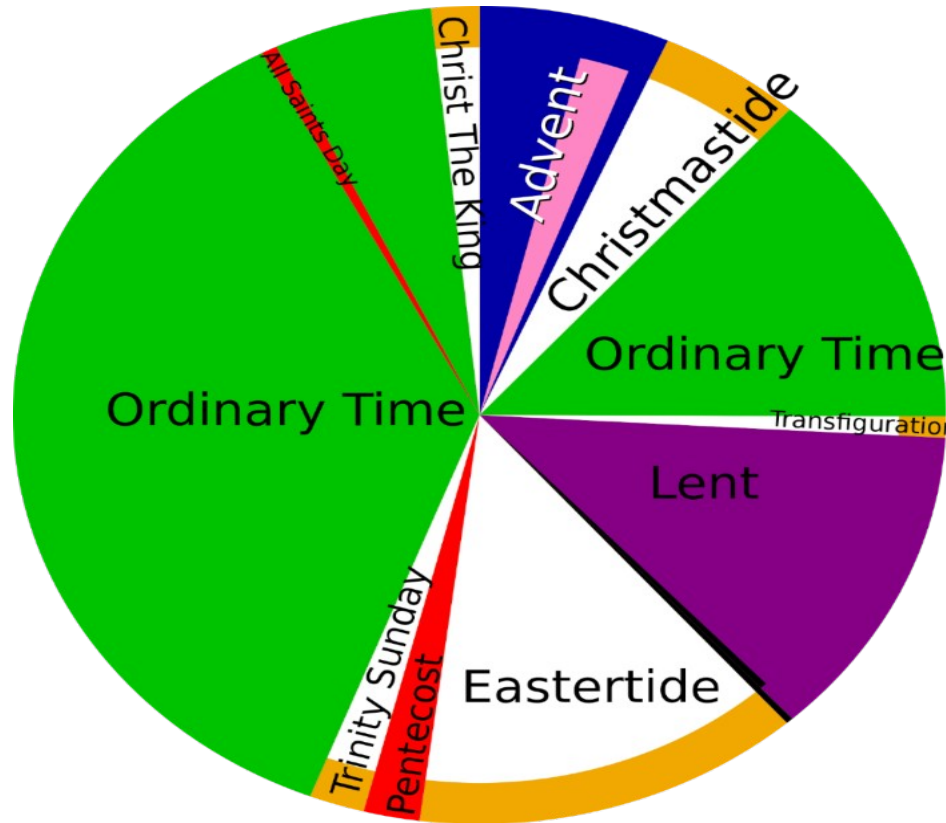


## Liturgical Reflections 2018



This liturgical year deals with the Gospel readings. The last time they have been considered was 2012...six years ago...as posted on this homepage. It may be interesting to compare both sets of reflections with this time gap in mind. Also it should be noted that not each and every part of a given Gospel excerpt is commented upon. It would be wonderful to do so, but this would be cumbersome. As with other documents on this homepage, it is intended solely to assist in the practice of *lectio divina*.

### 3 December, First Sunday of Advent

*32) But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33) Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. 34) It is like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35) Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow or in the morning—36) lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37) And what I say to you I say to all: Watch."* Mark 13.33-37

*Hora* is the noun for hour which means more a definite time or perhaps better, a season, reference being to Jesus' earlier words about heaven and earth passing away. So everyone—including angels and Jesus himself—have no idea of when this will occur. Nevertheless, they are aware of it's coming and aren't concerned about it as much as we might be or might think they are. The chief reason is that they are too occupied with their loving relationships with the Father. That means that the angels as well as Son set the example of taking heed and watching, *blepo* and *agrupneo* which, while important, are secondary to them. The former is a common verb which applies to looking upon or gazing and the latter, of keeping awake while at the same time being discreetly circumspect. By applying both, we get quite close to the angels and Jesus himself, indirectly, if you will, but still close.

Vs. 33 applies both *blepo* and *agrupneo* to both the *hora* just mentioned as well as calling it a *kairos* or time. *Kairos* differs from *hora*, it seems, by being a time when things are brought to a head with something new as a result.

