil') and means ill-treatment as well as distress.

In contrast to the robe of *penthos* and *kakosis*, the Lord bids Jerusalem to assume not so much a *stole*—and obviously that means covering one's entire body—but the following three pieces of clothing:

1) Divine "splendor" or *euprepeia*, a noun which derives from the verb (*prepo*) meaning to shine forth, to appear, with the preface *eu-* ('good' in the sense of 'well'). Because this *euprepeia* consists of *doxa* ('glory') from the Lord, it does not require a *stole*. Automatically this makes one think of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden who "were both naked and were not ashamed" [Gn 2.25].

2) "Robe" or according to the LXX, a double-garment (*diplois*) of "righteousness" (*dikaiosune*). This robe comes "from" God or is *para* God, that is, from beside him which implies Jerusalem receiving the robe from alongside the Lord.

3) A diadem according to the LXX or *mitra* which can apply to a head-band worn by women as well as a belt or girdle. This *mitra* is to display the "glory (*doxa*)" of the "Everlasting" or *aionios*, this adjective being derived from the noun *aion* which also means a period of existence as well as forever.

*Lamprotes* is the noun for "splendor" and can refer to the virtuous way a person conducts himself, that is, in a shining fashion which imitates the *euprepeia* or "splendor" of vs. 1. The realm of such brightness is "under heaven," that is, upon earth and does not especially belong to the divine realm.

In vs. 4 note the second use of the preposition *para* ('by God') which implies a being beside him from which Jerusalem will derive her name, and that name remains "forever," the preposition *eis* ('into') with the noun *aion*. The name at hand is twofold:

1) "Peace of righteousness" or *eirēne* coupled with *dikaiosune* which forms the "robe of righteousness" of vs. 2.

2) "Glory of godliness" or *doxa* coupled with *theosebeia*, the service (*sebas*: fear, reverence which is akin to the Latin *pius*) prefaced with *theos* (God).

In vs. 5 the Lord says to Jerusalem "arise," that is, arise but only insofar as her natural limit designated as "under heaven" in vs. 3. Thus the "height" on which she is bidden to stand is midway, if you will, between earth and heaven.

"Look toward the east" or *periblepo* which literally means to look (*blepo*) around (*peri-*), to scour the direction of the east or sunrise, the east or from where the first man had been banished from Eden (cf. Gn 3.24). This verb is used with the preposition *pros* signifying direction towards-which. The object of this looking-around is Jerusalem's children gathered not only from the east, the direction she is looking, but from behind her, that is,

from the west. Nothing is said of the other two cardinal directions, north and south, because east is connected with Eden.

The divine “word” or *rhema* does this east-west gathering, this term meaning that which is said or the subject of speech compared with *logos*, more the expression of speech. What this *rhema* says is not given as though its presence is sufficient to gather Jerusalem’s children. However, it is tied into their faculty of recollection (*mneia*) which also translates as mention.

Vs. 6 contrasts two verbs, *exerchomai* and *eisago* (‘went forth’ and ‘will bring back’). The preposition *eis* (‘into’) prefaced to *ago* suggests a fuller return, of being “into” you or Jerusalem.

The horizontal direction of east-west, if you will, is made level in vs. 7 so that Israel may “walk safely,” the verb being *badizo* which suggests walking at a slow pace, one that is *asphales*, literally as safe from falling. Such a slow-paced walk is to be done (*hegeomai*, to lead in the sense of to conduct) in divine glory, that is, back to Jerusalem or again, from both east and west. Such conducting will have both divine “mercy” (*eleeo*, verb being used) and “righteousness” (*dikaiosune* as noted in vs. 2 as consisting of Jerusalem’s robe) and one of two names in vs. 4, “peace of righteousness.” *Para* or “beside” is used with respect to “him” or God, again suggesting that those from the east and west will be right alongside him.

### 16 December, Third (Gaudete) Sunday of Advent

*Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. [Zephaniah 3.14-18]*

Note four similar verbs:

- 1) “Sing aloud” or *ranan* which is a shout for joy.
- 2) “Exult” or *ruah* which pertains to making a loud noise and in another verbal form which is called niphala means to become evil.
- 3) “Rejoice” or *samach* which means to be cheerful.
- 4) “Exult” or *halaz* means to exult.

These four similar verbs of exultant joy which pertain to Zion/Israel are paralleled by referring to the Lord:

- 1) “Gives victory” or *yashah*, a verb which means to save, the verbal root for the proper name “Jesus.” The Lord here is a *gibor* or “warrior,” so *yashah* has a military connotation.
- 2) “Rejoice” or *sus*, a verb which implies gladness and is used with the noun *simchah*, the verbal root of *samach* noted in #3 above.
- 3) “Renew” or *charash* which means to refrain, to cut or engrave.
- 4) “Exult” or *gyl* which means to dance in a circle. The suggestion of dancing fits in well with the “day of festival” which a footnote in the RSV designates as “obscure.” The noun is *rinah* which means singing and the verbal root for *ranan* in the first #1, “sing aloud.”

There are two reasons for this joyous outburst:

- 1) that the Lord has removed judgments against Zion/Israel and defeated her enemies but more

importantly

2) “ins in your midst” or *qerev* which means in the very center. It is within this *qerev* that the second list of four elements take place.

### 23 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

*But you, O Bethlehem Eph'rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.*

Micah 5.1.4

Eph'rathah has five other biblical references: Rt 4.11, 1Chron 2.24, 50, 4.4 and Ps 132.6. The last verse can be expanded by taking into consideration David's words of that psalm, “How he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty one of Jacob, ‘I will not enter my house or get into my bed...until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.’” Such words can be applied to the birth of Jesus or more specifically the “wise men from the east” [Mt 2.1] in their search for him. Surely they must have consulted these words of Micah prior to setting forth on their journey as well as Ps 132. While they must have had some familiarity with Hebrew texts, the ones at hand jumped out at them, so it was now a matter of discerning whether or not to follow their lead. One can only imagine the heated discussion among the three as how to proceed.

The verb “come forth” or *yatsa'* is the root for the noun “origins” or *motsa'* and that origin is “from of old,” *miqedem*, literally as from before. Compare it with “ancient days” or days which are *holam* or literally of time long past meaning antiquity. In order to perceive this identity of a yet unnamed person's *motsa'*, a certain familiarity with scripture is required as with the wise men. They did not attempt to divine the future but read the scripture the lines of what we call now *lectio divina*. This sensitivity is found in someone like John who perceived Jesus Christ as *Logos* or word-as-expression of the Father which begins his Gospel.

In the passage at hand, Mich is speaking of some kind of exile which is clear by “the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel.” This return is bound up with the unidentified woman “in travail” or when the “time” for her to give birth arrives, *heth* being the noun which means a time of opportunity or special occasion not unlike the Greek *kairos*.

A division of peoples had existed up to this point: those belonging to Israel and those who return to the people of that nation...in other words, a partial exile seems to be the case here.

Finally the unidentified person to be born in Bethlehem Eph'rathah will have access to divine “strength” and majesty” or *hoz* and *ge'on*. The former implies splendor and protection whereas the latter, sublimity and glory as well as arrogance which stems from such exultation. As for the people who will “dwell secure,” the verb *yashav* is used which fundamentally means to sit down while the unidentified person's renown will reach the “ends of the earth,” *'ephes* applicable to anything which is extreme. How this greatness (*gadal* is the verb used) is not indicated but lies in the future, something the wise men from the East noted above could foresee.

### 25 December, Christmas

The first reading is from the Vigil Mass.

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62.1-5*

This year we have an interval of only two days between the end of the Advent season and that of Christmas...in effect, more like one day if we take into consideration Christmas Eve.

Note two similar verbs, *chashah* and *shaqat*, “will (not) keep silent” and “will (not) rest.” The former implies being still, at rest, and the latter implies physical rest, of laying down. In the larger context of Isaiah, this isn’t spelled out directly which means that the Lord prefers to reveal himself in a more subtle fashion and by allowing Zion/Israel to be his manifestation. Such *chashah* and *shaqat* are formative later on for being attentive to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, all down in silence, while a commotion is created around him, notably by King Herod. Then we hear nothing for some thirty years of obscurity until Jesus appears on the banks of the Jordan River with John the Baptist.

*Yeshuhathah* is the noun for “salvation,” a variation of the verbal root for the proper name Jesus which is likened to a “burning torch” or *laphad*, a means for providing light while walking about in the darkness.

While the noun *yeshuhathah* is more obvious for intimating the coming of Jesus (*Yeshuah*), Isaiah records that the nations do not see this. Instead, they see divine “vindication” (*tsedaqah*) which more properly is taken as righteousness. The same apply to kings regarding divine “glory” or *kevod*. So this not-seeing of salvation makes it all the more mysterious and requires greater sensitivity to perceive.

Usually a crown and diadem are worn by kings and queens whereas here both remain in the Lord’s hands, as though waiting for a future time to crown Zion/Jerusalem.

Note the pair of contrasts for Zion/Jerusalem: “forsaken” and “desolate” (*hazuvah* and *shemamah*) vs. “my delight” and “married” (*chephtsy-vah* and *behulah*). The first pair suggests abandonment and having been laid waste. The second pair suggests sheer joy through marriage (to the Lord). While the first pertains to the relationship with the Lord (*chaphats* for ‘delights in you’), Israel’s land will be “married” or *bahal*, the root for *behulah*. The notion of “land” is important for Israel and pertains to her identity, for it something she had been absent from for four hundred years in Egypt and returned to as Canaan after the Exodus. Thus *‘erets* is a concept, and to be “married” to the Lord is fulfilment of Israel’s dreams. This marriage of *‘erets* to the Lord is further described as one between a young man and a virgin, in terms of “rejoicing over” or *sus* with the preposition *hal* which is an expression of gladness put in sexual overtones.

## **26 December, St Stephen, Protomartyr**

Please note a brief remark as to the verb *atenizo* which means to gaze intently and consists of the verbal root *teino* (to extend) with the alpha privative rendering it literally as not extended or not stretched out. It occurs twice in Acts with two difference implications. First consider 6.15 with regard to the council of Jews: “And

gazing at him (Stephen), all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.” Secondly, 7.55: “But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” In other words, two different uses of *atenizo*, of showing the intensity of the members of the council and Stephen. Both examples of gazing are not extended, if you will.

### 30 December, Feast of the Holy Family

*For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother; O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you.* Sirach 3.2-6, 12-14

Note the importance of “honor” which occurs three times: by the Lord with regard to the father, the person who honors his father and the one who also honors his father which will carry over into his children. Obviously the second and third belong to the same person. The verb in the first instance is *doxazo* (Sirach is in the Apocrypha, written in Greek), more specifically as to give honor or *doxa*. *Doxa* is an attribute of God and here is transferred to the father, head of the household who acts in God’s stead. The other two instances have the verb *timao* which means to fix the value on someone or on something as well as to venerate. The significance of *doxazo* concerning the Lord is mirrored by “whoever glorifies his father will have long life.” While *timao* is certainly important, it is secondary to *doxazo* here, being derived from it. Interestingly, *doxazo* applies to the mother (‘whoever glorifies his mother’). Such glorifying of the mother results in the person’s prayers being heard, the verb being *eisakouo* or literally to hear into (*eis-*), a thorough paying attention of the prayer offered by God.

As for the mother, the Lord confirmed her right over her sons, *krisis* being the noun for “right” which fundamentally means selection, separation or judgment. The verb at hand is *stereo*, to make firm or strong. Recognition of this by a son or daughter results in one “who lays up treasure” or *apothersaurizo*, a verb which suggests hoarding. The process of such hoarding seems to continue indefinitely, a result of that glorifying (*doxazo*) the mother.

The verb in the last verse (14) which pertains to one’s father is *prosanoikodomeo*, “will be credited” (to you). It consists of the root *demo* (to build) to which is prefaced the noun *oikos* (house). Then to these two are added two prepositions, *pros* and *ana* (to or towards and above). Thus the literal sense is building a house up-towards. Such is the result of *eleemosune*, pity or mercy.

### 1 January, Solemnity of the Virgin Mary or Octave of Christmas

*The Lord said to Moses: “Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them: This is how you shall bless the Israelites. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace! So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them.”* Numbers 6.22-7

The notion of the first day of a new calendar month viewed as an octave puts the common method of telling time in its proper place instead of exalting it as a new beginning. Being an octave means that today is the

eighth day after Christ's birth and has nothing to do with the year 2013 nor any other measurement of conventional time. At first the liturgical way of telling time appears static, of returning to an event over and over again compared with the forward looking movement of passing from one calendar year to another. Not so because the cyclic one of the liturgical cycle is moving upwards, round and round, with the starting point always as Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega. And Christ as Alpha and Omega includes everything in between.

The blessing at hand in Numbers is familiar and one adapted for all sorts occasions. It has a general feel about it, kind of prosaic and close almost borders upon the secular by reason of our acquaintance with it. That's its appeal...no one can find harm in a general sort of blessing.

The blessing itself commences with the Lord speaking with Moses who, in turn, speaks with Aaron and his sons. That means any divine speaking (*davar*) is mediated by Moses and deliberately so. No one, not even Aaron, could bear the one-on-one communication enjoyed by Moses. Despite the close proximity of Aaron to his brother, he is not of the same caliber; unfortunately, his sons are further down the scale. Later in Lev 10.1-2 these sons by the names of Nadab and Abihu "offered unholy fire before the Lord" which "came forth...and devoured them." Thus the mediation of Moses, powerful as it was, could not have a positive effect upon his brother's two sons. However, that lays in the future.

The blessing at hand consists of three elements:

- 1) "Bless" and "keep" or *barak* and *shamar*. The latter implies close protection and is used of ten with regard to reading the divine Torah.
- 2) "Shine" and "be gracious" or *'or* and *chanan*. The former means to give light and the latter, to be inclined to take pity. 'Or is associated with God's face which spills over, if you will, into being *chanan*. Thus there is a transition from the divine face to taking pity, a stream of light.
- 3) "Look upon" and "peace." The former reads literally "may lift his face to you" and the latter as "may place to you peace" (*shalom*).

The verb *sum* ('invoke') means a putting, a laying down. The normal way of representing it is a person looking heavenward for God to look downward, that is, for his *sum* which in the verse at hand pertains to his "name" (*shem*). Thus there is a play on words, *sum-shem*. And the *sum* at hand is to be "upon" or *hal* the Israelites resulting in God blessing them through the mediation of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu.

## 6 January, Epiphany of the Lord

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. Isaiah 60.1-6*

A major feature of this passage concerns references to brightness, all in the following order: shine, light, glory, glory, light, brightness and be radiant. Because this is the dominant theme of the Isaiah passage as well as for today's feast, these six words ('shine' and 'light' being the same) will be outlined as follows:

1) *Or*: both the verb and the noun for “light” which is equivalent to the first light of creation as in Gn 1.3: “Let there be light, and there was light.” Intimately bound with *or* in the verse at hand is the divine command to “arise” or *qum* meaning that Israel had been laying down either prostrate due to defeat or simply fast asleep.

2) *Kevod* or “glory” which fundamentally means that which is heavy or weighty. It too is linked with a verb related to *qum*, *halah* and differs from the former by having a broader connotation such as to increase, to be strong.

3) *Halah* is used a second time after mention of darkness followed by second mention of *kevod*. Note that “it will be seen:” not by Israel upon whom this *kevod* will rest but by those nations around her.

4) *Or*: another mention of “light” to which nations will come.

5) *Nogah* or “brightness” which applies to splendor or anything glorious. “The path of the just is as the shining light” [Prov 4.18]. In the verse at hand, it applies to Israel’s “rising” or *zerech* which applies to light only, the scattering of rays as at sunrise.

6) *Nahar* or “be radiant” which fundamentally means to flow as a river. “And all the nations shall flow to it and many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord’” [Is 2.2]. Such radiant flowing follows upon having seen: in the verse at hand as well as vs. 4. The seeing of vs. 4 results in Jerusalem’s heart to “thrill” and “rejoice” (*pachad* and *rachav*). The former more specifically means to tremble and the latter, to be broad, wide or spacious.

Gold and frankincense are mentioned in the Isaiah passage which automatically makes one think of the three wise men. However, the third gift of myrrh is lacking, symbolic of Christ’s future death. That means one of these men picked up on this missing element and knew from the star that he was destined to bring this spice in order to fulfill the text. Chances are these wise men read the Isaiah passage at hand not only upon having seen the star, but found it essential for sustaining them on their long trek. Although this scripture may have not been native to their land, they must have had access to it by Jews who had lived there and were intrigued by Isaiah’s words about a future savior, not only by the text but by contact with Jews in exile.

### 13 January, Baptism of the Lord

*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”* Isaiah 42.1-4, 6-7

The Lord himself is speaking here about his “servant” (*haved*; fundamentally means a slave) whom he also calls his “chosen” or *bechyr* which is from the verbal root *bachar* which refers to a process of trying, of examining. When the Lord mentions his “soul” or *nephesh*, he means his very self, that word fundamentally meaning breath and animating principle. To this servant the Lord expresses his delight or *ratsah* which is reminiscent of the Father saying of his Son on the mount of Transfiguration, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” [Mt 17.5]. Surely the disciples who were with Jesus must have reflected upon these words from Isaiah.

After the Lord explicitly mentions his *nephesh* or “soul,” he speaks of his Spirit or *ruach* which also means to breath and tends more towards that which is divine compared with *nephesh*. *Ruach* also applies to the scent of smell, can pick up odors at a considerable distance and hence is more sensitive and all-encompassing. You would think the Lord would put this *ruach* within his servant but instead puts in “upon (*hal*) him.” This spirit

weighs nothing, so for the Lord's servant to be aware of it, he must be made sensitive to its presence by the sense of touch, if you will. We don't have anything explicit about how this is effected except by what he does, namely, bringing forth justice.

As for the "coastlands," they apply to maritime peoples neighboring Israel. To speak of them awaiting the divine "law" means the *Torah*, just as important to Israel as the covenant, the two being inseparable. The advantage of having such coastland peoples await the *Torah* means they can use the (Mediterranean) sea as a vehicle for evangelization, of spreading news about the *Torah* through a broad area pointing westward.