Vs. 34 starts off with Jesus making a comparison relative to *hora* and *kairos* which means that he does know something about the passing away of creation. The comparison consists of a man going on a journey who puts his servants in charge of his work with special mention of a doorkeeper. A doorkeeper's task is to be on duty at all times, so he is the embodiment of both *blepo* and *gregoreo*, the latter a third verb added which is related specifically to him. *Gregoreo* means to be on watch in the sense of being cautious or active, something associated with this task. So we have servants tending their master's affairs while the doorkeeper is more or less idle, physically speaking. However, he is far more alert to anyone approaching the household.

So while this doorkeeper keeps an eye-out for visitors and especially anyone troublesome, he's more concerned with the arrival of his master. Note the times mentioned in vs. 35: evening, midnight, cockcrow and morning...in other words, not during the day. Such references to twilight and night seem the most likely times of the master's arrival, this re-enforced, if you will, by reference to "lest...he find you asleep." So technically speaking the command to watch or *gregoreo* in vs. 36 as embodying both *blepo* and *agrupneo* is applicable first to "you" or Jesus' audience and secondarily but just as important "to all." That is to say, he is inviting everyone to be like himself as well as like the angels as noted above and especially to drop wondering as to the end of heaven and earth.

## **8 December, Immaculate Conception**

26) *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,*  
27) *to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the*

virgin's name was Mary. 28) And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29) But she was greatly troubled at the saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. 30) And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31) And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32) He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33) and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34) And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" 35) And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. 36) And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37) For with God nothing will be impossible." 38) And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. Luke 1.26-38

Mention of the sixth month intimates from the time of the conception of John the Baptist. Because Mary is related to John's mother-to-be Elizabeth, obviously she heard of the mysterious surrounding of the angel Gabriel who had communicated with her husband Zechariah. So when Gabriel came to Mary, right away she figured it was him though he doesn't identify himself. No small wonder that despite being called "favored one" (*charitoo* implies being singled out for a specific mission), she was not only troubled but troubled greatly. The verb is *diatarasso* where the preposition *dia* or "through" is the way "greatly" is expressed...troubled through-and-through might be another way of putting it.

Mary's natural response is summed up well in the verb *dialogizomai* translated as "considered." Note that like *diatarasso*, it has the preposition *dia* prefaced to it. Usually it applies to entertaining all sorts of thoughts as well as plotting, etc. In other words, the verb can suggest a disturbed or overly excited attitude where one's thoughts run wild. Again, this response is natural in light of Gabriel having appeared to Zechariah, not to Elizabeth, meaning that Zechariah had to explain to Elizabeth the meaning of her pregnancy in old age. Judging by her favorable response in vs. 25, we could say that she had no *dialogizomai* compared with her cousin.

As far as Gabriel coming to Mary is concerned, she is specified as engaged to Joseph. That means Joseph is privy to this coming, if you will, just as much as she is. He has to because is of the lineage of King David, so Gabriel's coming to him, albeit indirectly, is an acknowledgment of this important fact. That's why in vs. 32 he mentions David's throne as applied to her son to be born.

Mary's response to Gabriel after such lofty words as her son reigning forever, etc., takes second place to her question which relates directly to her status in the community. That is to say, Mary says she has no husband, so if people find out she's pregnant, automatically

she will be ostracized. Without missing a beat, Gabriel says that in place of a regular husband, the Holy Spirit will make her pregnant by coming upon her as well as the power of the Most High overshadowing her. Thus Mary will become pregnant by two divine entities which really caused her to *dialogizomai* more intensely than before. Wonderful as that sounds, try explaining that to the locals...

As for both coming upon and overshadowing, we have no account of its actual occurrence but presumably this must have happened as soon as Gabriel left. However, the important lesson Mary took away from this visit is her crucial response or acceptance which put an end once and for all to her *dialogizomai*. Gabriel's mention of Elizabeth is crucial for Mary in that it confirmed for her the need not to engage in *dialogizomai*, even for the rest of her life. This is evident from the accounts, albeit scant, of Mary with regard to her son's activity, especially at the crucifixion as well as those events subsequent to his resurrection and birth of the church. By being aware of it as not afflicting the way she comports herself, we can get a better appreciation of Mary's role in the life of her son.