After the Lord speaks about this "justice" or *mishpat* (the word applies to judgment), the text has the Lord speak explicitly about his servant's mission which may be outlined in the following seven parts:

- Called in "righteousness" or *tsedeq* which applies to rectitude, a just cause.
- "Taken" by the hand or *chazaq*, a verb of some force indicating seizure.
- "Kept" you or *natsar*, a verb which means to watch, to defend or to protect.
- "Covenant" or *beryth* which in Israel's collective mind hearkens back to the one given by the Lord on

Mount Sinai.

- "Light" or *or* to "nations" or *goyim*, a term used to set apart Israel from all other neighbors, usually in the negative sense.

- Open eyes of the blind.

- Bring prisoners from the dungeon which consists of "darkness" (*choshek*), darkness in the moral and religious sense.

Since this passage from Isaiah applies to the baptism of Jesus, surely he as well as John must have been familiar with it. Though the excerpt had different applications, each man interpreted it differently. So when it came time for Jesus to appear at the Jordan River, both interpretations came together as one. This is not recorded, but it is not impossible that Jesus and John shared their interpretations. After all, the prophet Isaiah was so identified with John that Mark's Gospel, for example, begins with a quote from him as to preparing the way.

As for John, he must have been mindful of this passage later when imprisoned, words which gave him special comfort, having experienced them first hand: "to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." However, John knew he was not sitting in darkness but received knowledge of Jesus' activities and message through what he had heard about him.

## 20 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight is in her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62.1-5*

After the Advent-Christmas season we return to Ordinary Time which this year is short: Ash Wednesday comes upon us 13 February. The current shift from one liturgical season to another always is mysterious, a rite of passage. It gives reason to pause on how the Church employs various seasons parallel to chronological time yet different from it in order to give our experience of time's passage meaning. However, the season at hand is not as sudden nor as stark as when passing from Lent-Easter-Pentecost to Ordinary Time, the day after Pentecost Sunday. Furthermore, the second part of the Ordinary Time cycle extends much longer, through summer and autumn up to Advent. Judging by the first reading from Isaiah, the current shift into Ordinary Time is lessened, if you will, because it is reminiscent of both Christmas and Epiphany which we just left behind (better to say, have just incorporated). Actually, the Christmas season continues to the Feast of the

Presentation on 2 February though it's less noticeable than the time after Easter. Still, we can keep the next few Sundays in the light of Christmas-Epiphany.

The first verse contains two similar verbs, *charash* and *shaqat*, "keep silent" and "rest." The former means literally to cut into as well as to plow and the latter, to be quiet. The idea of astonishment seems to be conveyed and hence we have a silence of such astonishment. The Lord will not do both until he accomplishes two goals: 1) the going forth of Jerusalem's "vindication" or *tsedeq* which more fundamentally pertains to righteousness and 2) her "salvation" or *yeshuhat* (similar to the proper name Jesus) becoming a "burning torch" or *laphyd*, that is a torch characterized by *bahar*, a verbal root meaning to consume with fire. *Laphyd* is a portable means of illumination with a very bright and powerful flame which is reminiscent of the ten maidens of Matthew Twenty-Five. Five of them had sufficient oil for their lamps (in imitation of the just noted *laphyd*) and responded readily to the midnight call of "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Although these maidens are not historical, we could say that if they had been, they would have used this passage from Isaiah as inspiration during their night vigil. The other five may have read the same passage yet were unaffected.

A *laphyd* burning in the night is visible all around and is equivalent to Jerusalem's just noted vindication, hence the reason why it is seen by "nations" or *goyim*, a term usually reserved to distinguish people from non-Israelites. This somewhat derogatory appellation can be contrasted with the use of "land" *'erets* ('your land shall be married') which is linked to the identity of Israel. Apparently Jerusalem's "glory" or *kevod* will be like this flaming *laphyd*, for kings will behold it. Since *kevod* can be associated with the trappings of royalty, they will be in a better position to recognize it...like being attracted to like.

As for the "new name" the Lord will give to Jerusalem, nothing is said about it even though a bit later he uses the names "My Delight" and "Married." Mention of the Lord's "mouth" or *py* can signify the importance of the Lord bestowing the future name, of uttering it, and thereby holding everyone's attention (including Jerusalem) in suspense until it happens.

As for the other two names of the holy city, the first being *Chephtsy-bah* derives from a verbal root *chaphats* meaning to incline in a favorable manner and to do so with a certain intensity. *Chaphats* counters the former name of Jerusalem (and let's say the five maidens without sufficient oil) which is *Shemamah* or Desolation, a name which intimates waste. The second is *Behulah* whose root means to have dominion over...as a lord over his subjects or a husband over his wife. This theme of marriage brings to a close the excerpt from Isaiah and hence the parable of the wedding feast to which the five maidens are summoned while the door was shut on the other five (cf. vs. 10). It is a time of rejoicing or *sus*: bridegroom-to-bride and God-to-you or Jerusalem.

### 27 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

*And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithh, Shema, Anai'h, Uri'ah, Hilki'h, and Ma-aseih on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Misha-el, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-badanah, Zechariah, and Meshullm on his left hand. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jesh'ua, Bani, Sherebi'ah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodi'ah, Ma-aseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the*

people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8.2-4; 5-6; 8-10:2

A rather lengthy first reading comprising the first ten verses of Chapter Eight; other verses are added in order to present the text in full. The passage begins with "one man" or *ysh 'echad* or literally as "man one" which follows the same process of enumeration as in Genesis (Day One, Day Two, etc.). There's something both mysterious and gripping about the noun coming first followed by the modifying adjective...it heightens the sense of the text for the reader, making him feel present at the event. Upon having assembled, the people bade Ezra to bring the Law (*Torah*) of Moses out before them. Surely the people were acquainted with the *Torah* less likely through personal reading than through hearing it as on the Sabbath and other occasions. Now they were assembled as one person or as one nation, symbolic of Israel's identity which grew during their forty years of wandering and came to fruition once they entered Canaan.

Ezra brought the *Torah* "before the assembly" or *qahal*, a term usually reserved for religious worship as is the case at hand. The text is careful to distinguish within this *qahal* people who "could hear with understanding" or *byn* which means to discern and more fundamentally, to separate (the preposition 'between' is derived from it). The day of the public reading of the *Torah* is significant, "on the first day" or in line with what was noted in the last paragraph, "on day one" (*beyon 'echad*). Thus a unity exists between the assembled *qahal* and the day on which the *Torah* is read. Such an extraordinary corporate display took place "from early morning until midday" or literally "from light" (*min-ha'or*) which means that the people had to gather well before dawn in the darkness. Some may have camped out the night before to get a good seat. We could say that in anticipation of the reading already they were as *ysh 'echad* or as "man one." Each person was "attentive" or *hambynym*, a form of *byn* as used with the just noted "understanding."

When Ezra read from first light to noon he was flanked by men on his left and on his right. Nothing is said of their function but presumably were representatives the people chose to be with Ezra for support, a scene somewhat reminiscent of Aaron and Hur who supposed Moses while Joshua was fighting against Amalek (cf. Ex 17.8-13). Apparently the men with Ezra remained silent compared with the thirteen Levites mentioned below. When Ezra wearied of reading—after all, he did this for a good bulk of the day—these men rushed to his support. Opening the book (*sepher*) was especially solemn...perhaps Ezra decided to wait until sunrise itself, symbolic of this act. Although emphasis is on reading the *Torah*, it was important to commence its reading with opening the book...the scroll is more accurate..."in the sight of all the people."

In addition to Ezra reading the *Torah* of Moses, he had thirteen assistants or Levites who "helped the people to understand" (*byn* again) what was being pronounced. While Ezra was on the wooden platform, chances are these thirteen Levites took up specific positions among the *qahal*. Ezra must have paused from time to time for this *byn* to sink in after which he resumed, reading one chapter (as we have it now) at a time. Moses had appointed Levites for liturgical worship associated with the tabernacle while Israel was in the desert, and here was a perfect manifestation of their office. Surely they and the people had in mind this forty year period of wandering during the reading of the *Torah*. Note that the people did not move about but "remained in their places," possibly grouped together tribe by tribe. The *byn* or understanding of the *Torah* read by Ezra is so important that it is mentioned yet again: "and they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood (*byn*) the reading." Here the thirteen Levites are engaged in the reading, perhaps repeating what Ezra had just uttered but more slowly for clarification. *Parash* is the verb for "clearly" which means to separate, to distinguish. In other words, they interpreted the *Torah* whereas Ezra went straight through the text. As for this "sense," the noun is *sekel*, a more intense form of *byn* which fundamentally means to look as to behold. More precisely, this *sekel* is placed, if you will, the verb being *sum*...placed in the understanding or in the *byn* of the *qahal*.

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. Note that the official designation of Nehemiah here is according to these verses, broken up to some degree. However, the excerpt here is complete, starting with vs. 1 and running through vs. 10.