In conclusion, we know that the Church has bestowed Mary with many titles and all the rest. Keeping in mind this little digression upon *dialogizomai* which takes place at the Gospel's beginning, we could add another title or role, if you will. Mary is the patroness of not worrying...of having no *dialogizomai*.

## **10 December, Second Sunday of Advent**

*1) The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2) As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face who shall prepare your way; 3) the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight -- "4) John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5) And there went out to him all the country of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6) Now John was clothed with camel's hair and had a leather girdle around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7) And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8) I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Mark 1.1-8*

This is the only Gospel introduced with the noun *arche* or beginning in the sense of being the first principle of anything or its origin, It assumes special importance insofar as it refers to two biblical quotes dealing with roads and paths...in other words, their beginning which are rooted in the Lord.

Right away Mark quotes from Isaiah 40.3 along with Malachi 3.1, the latter coming first. Thus the Hebrew of the Malachi verse reads in full as follows: “Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” It seems that this way or *derek* is in the process of being laid out which will provide a way for the Lord to approach his temple, presumably in Jerusalem. The people seeking the Lord are advancing along this way as well, the verb *baqash* intimating finding which hadn’t been fulfilled yet.

Either along with the Lord or independently comes the messenger of the covenant, *mal’ak* also applied to an angel and referring to this heavenly being’s function to communicate between God and mankind. Apparently the people were familiar with this *mal’ak* because they had taken delight in him, *chaphets* suggestive of pure, spontaneous joy. The same may be applied to John the Baptist. As for covenant, it can apply to the one given to Moses and with the angel being its guardian. And so we have two comings, the Lord and his messenger, both of whom will meet in the temple.

The second quote which is from Isaiah runs: “A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God.’” There is no specific identity as to this voice (*qol*) which could be Isaiah himself and is used with *qara’* or to cry out aloud. Actually the two words sound the same, *qol gore’*. *Midbar* is the noun for “wilderness” and derives from the verbal root *davar*. It is here that the voice bids to “prepare” or *panah* which fundamentally means to turn and thus intimates repentance. In addition to the *midbar* is the *haravah* which connotes a sterile, arid region. That is to be “made” or *yashar*. Note the two words for a road, *derek* and *mislak*. The latter as noted in 35.8 suggests a raised embankment and is used with the preposition *l-*, literally as “to our God.”<sup>1</sup>

Both the Malachi and Isaiah quotes are applicable to John the Baptist who lived in the wilderness, that *midbar* mentioned in the latter’s quote, a place of speaking or better, a place to listen to the Lord speaking. Those who came to him there traveled on a *derek* suggested by Isaiah and were baptized. Although the people were eager for this as a means to have their sins forgiven, John is clear on one point. That is, he says clearly that one mightier than he...and to those familiar with the Malachi and Isaiah quotes can either be the Lord or his *mal’ak*. The former is inferred by mention of the Holy Spirit though at this stage it isn’t clear to everyone.

## 17 December, Third Sunday of Advent

---

1 Part of this paragraph is lifted from *Expansions on the Book of Isaiah*, also on this homepage.

6) *There was a man sent from God whose name was John.* 7) *He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him.* 8) *He was not the light but came to bear witness to the light...* 19) *And this is the testimony of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"* 20) *He confessed, he did not deny but confessed, "I am not the Christ."* 21) *And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No."* 22) *They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"* 23) *He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."* 24) *Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.* 25) *They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"* 26) *John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know,* 27) *even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."* 28) *This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan where John was baptizing.* John 1.6-8 & 19-28

In the next excerpt we have the angel Gabriel being sent from God as he had been just earlier to Zechariah. In the passage at hand we have a similar sending or *apostello* with regard to John, almost as though his home isn't upon earth but in heaven. He realized this, of course, which contributed to him living in the desert away from human intercourse.