Finally, Nehemiah said “this day is holy to the Lord your God:” this day of reading which began at sunrise and lasted until around midday. That means everyone had the afternoon until sunset to rest in “the joy of the Lord” who is their strength. After such an intense experience commencing at dawn and continuing to the heat of the day, the people needed not just to feast as they were commanded but to continue discussing with the Levites the divine *Torah*. As for the day after, heads of “fathers’ houses” gathered with the Levites and Ezra “to study the words of the law.” *Sakal* is the verb used which is the root of *sekel*, that “sense” noted in the last paragraph. What they came up with was that the Israelites should dwell in booths (cf. vs. 14) in accord with what Moses prescribed in Lev 23.33-6. A brilliant idea, really, rooted in tradition and capitalizing on the reading of the *Torah* just accomplished. The people could utilize the time for continued reflection and discussion of the experience they had of Ezra reading from the *Torah*. From that point on any insights were written down and treasured for handing over to future generations meaning that scribes were employed to record them. Obviously this was an expansion on the original feast of booths prescribed in Leviticus but a very meaningful one after what they had just undergone with Ezra and the Levites.

### 3 February, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." But you, gird up your loins; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you." Jeremiah 1.4-5, 17-19*

At this juncture less than two weeks away from the beginning of Lent you can't help but be aware of this year's short period of time of Ordinary Time which began on 2 January. Part of it, as with every liturgical season, is that as of the feast of the Presentation (2 February) approximately half of Ordinary Time after 25 December consists of the Christmas season...not so much in the “official” manner as with the post-Easter Sundays but more shadow-like with a tinge of Christmas lingering in the air. Another way of looking at this time is that we're on the threshold of the church's longest liturgical season: In other words, Ash Wednesday runs through Easter, and Easter runs through Pentecost, and Pentecost runs through several Sundays afterwards (Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi and Sacred Heart, the third being on a Friday). After that we have the resumption of Ordinary Time on 9 June. Since we're dealing with a period of time from mid February through almost mid June, some care and preparation is helpful in order to get an overall grasp of what this means. Such appreciation is important in its own right because it contains the essence of the Church's teaching not only about Jesus Christ but the Holy Spirit whom both he and the Father send. No matter how many times we've been through these cycles, never do they cease to amaze.

The Hebrew lacks “came” and has instead the verb “to be”...“the word of the Lord was to me.” Two verbs relative to speaking are contained here, *davar* and *'amar* (‘word’ and ‘saying’). The former is not unlike the Greek *logos*, difficult to translate adequately, and connotes discourse, a thing accomplished and business whereas the latter is the common word for speaking. I.e., the discourse of the Lord, if you will, comes to Jeremiah and is present to him in a manner left not elaborated upon but comprehended best as through the practice of *lectio divina*.

Jeremiah was ignorant of this foreknowledge shown by God's *davar* and had to be made aware of it, hence the Lord had to manifest it to him in the form of being known before birth. The verb for “knew” is *yadah* which means intimate knowledge and can be used for sexual intercourse as in Gen 4.1: “Now Adam knew Eve his wife. Such *yadah* is a reality even before the Lord had “formed” Jeremiah, *yatsar* often being applicable to the fashioning of a vessel by a potter. *Yatsar* implies close consideration to details in order that the object being

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The word “season” has a nice ring about it compared with the more prosaic “time.” “Season” is more comprehensive and connotes something of the sense of taste as when we taste seasoning in food.

created comes out just right. In addition to this fashioning the Lord had “consecrated” Jeremiah, *qadash* meaning fundamentally to set apart; it is the verbal root for the adjective “holy.” Finally, the Lord determined Jeremiah to be a “prophet” or *navy*. The verses which follow this divine commission (not in the text at hand) contain Jeremiah’s strong opposition, claiming “I am only a youth” [vs. 6]. Between this incident and vss. 17-19 the *davar* of the Lord “was” to Jeremiah a second and third time, all three incidents to confirm his future role as prophet.

“Say to them everything that I command you.” Instead of the common verb *amar* noted above, Jeremiah is to *davar*...to *davar* in imitation of the way the Lord’s *davar* “was” to him. Here *davar* is equivalent to a command coming from the Lord (‘that I command you’), the verb being *tsawah* which connotes an appointing and constituting; in other words, a bringing into being the *davar* for the people and leaders that of which they had been ignorant. So between the first utterance and now Jeremiah had undergone what we could call a training in the way by this *davar* or discourse/business is to be communicated to people. It is not to be an easy task, hence phrases as “fortified city,” “iron pillar” and “bronze walls,” all very formidable. Such fortification is to prevent Jeremiah from being dismayed or *chatat* which means to be broken by fear or confounded.

Finally after the Lord says that the leadership of the people will be arrayed against Jeremiah, he says “I am with you.” This being-with Jeremiah is the same being-with as intimated when the divine *davar* came to him three times, not as a coming but as a permanent presence. *Davar* has another manifestation, if you will, to “deliver” or *natsal* which means to snatch away suddenly. And so fortified, Jeremiah begins his prophetic mission. When Chapter Two begins with “The *davar* of the Lord came to me, saying (*amar*) as it had done in vs. 4, Jeremiah knows how this will be operational for him as a prophet.

## 10 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah 6.1-8*

Now we are on the very threshold of leaving Ordinary Time and about to enter a wholly different mode of liturgical time, that of Lent which leads to Easter-Pentecost. Furthermore, as of 2 February (Presentation) we have left behind the Christmas-Epiphany season with less than two weeks or Ordinary Time proper. While that may be sound a bit too technical, it’s helpful to keep in mind this movement the Church is presenting us within liturgical time, for it enables a better understanding of the various details belonging to each season. Besides, it adds greater excitement to the passage of time.

Vs. 1: High (*ram*) and lifted up (*nasa*). Compare the former with 2.14, symbolic of pride. The same applies to the latter in 2.13.

-Train (*shul*): the only reference in Isaiah. This term pertains to a loose garment which flows. “It is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up. [Jer 13.22]

Vs. 2: Seraphim (*seraph*, singular): next reference is vs. 6. It can have a negative meaning as in 14.29, “and its fruit will be a flying serpent.”

-Wings (*kanaph*, singular): next reference is 8.8.

-Covered (*kasah*): next reference is 11.9. The alternate meaning of this verb is to flee, to take refuge. “In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge.” [Ps 57.1]

-Flew (*huph*): next reference is vs. 6. For an alternate use, cf. Gen 1.20: “And the people were faint.” [1 Sam

14.28].

Vs. 3: Holy (*qodesh*): three times and first used in 4.3.

-Glory (*kavod*): first noted in 4.5 and connotes a sense of heaviness.

Vs. 4: Foundations (*'amah*, singular): the only use of this term with this meaning. This term also refers to a unit of measurement, the cubit.

-Thresholds (*saph*, singular): only use of this term in Isaiah. "And the priests who guarded the threshold put in it all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord." [2 Kg 12.9]

-Shook (*nawah*): the next reference is 7.2. "Hisses and shakes his fist." [Zep 2.15]

Vs. 5: I am lost (*damah*): cf. 1.9, "to become like." "I will lay waste the daughter of Zion." [Jer 6.2]

-Unclean (*tame*): next reference is 38.5 and connotes profanation. "Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness." [Lev 15.31]

-Dwell (*yashav*): this word is used in vs. 1, "the Lord sitting."

Vs. 6: Burning coal (*ritsphah*): for another use of this term, cf. 2 Chron 7.3: "they bowed down with their faces to the earth on the pavement."

-Tongs (*melqach*, singular): "and the tongs of gold." [1 Kg 7.49]

-Altar (*mizbach*): the next reference is 17.8 and the first use of this term in the Bible is Gen 8.20, "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord."

Vs. 7: Touched (*nagah*): cf. vs. 9, "joined." In the verse at hand this verb is used with reference to Isaiah's mouth and lips.

-Guilt (*hawon*): cf. vs. 5 as "iniquity."

-Forgiven (*kaphar*): with respect to sin, and the other reference is 22.14. This verb means to cover and is the verbal root for "young lion" in 5.29.

Vs. 8: "Who will go for us?" The plural use of this verb is parallel to Gen 1.26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Use of first person plural is suggestive both of deliberation and of spontaneous action.

### 13 February, Ash Wednesday

*"Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil. Who knows whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, a cereal offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not thy heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. Joel 2.12-18*

The words "even now" which begin this excerpt are based upon the previous verse, "For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?" The words "very terrible" or *nora' me'od* read something like excessively fearful (the verbal root is *yare'* (to fear) and applies to *yom* ('day') which is more inclusive than a twenty-four hour period, an occasion when something special occurs; i.e., it is not like the New Testament *kairos*. Since the passage at hand concerns the beginning of the forty day period of Lent which, in turn, is followed by Easter and then by Pentecost, the *yom* at hand may be said to contain this entire stretch of time.

The verb *shuv* ('return') occurs three times:

1) "To me" or *haday* where *had* is used instead of the more common *'el* thereby implying something like "even until." Next follows "with all your heart" or literally "in (*b-*) all your heart (*lev*)." After this *shuv* or first return, one's *lev* is to be rent (*qarah* suggests being cut into pieces). This first *shuv* involves fasting weeping and mourning and rendering one's heart. It has to do with the person's side of the bargain, as it were, followed by the Lord's in the second *shuv*.

2) "To the Lord" where the preposition *'el* is used compared with *had* in the first instance. This second *shuv* contains the Lord's side of the bargain: gracious (*chanun*), merciful (*rachum*), slow (*'erek*) to anger, abounding in steadfast love (*chesed*) and repents of (*nacham*) evil. *Chanun* suggests an inclining with regard to showing pity; *rachum* suggests cherishing and soothing; *'erek* suggests something long and drawn out; *chesed* is akin to the equally untranslatable *agape* in the New Testament; *nacham* is suggestive of lamentation as well as taking comfort.

3) "Turn" is bound up with "repent" or *nacham* as noted in #2.

After this threefold *shuv* or return we have a summons to a more specifically communal purpose where the noun *hatsarah* is used for "congregation" instead of the more familiar *qahal*. It seems to apply more to the observance of festivals compared with the latter which deals with the congregation (of Israel). The purpose for this gathering is twofold and seems to involve the way nations perceive Israel and hence Israel's relationship with the Lord (That's why it is said a bit later, 'Where is their God?'):

1) "Spare thy people" where the verb used is *chus* which implies having compassion.

2) "Make...not a reproach" where the noun is *cherphah* meaning scorn and derision.

"Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people." The two verbs here are *qana'* and *chamal*). The first clearly involves envy and the latter, a desire to spare and be gentle. The first has the preposition *l-*(to) prefaced to *'erets* or "land" which implies the whole of Israel set apart from the nations. The second has the preposition *hal* which is more a setting upon of divine *chamal* with regard to the "people" (*ham*). In sum, both *'erets* and *ham* are one and the same.

Although the excerpt stops with vs. 18, the jealousy and pity just noted takes the form of the Lord sending grain, wine and oil as well as banishing the "northerner" who is encroaching upon Israel. As a footnote to the RSV says, reference is not so much to a nation but to locusts. That would explain mention of the three food-related items.

## 17 February, First Sunday of Lent

*Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. 'And you shall make response before the Lord your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God.*

Deuteronomy 26.4-10

This passage takes place in the context of the opening words of Chapter Twenty-Six which is important for a fuller understanding: "When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it." That is to say, we have here a kind of rehearsal or preparation for what is to come with regard to the first fruits of the harvest. Mention of this wandering at the beginning of Lent can be taken as an invitation to go on a pilgrimage or a forty day journey lasting until the Triduum which begins on Holy Thursday and lasts through Holy Saturday.

The emphasis upon wandering here in Deuteronomy is less than flattering but a realistic approach to the situation at hand, that is, it refers to the wanderings of Jacob in Genesis 28 through 35. His wandering took place within the general confines of the land (Canaan) promised to his father Abraham which to date could be called a relative failure. Then fast-forward to Jacob's son Joseph which set in motion a series of events where Israel dwelt in Egypt for some four hundred years followed by their miraculous departure, the Exodus. This brings us to the passage at hand, of Israel in the desert before returning to the land in which Jacob had wandered about. Memory of this as well as Abraham's divine summons to possess Canaan must have been maintained for over four hundred years in Egypt as well as for the shorter forty years in the Sinai desert. Although the text speaks of an offering of the land (*'erets* implies its very essence), there's a certain anxiety and potential for further wandering, of not settling down, in the words "A wandering Aramean was my father" ...and so I, Israel, might be. As for the verb, it is *'avad* which also means to perish, not very encouraging and intimating possible annihilation by the native inhabitants.

While *'erets* suggests a sacred identity between the people and the physical place in which they dwell as noted several times within the Deuteronomy passage, vs. 10 speaks of *'adamah* ('first of the fruit of the ground'). *'Adamah* pertains to that which is tilled or the soil from which the produce or offering of the first fruits springs. Also it is reminiscent of mankind's origin, the proper name *'Adam* or the first man, whom God had fashioned from the earth.

Vs. 10 makes a parallel between the two verbs "set down" and "worship," *nuach* and *shachah*. The former means a bringing to rest, of settling down and the latter, to bow down or to prostrate oneself. *Nuach* refers to the setting down of the offering from the *'adamah* or ground implying that at last Israel will be at rest in the land of Canaan and be free from all wandering. Then the people will be free to worship the Lord. Given the context of the First Sunday of Lent, after Lent and the Triduum the church will be able engage in this *nuach-shachah* or being at rest and worship during the Easter-Pentecost season which follows.

#### 24 February, Second Sunday of Lent

*And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." Genesis 15:5-18*

Vs. 5: outside (*chuts*): as opposed to being inside which in this instance probably refers to a tent. In other words, the divine word/vision was uttered within Abram's tent. "And the Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud; and the pillar of cloud stood by the door of the tent" [Dt 31:15].

Count (*saphar*): the fundamental meaning of this verb is "to write. "My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe (noun)" [Ps 45:1]. It is almost as though Abram were bidden to write down on a tablet the multitude of stars. The same applies to the number of his descendants or *zereh*; cf. 9:9 where the alternate

meaning of this word is noted as “seed.”

Vs. 6: believed (*aman*): the first use of this word in the sense of “faith.” Abram’s act of faith took place outside the tent, not inside, and during the night because only then were the stars visible for Abram to count.

Reckoned (*chashav*): alternately as “to be accounted,” “to invent,” “to think.” “Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy” [Job 13.24]? The object of the verb is righteousness or *tsedaqah*. For a New Testament development on this theme, cf. Chapter Four of Romans. The Greek translation (cf. Rom 4.32) has the words *logizomai* (*chashav*) which implies taking into account and deliberation and *dikaosune* (*tsedaqah*). Vs. 24 develops the notion of *logizomai* in light of faith in Jesus Christ “who was raised for our justification (*dikaosune*).” Compare the righteousness of Abram with Noah: “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation” [7.1].

Vs. 7: This verse hearkens back to 11.31 when Terah, Abram’s father, took him and Lot from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Canaan in order to settle in Haran. No mention is made there of the Lord’s involvement in the migration. Perhaps vs. 7 is a revelation to Abram that the Lord had been active in this process and that Abram was unaware of it.

Possess (*yarash*): Note the two uses of the same word in the following: “You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey” [Lev 20.24]. This verb is the root for “heir.” In this verse the first word for land is *adamah*; the second has *erets*. The Lord first gives Abram the land who must then possess it. The next verse (8) has Abram asking for a sign to know (*yadah*) about this possession. Here he posits a question which may be compared with a lack of questioning when asked to leave his native home in 12.1.

Vs. 9: The form of knowledge, as it were, which God gives to Abram is in terms of five animals for a sacrifice: heifer, she-goat, ram, turtledove and a young pigeon.

Vs. 10: Abram brought these five offerings to (*l*) the Lord. No specific place is given but keep in mind when God began speaking with Abram in a vision (vs. 1) and outside (the tent?, vs. 5). As commented with respect to the latter, Abram is bidden to count the stars which means this divine communication was at night and when (presumably) Abram brings the five sacrifices. However, cf. vs. 12 which says “As the sun was going down...”

“Cut (*batar*) them in two (*batok*):” this verb applies to sacrifices and can also mean a section or part of a land as in Sg 2.17: “Be like a gazelle or a young stag upon rugged mountains.” Note that the RSV has a footnote here, “the meaning of the Hebrew word is unknown.”

“And laid each half over against the other:” the Hebrew text literally reads, “and gave man his cutting against his neighbor.”

Abram does not divide or *batar* the birds (turtledove and young pigeon) in two, only the heifer, she-goat and ram.

Vs. 11: birds of prey (*hayt*): as in Is 46.11, “Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country.” The verbal root refers to any violent onrush as in 1 Sam 25.14: “And he railed at them.”

Vs. 12: The sun was going down or *bo*; this verb is often employed in the context of sunset as in Jdg 19.14: “The sun went down on them near Gibeah.” *Bo* commonly means “to enter,” “to come,” “to bring.”

Deep sleep (*tardemah*): as used in 2.21, “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.” Cf. remarks there regarding the verbal root *radam* (to sleep or to snore heavily). Both verses use the verb *naphal* (to fall). In both cases the LXX has for *tardemah* the Greek word *ekstasis* which can translate as “ecstasy.” As noted with respect to vs. 10, the divine command to prepare the sacrifice can be taken as occurring at night whereas vs. 12 implies daylight, i.e., “the sun was going down.”

*Naphal* is used a second time in vs. 12 with respect to two states concerning Abram, the first being *tardemah*:

1) dread (*'eymah*): as in Hab 1.7, "Dread and terrible are they; their justice and dignity proceed from themselves." The same word can apply to idols: "For it is a land of images, and they are mad over idols."

2) "great darkness (*chashakah*): usually in the negative sense as in Is 8.22: "And they will look to the earth but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish." In the verse at hand, this term can apply to God's presence as in Dt 5.23: "And when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness."

Vs. 13: Words from the Lord about Israel's forthcoming descent into Egypt and eventual liberation or Exodus. The words "Know of a surety" have in the Hebrew text a double use of the verb *yadah*, i.e., "know know" or take it to heart.

The object of this "double" knowledge is the fate of Abram's descendants (*zereh*: cf. vs. 5, "so shall your descendants...seed...be") as sojourners or *ger*. This is the first occurrence of *ger* in the Bible which may be viewed in light of man's banishment from the Garden of Eden. For a reference in fulfillment of the verse at hand, cf. Ex 2.22: "She bore a son and he called his name (*Ger*)*shom*; for he said, 'I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.'"

Slaves (*havaf*): in the Hebrew text the verb is used.

Oppressed (*hanah*): a verb which also connotes affliction as in Zech 10.2: "Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for want of a shepherd." This prophecy seems to overlook the story of Joseph who brought Israel into Egypt.

Vs. 14: Both this and the preceding verses are to be seen in light of Ex 12.40-1: "The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." Most likely Abram had in mind the words "on that very day."

Bring judgment (*dyn*): connotes a sense of ruling, of condemning: "For by these he judges peoples; he gives food in abundance" [Job 36.31].

Nation (*goy*): a term normally used to distinguish Israel from other peoples but cf. 12.2: "I will make of you a great nation." The alien nature of *goy* is further emphasized by the verb *havaf*, to serve.

"Great possessions (*rekush*):" cf. 13.6, "for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together." "To seek from him (God) a straight way for ourselves, our children and all our goods" [Ezra 8.21]. The verse at hand refers to Ex 12.36: "And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians."

Vs. 15: "Go to your fathers:" the first use of this common expression found, for example, throughout the Book of Kings: "And Rehoboam slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David" [1 Kg 14.31]. The ancestry of Abram was limited compared with later generations; certainly he must have had in mind Noah and before him the generations preceding the flood and hence Adam. Abram's departure is in peace or shalom, the first use of this term in the Bible.

Old age (*seyvah*): the first use of this term in the Bible. "A hoary head is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life" [Prov 16 31].

Vs. 16: iniquity (*hawon*): that is, belonging to the Amorites; cf. 9.25 to which this verse hearkens back, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." The iniquity at hand most likely alludes to sexual perversion. This word can also apply to guilt contracted by sinning: "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me" [Ex 20.5].

Such iniquity requires four generations to achieve completeness or *shalam*, the verbal root for shalom noted in vs. 15.

Vs. 17: the second reference to sunset, the first being vs. 12 ("as the sun was going down") or when Abram was overcome with that deep sleep. That is to say, the words addressed to him by God occurred in this special condition reminiscent of when God caused the same deep sleep to fall upon Adam in order to create Eve.

Dark (*halatah*): the only other three references are Ezk 12.6, 7, 12 which refer to Ezekiel going into

(symbolic) exile: "I went forth in the dark, carrying my outfit upon my shoulder in their sight" [vs. 6]. This term implies not just darkness but one which is thick and impenetrable.

"Smoking fire pot (*tanur*):" more specifically, "oven," "furnace." "You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear" [Ps 21.9].

"Flaming torch (*lapyd*):" "His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches" [Dan 10.6].

Both the fire pot and torch passed between the sacrificial pieces or *gezer*: from a verbal root meaning "to cut," "to divide" and which alternately means "to decree." "To him who divided the Red Sea in sunder, for his steadfast love endures forever" [Ps 136.13].

The images presented in the last two verses may be taken to prophesy Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. "And the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them" in preparation for the Exodus, Ex 14.19. This concluding verse to Chapter Fifteen is made all the more pertinent by vs. 19's references to two rivers, that of Egypt and the Euphrates. The ten peoples mentioned in vss. 19-20 live in between these two rivers. Cf. 1 Kg 4.21 as reference to King Solomon's domain: "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt." The promise to inherit this region is given in Dt 11.24: "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your territory shall be from the wilderness and Lebanon, and from the River, the river Euphrates to the western sea."

### 3 March, Third Sunday of Lent

*Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15*

Obviously, this passage is very important insofar as divine revelation, and Lent is perhaps the best time to have it included. The following observations are made with respect to it, lifted from *Expansions on Exodus*. Though generally I don't like doing this both here and in a few other places, this practice is quite limited.

"God said to Moses, 'I am who am'" [vs. 14] which transliterates as *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. These words are amazing at how open the Lord is, not at all afraid to reveal himself in a matter-of-fact manner. The first and second words mean "existed" or "was," the first person singular imperfect form, and can be translated in as "I will (shall) be." While interpretation of this has been debated and continues to be so, it might be helpful to focus on the connective or relative pronoun "who," *'asher*, which bridges the gap between the two "existings." By its very nature, a relative pronoun connects two distinct elements. At the same time it represents a transition, essential to go from Point A to Point B, while not attracting attention to itself...almost shy, if such a way of putting it is appropriate. With this in mind, the quicker the relative pronoun makes the transition, the better, and less attention is drawn to it. However, the first half (in this case *'ehyeh*) could never make the

switch to the other side, as it were, without intervention from the relative pronoun *'asher*. Interestingly, the verbal root means to be straight, to prosper, be happy. It is the opening word of the Psalter: "Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked" where the adjective for "happy" is *'esher*. With this in mind, blessedness can be described as something you can't quite get your hands upon (you'd ruin it otherwise) because it's too slippery, goes by you too quickly. The reason? Your attention prefers to focus less upon the middle in favor of Point A and Point B. But once you've put attention on the middle...the *'asher*...you have the best of both A and B. Such is the composition of God's name, a wise decision on his part and shorted to the familiar *YHWH*, four letters suggestive of breathing and therefore of life itself. As for the Lord communicating this to Moses, you can't help but see how excited he is, almost unable to contain himself to show off this name. For Moses' part, he deserves special credit for having taken all this in stride. The Lord abbreviates *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* with the words "Say to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" That is to say, "*'ehyeh* has sent me"...*'ehyeh* without the connective pronoun *'asher*. That leaves the divine essence out of the picture which might appear defective. However, at this stage of first revelation the Israelites weren't in a position to grasp theological subtleties.

Vs. 15 has the Lord refining his (abbreviated) name of *'ehyeh* in more familiar terms immediately after *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, that is, he being the God of Israel's fathers specified as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Note that the Lord identifies himself with each patriarch individually, not collectively, a way of drilling in the fact that indeed he means business. Hopefully this would arouse first their curiosity and then their allegiance to Moses. Looking back upon encounters all three patriarchs had with the Lord shows that no such name as the one revealed to Moses had been given. Now it is time to take it one crucial step further and see if Moses could have the Israelites put two and two together, the divine name and the Lord of their forefathers' memory. The *'ehyeh* part can wait until Mount Horeb. The next part of the divine commission to Moses is "this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Note the distinction: the Lord's name is forever or for all eternity with this eternity mirrored in human history, "generations" (the Hebrew text reads literally 'to generation generation'). That means starting with Moses and the Israelites currently in Egypt the Lord's name will be imparted. Once imbued with it, they will pass it on to the next generation or those who will be born in the Sinai wilderness. In a sense, the second generation is more difficult to train because they are one step removed from the initial impulse. That's why forty years in the desert is necessary for appreciation of the divine *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. Once that second generation has had time to reflect upon it, they were in a stronger position, even more than the first generation, to impart it to the third and so forth or those who would reside in the land of Canaan.

### 10 March, Fourth Sunday of Lent

*And the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. While the people of Israel were encamped in Gilgal they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho. And on the morrow after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased on the morrow, when they ate of the produce of the land; and the people of Israel had manna no more, but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year. Joshua 5.9-12*

First of all, the proper name Joshua in Hebrew (*Yehushuah*) is one of several spellings of "Jesus."

The event at hand occurs after the "circumcising of all the nation" [vs. 8], that is, of Israel. The circumcision is a rolling away (*galal*) of the reproach of Egypt, its contamination that has remained with Israel during its forty year wandering in the Sinai desert. Rolling is suggestive of an easy gesture, one on flat ground, yet the Israelites couldn't do it on their own. They required divine intervention through the medium of a communal act (circumcision). Another example of *galal* as rolling is Prov 16.3 ('commit'): "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." Such rolling/committing essentially is easy yet requires a certain disposition of trust. As the Joshua text states, Gilgal...place of rolling, if you will...is the name where Israel's collective circumcision took place. Despite the pain suffered, those who had been circumcised felt a great

relief. At last they were prepared to what may face them.

The situation at hand is followed by the capture of Jericho after the Israelites have marched around it for seven days. If they had attempted to assail Jericho on their own, they stood a real chance of being wiped out or if not, would have been hindered severely in their efforts to take over the land of Canaan. As for “reproach,” the word is *cherpah* which means scorn and contempt. Though associated with Egypt, the word itself isn’t found in the Book of Exodus nor in Deuteronomy, accounts of Israel’s wandering. “God has taken away my reproach” [Gen 30.23]. Despite the many signs and wonder during their forty year trek given by the Lord, still this *cherpah* weighed heavily upon the people and had to be removed. Surely it must have been a great collective relief.

Note that the circumcision and hence removal of the *cherpah* takes place on the plains of Jericho, in full view of that city. The inhabitants of the city must have wondered what was going on, these invaders celebrating right out there on the open plain completely undefended. If they had attacked right now, they would avoid a catastrophic defeat. By their very act of keeping the Passover and eating the land’s produce the Israelites were manifesting a certain confidence and way of intimidating those behind Jericho’s walls. The contrast between the two groups couldn’t be stronger. In a real sense, the walls already had fallen down. All the Israelites had to do was to walk around the city for the prescribed seven days. Thus everything associated with Jericho is wrapped in symbolism for Israel, something they could enshrine in their collective memory during their soon to be enacted conquest of Canaan (or better, already it had begun).

Note that the manna ceased when Israel ate of the land’s produce. Until then they had been provided with this though nothing is said about the cessation of quails which supplemented the manna (cf. Ex 16.13). The Joshua passage distinguishes between “produce” and “fruit” (of the land), *havor* and *tevu’ah*. The former more specifically pertains to corn and the latter to anything from the earth, including from a vineyard. So when the citizens of Jericho saw this eating from the very land on which their city had been built, they knew they were in for trouble, facing a confident foe.

Back in 2.1 Joshua bade two men to reconnoiter the land, “especially Jericho” which means he had special attention focused upon it. Once within the city, the spies met up with a harlot who gave them shelter and diverted a search party after them. In exchange for this daring gesture, the men promised her...she isn’t named...that she and her household would be spared later on. So we can imagine this woman looking out from her window in the city wall (cf. 2.15). Even from that distance the two men on the plain must have seen that scarlet cord (cf. 2.18) dangling out of the window. Of course, no one in the city had an idea what it was nor cared since she was a harlot...a harlot, yes, but destined to be rescued from the coming sack of Jericho.

### 17 March, Fifth Sunday of Lent

*Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.*  
Isaiah 43. 16-21

“Way” and “path” (*derek* and *nityvah*) refer to the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses’ guidance. The former is the most common term for a road whereas the latter usually refers to a path trodden by feet compared to wagons, chariots or the like. It should be noted that the Exodus account does not mention these terms nor related ones, just the fact that Israel had marched on dry ground, that is, to heighten the fact that the people walked on the seabed. Any more would be deemed superfluous, given the nature of that miracle.

The Lord is using this pivotal experience in Israel's history in a manner which will serve as a reminder not just for the generation he is addressing through Isaiah but for all future ones. That is why he says "remember" or *zakar*. From that verb comes (same spelling) the noun "male," representative of the propagation of these future generations. Thus instead of this traditional remembering...propagating...the people are being prepared for a brand new way to be mindful of the Lord and to project this into the future.

"New thing" is the adjective *chadash* which the Lord is doing (the common verb *hasah*) now, not in the future. Such is to be Israel's focus of attention instead of the remembering they had been accustomed to for so long. *Tsamach* is the verb for "springs forth," a verb applicable to growth of a plant or the like. In the same sentence the Lord ask "Do you not perceive it?" That is, do you not have knowledge of it now, not from recollection of the past? *Yadah* is the verb at hand which applies to intimate, even sexual, knowledge. As for this *chadash*, it is not specified. Rather, emphasis is upon the readiness to know...*yadah*...what the Lord is doing within the present and to stay focused there. In many ways this is a new challenge because by now Israel had relied upon past records of divine intercession, repeating them in liturgical form or in other prayers. Such is the *chadash* which will resist the human tendency to harden an event in the past and therefore to control it in the future.

"I will make a way" has the verb *sum* which more properly means to put or to place compared with the fashioning action of *hasah* noted in the last paragraph. In other words, after the "making" of a new thing, the Lord "puts" a "way" in the wilderness, the second use of *derek*, the other term *nityvah* or 'path' not being included. While Israel had left behind their forty year wandering in the Sinai Desert long ago, still the Lord makes reference to such an inhospitable place. That means Israel's current situation is not unlike that period, a time of wandering that could repeat itself in later generations due to various calamities. At the same time, such wandering was one of intimacy with the Lord, difficult to capture in a settled form of life.

*Yatsar* is the verb for "fashioned" and connotes artistic work. To show the intimate connection between the Lord who does this *yatsar* and Israel the text reads literally, "whom I formed to me," the preposition *l* (to) being prefaced to "me." Such artistic fashioning has a specific goal, declaring the Lord's praise. *Saphar* is the verb at hand which more specifically means to inscribe as upon a stone tablet or a scroll. Thus Israel will have a permanent point of reference for future generations. This *saphar* imitates, if you will, the writing down of the Torah by Moses though the verb is not used in reference to him but *katav* which more specifically means to put down in writing. Now when Israel is to declare...*saphar*...God's praise, it is to do so with the immediacy of a "new thing."

## 24 March, Palm Sunday

*The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. Isaiah 50.4-7*

*Lamad* is the verb "taught" and involves much more than learning something, even if it pertains to divine matters. It means to accustom oneself to the subject matter at hand and hence implies gradual-ness and an extended period of absorption. For example, *lamad* pertains to those who study the Torah, a task you don't do once and for all, let alone in a rush, and the Syriac term for "disciples" derives from this word. In other words, the followers of Jesus are those who make *lamad* central to their lives, an image which evokes rabbinical instruction. To see this in action, consider Ps 119 which contains numerous references to this verb with respect to the Torah or Law.

In the passage at hand *lamad* is put at the service of sustaining people, *hut* being the verb and the only use in the Bible. Such sustaining is done by means of a “word” or *davar* which is used commonly for when the Lord utters or communicates something to people. Thus *davar* is a direct offshoot of *lamad*; it is rooted there and sustains it into the future.

The importance of *lamad* is brought out further by a daily awakening by the Lord to “hear as those who are taught.” That means the prerequisite for being someone characterized by *lamad*...a disciple...is the ability to listen on a daily basis. The nature and content of this listening is not spelled out here though the next verse intimates that it is something against one’s will: “I was not rebellious” (etc.). So the Lord’s intent is to make a disciple through hearing. This is transpiring while people are striking the servant of God and piling all sorts of abuse upon him, the reason for which is not given directly. It seems that just a receptivity to being *lamad* or being taught brings this about automatically. Such is a response to some persons who aren’t receptive to *lamad*, tinged with a certain jealousy.

*Hazar* is the verb for “helps” which counters two forms of opposition: 1) *kalam*, “have (not) been confounded” which implies being insulted as well as receiving physical abuse. 2) *Bosh*, “(not) be put to shame” which implies being confused. In sum, *kalam* and *bosh* are the exact opposite of *lamad* and refusal to recognize the divine *davar*.

### 31 March, Easter Sunday

*And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10.34 & 37-43*

Opening one’s mouth conveys a certain drama...expectation...to the situation than if the text read “And Peter spoke.” It’s akin to something like “Thus says the Lord” and therefore serves to grab one’s attention. Peter steps in and changes the situation by reminding his listeners of something very important as it pertains to God and Jesus Christ. You could say that a brief second of time, almost immeasurable, exists between Peter opening his mouth and beginning to speak, a time when everyone’s attention is directed to him.

Peter has perceived, that is, *katalambano* or has received (*lambano*) an insight in accord with (*kata-*) a divine revelation, namely, that God “shows no partiality,” *prosopolemptes*, literally as (not an) acceptor of faces or persons, *prosopon* referring to both and originally meaning a mask through which an actor speaks. That translates into having no favorites, quite a statement from someone who was raised to consider the Jews as chosen by God compared with Paul whose mission was to preach to the Gentiles. Peter proceeds to tell his listeners briefly about Jesus’ activity which may have been news to them, this being very early in the church’s mission. Note the close connection between the baptism of John and the anointing of Jesus with power (*dunamis*), a term suggestive of capacity and authority. Peter then moves on to use the first person plural: “we are witnesses to all that he did,” most likely referring to his fellow apostles and those more immediate to them. He makes special mention that Jesus did eat and drink with his apostles after his resurrection so that his audience would not consider him a ghost or some kind of spirit. This misunderstanding has to be dispelled right away.

Throughout the four Gospels observations are interjected as to the apostles not understanding what Jesus was

saying or doing. All that would be clear after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Peter must have had this in mind when say that the prophets testified to Jesus' mission of forgiveness of sins. And so he was saying this with some personal embarrassment which he didn't want to let on to his audience. As for these prophetic witnesses, the chief four are listed in a footnote to vs. 43 in the Greek critical text as follows although the Gospels contain more:

“And no inhabitant will say, ‘I am sick;’ the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.” [Is 33.24]

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” [Is 53.5-6]

“And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother saying ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” [Jer 31.34]

“Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to sea both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.” [Dan 9.24]

Of all the four citations, Is 53.5-6 stands out and possibly was grasped by the apostles due to its obviousness though somewhat dimly. Admittedly the other three are far more obscure as pertaining to Jesus. However, they could have been among the passages “beginning with Moses and all the prophets” [Lk 24.27]. That conversation is presented as occurring in the evening but must have continued throughout the night when Jesus stayed with the disciples before vanishing from their sight. Although Peter was not part of it, he got detailed word later on and must have had this Emmaus conversation in mind when addressing the audience in the passage under consideration. Those memories were inserted, if you will, in that above mentioned interval between Peter opening his mouth and his speaking.

After Peter's address, “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” [vs. 44]. Compare this falling-upon (*epiipto*) with the same Spirit resting upon those at Pentecost, the verb being *kathizo* which more accurately means taking one's seat, as though the Holy Spirit (right depicted as ‘upon them’) but shortly afterwards sitting around with those in the upper room, very familiar-like. That's why the Spirit is called Counselor or *Parakletos*, literally as one who summons beside oneself (*para-*).

## 7 April, Second Sunday of Easter

*Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.* Acts 5.12-16

This year the feast of the Annunciation takes place tomorrow, having been moved to the 8<sup>th</sup> due to Holy Week and the Easter Octave. The liturgy suddenly shifts back to the very beginning of salvation history in the sense of the more immediate arrival of Jesus Christ. Always it's amazing how these radical shifts do not upset the normal flow of a given liturgical season (Easter, for example). In fact, barely we give thought to this supposed disruption. Such shifts are worth pondering. They throw into perspective our normal perception of how time flows and how we move through space. The Church offers an alternate without disrupting that fabric, really quite amazing.

During Lent the Church brings out her Big Guns as far as readings during Mass are concerned, the very best she has to offer. They increase in intensity, if you will, the closer we move to the Triduum. Then after Easter

there's a sudden falling off when we're confronted with a certain blandness in the daily readings. To a large part they center around the Acts of the Apostles; valuable as that document may be, it lacks the luster and vitality we had just experienced for a number of weeks. While initially disappointing, upon further reflection this blandness is suitable. It would be impossible...actually expecting too much...for the Church to sustain the intensity of readings experienced so recently.

"Signs and wonders" or *semeion* and *teras*. The former originally applied to a communication from the gods as an omen and the latter to a wonder, miracle or a marvel. Both are found in Acts 2.19 which quotes the prophet Joel immediately after the Pentecost event: "And I will show wonders (*teras*) in the heaven above and signs (*semeion*) on the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapor of smoke." Perhaps one *semeion* at hand could be the sign of the cross, one of its first usages. Both were effected "by the hands of the apostles" where the Greek preposition *dia* is used for "by," more as "through," and thus more indicative of them being agents of the two. The preposition *en* is used for "among the people" or literally "in the people." Thus we have this through-ness of signs and wonders coupled with an in-ness with respect to the people.

As for Solomon's Portico, certainly the apostles have frequented the place with Jesus during many visits to the temple area. They recalled how he taught the people and felt his presence especially close in that spot. They may have felt a close connection between King Solomon, noted for his wisdom (after whom the portico was named) and the fulfilment of that divine wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the apostles were lonely. Their boldness vis-a-vis the religious authorities (who condemned Jesus just a short while ago) isolated them from everyone else. Then the text at hand continues with "believers were added to the Lord." Nothing is said how this isolation and growth came about, just that it did. Perhaps one person dared to step forward in the Portico after which another and so forth.

Later the shadow of Peter had miraculous healing power. That meant people approached him during the earlier and later parts of the day when his shadow was longest, not around noon. In that way they could reap the greatest benefit. It was easy for Peter, too since all he had to do was walk by. The hard part was what how to handle the people once they were healed. Some would go home while others...not as many, of course...would want to be with the apostles. That means Peter had to turn his attention more to organizing all these disparate groups, a much harder task, since it involves collaboration with them as well as the other apostles.

#### 14 April, Third Sunday of Easter

*And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."...So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Acts 5.27-32, 40-41*

The verb *paragello* is used with the noun *paraggelia*, to charge in a legal sense which applies to a summons to appear in court. In other words, the verb and noun mean the same and used for emphasis. The seriousness of the charge contrary to the practice of Judaism is countered with scorn for Jesus Christ when the authorities says "in this name" as though Christ's name was just one among many rebel-rousers.

Peter's boldness of response stands in sharp contrast to his recent cowardly behavior at having denied Jesus upon his arrest, that is, a triple denial of being associated with him. Obviously his newly found boldness derives from the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. It must have been colored by a determination never to repeat this denial. Just the fact that this weakness is contrasted with a new audacity is proof enough that

Peter's words are true. They are impossible to counterfeit which must have impressed the authorities themselves. Peter makes an association between Jesus and "the God of our fathers" in a vain hope to persuade his interrogators, all the while knowing full well that it wouldn't work. Most likely Peter intended to persuade those around him, and that must have had an effect. Some of the bystanders could have been present at Pentecost and realized something new was going on and wanted to be part of it. Included at this scene could have been those healed by Peter's shadow as recorded in last Sunday's entry.

As soon as Peter gives a brief summary of Jesus and his relationship with the God of Israel he brings in the Holy Spirit. When the authorities heard the words "those who obey him" they realized they had no share in that because "they were enraged and wanted to kill them" [vs. 33]. This verse plus those up to vs. 40 is omitted in today's second reading. They deal with the respected Gamaliel who was "held in honor by all the people" [vs. 34] who could not have but heard of the events surrounding Jesus' death, resurrection and Pentecost itself. "They took his advice" or *peitho* which means to persuade which results in letting the apostles go. Gamaliel gives a brief account of Judas the Galilean's revolt which had petered out. While speaking of this he may have been mindful of Barabas whom Pilate set free in place of Jesus. In fact, the two may have crossed paths at one point or another, both knowing the so-called rumors of Jesus' resurrection and Pentecost. Regardless, the *peitho* by Gamaliel stands in stark contrast to the teaching or *didasko* of vs. 28 by the apostles, that is, as far as the religious authorities are concerned.

Chapter Five concludes with "Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." In other words, the apostles, led by Peter, resumed their mission just as nothing had happened. Perhaps Gamaliel listened in and became part of the group although we have record of this. Even if he did not, Gamaliel provided a valuable link between the fledgling Christian community and the larger Jewish one. In the meantime, the teaching which "filled Jerusalem" spread, building upon those persons who had been familiar with Jesus and his eventual demise which was followed by his resurrection and Pentecost. They all contributed bits of information which influenced the apostles who must have spent many hours attempting to sort this all out and see where it would lead them.

## 21 April, Fourth Sunday of Easter

*But they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia...And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'" And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:43-52*

This excerpt follows Paul's sermon at Antioch where he quotes from the prophet Habakkuk which runs in vs. 41, more in line with the Septuagint: "Behold, you scoffers and wonder and perish; for I do a deed you will never believe if one declares it to you." The Hebrew is as follows: "Look among the nations and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told." Despite the harsh words, both Jews and converts asked Paul and Barnabas to flesh out what they had said in light in these prophetic words. Both tempered Habakkuk with urging the people "to continue in the grace of God." The verb here is *prosmeno*, the root *meno* (to remain) prefaced with the preposition *pros*, indicative of direction

towards-which. Thus two contraries are combined, if you will: to remain put and to advance continually. Thus divine *charis* (grace) involves remaining stable and advancing, both simultaneously.

A whole week went by until the next Sabbath which gave Paul and Barnabas plenty of time to explain what they meant in light of Habakkuk's scathing prophecy. In the meanwhile the entire city assembled to hear the Lord's word, and some in charge of the synagogue may have decided to re-examine Habakkuk in light of the new preaching about Jesus Christ. While the city was enthusiastic to hear more, the Jewish leaders attempted to quell it and cannot be blamed for doing so. In response, "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly," the verb being *parresiazomai*. The noun *parresia* means boldness and confidence, used by ancient Greek citizens of a city-state when they spoke out freely without fear of recrimination. Paul and Barnabas were imitating this prized virtue which galvanized the crowd all the more.

Because of opposition by the Jewish leaders, the two apostles recognize they could get no where and "turn to the Gentiles" which reads literally as turn into the nations." To back up this claim coming from God they quote from another prophet, the most famous one of them all, Isaiah: "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth" [49.6]. The Hebrew is close, running as: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This facility of quoting from the Hebrew Bible to back up the claims of Jesus harkens back to numerous references in the Gospels where Jesus speaks about his disciples being able to grasp the meaning of his words and biblical citations. It is done with confidence and ease, completely unheard of in Jewish tradition to date, and cannot be underestimated. We can intimate that the other disciples chosen by Jesus were doing the same though we have no record of this. The Hebrew for "salvation" is, of course, *yeshuah*, the equivalent of the proper name Jesus. So when the personal pronoun "my" is used with *yeshuah* (my salvation)...my Jesus, if you will...no small wonder that the Gentiles were thrilled at the prospect. Immediately they "glorified the word (*logos*) of God" which means they gave glory to this prophecy of Isaiah interpreted as such as well as the earlier words of Habakkuk. Paul and Barnabas must have seized upon the Gentiles' familiarity with *logos* and used it as an opportunity to expound Jesus as *Logos*...perhaps not now but certainly later.

This new-found belief in Jesus Christ by the Gentiles is ratified by the words "and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." The verb *tasso* means more something akin to being enrolled, of being signed up, and necessarily doesn't suggest being foreordained. In other words, stress is upon free will of those who subscribe to the interpretation of Habakkuk and Isaiah. A movement of sorts is conveyed: *eis zoen aionion* (into life eternal), where the preposition *eis* intimates moving into this life which does not come to an end. With this prospect in store for the Gentiles, no small wonder that "the word (*logos*) of God spread throughout all the region.

So while Paul and Barnabas had great success with the Gentiles for the very first time, they suffered persecution at the hands of the city leaders. Still, they "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" meaning that they would continue their new tactic of explaining biblical passages which refer to Jesus Christ. This task will be more difficult with the Gentiles, many of whom were not familiar with the Jewish scriptures. Yet later on some among the Gentiles will take time to reflect and begin to formulate their own theological reflections first on the message brought by Paul and Barnabas and later upon the Torah.