Thus John's *apostello* has two main features that run throughout this rather lengthy excerpt. They are "testimony" and "to bear witness" which may be paralleled with Gabriel's standing in God's presence as described in the next excerpt. The verb there is *paristemi*, a kind of standing nearby or in the vicinity. The same preposition (*para*) is used with regard as "from God"...not "from" in the spacial sort of way but remaining just the right distance from God while simultaneously remaining in his presence.

As for John being the embodiment of testimony and bearing witness, the words are *marturion* and its verbal root *martureo*. Thus the two are one and the same; the noun represents stable presence and the verb indicates ongoing activity. Note that the noun is prefaced with the preposition *eis* or into, literally "into witness," indicative of a thoroughness with respect to that mission.

There's a kind of *anti-apostello* in vs. 19 where the Jews sent priests and Levites out to John. These, of course, were notable religious figures who by reason of their office could be intimidating, this not entirely absent from the picture. It's countered, however, by the words "this is the *marturion* of John," *marturion* being able to stand up to any threat or intimidation.

The delegation asked two questions as to John's identity to which he responded in the negative. In both frustration and fear of not being able to return to Jerusalem with an



adequate response they asked John what he had to say about himself. He cites words from Isaiah which the priests and Levites must have recognized immediately. According to the Hebrew text it runs, "A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make in the desert a highway for our God." As for this voice or *gol* there's no specific identity as to whom or what it might be. Although the text at hand doesn't mention it, perhaps those now thoroughly perplexed thought John fancied himself to be Isaiah himself. As for "wilderness," the noun is *midbar* and derives from the verbal root *davar*. With this in mind and in the context of the verse, *midbar* could be taken something as "place of speaking." In this special type of place the voice bids to "prepare" or *panah* which fundamentally means to turn and thus intimates repentance.

Interestingly John-as-voice has the short sentence following it: "They had been sent from the Pharisees," mere mention of which intimates that the religious authorities had rejected John in advance. Then they ask why John is baptizing, the response being that already there's one among them whom they don't know, *mesos* meaning in the middle or very center of. Thus the representatives are caught between two not-knowings if you will: John and the as yet to be identified Jesus.

#### **24 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent**

*26) In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27) to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28) And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29) But she was greatly troubled at the saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. 30) And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31) And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33) and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34) And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" 35) And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. 36) And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37) For with God nothing will be impossible." 38) And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. Luke 1.26-38*

Without a doubt, this is the shortest gap between the two seasons of Advent and Christmas. Technically speaking, we're dealing with First Vespers on Saturday through the evening of the next day, Christmas Eve.

*Apostello* and *aggelos*: sent (verbal root for ‘apostle’) and angel, the nature of which applies to an angelic being to be dispatched on missions, more specifically, to make proclamations as to future events that would impact a wider audience than the individual being addressed. Actually this is the second dispatch of Gabriel, the one standing in the presence of God (cf. vs. 19), the first being to Zechariah. So he returns from Zechariah, hangs around a short time, and then sent out to Mary after which he disappears from history. These two missions were and remain the most important for any angelic being, so he can remain content with this knowledge when back in God’s presence.

This brief but significant flurry of activity makes you wonder as to how the Lord transmits a message to an angel and the angel’s response to this mission. To paraphrase the words of Ps 19.3, no speech nor word is heard. So to get insight into this transmission, it’s helpful to consider Gabriel’s words just noted, that is, standing in God’s presence. This reads in Greek *ho parastekos enopion tou theou*. The participle is the verb *paristemi*, to stand beside and prefaced with the preposition *para-*. This preposition is interesting in that it means in the presence of or nearby but not quite fully face-to-face. To be aware of someone who is *para-*, if you will, is not unlike looking at something at night, slightly off to the side. Never are you fully focused but still enjoy a genuine presence.

So when Gabriel the angel was sent to Mary (the same can be said with regard to Zechariah), he brings this *para-histemi*...this standing-beside God...to her. So after Gabriel speaks with Mary and Mary gives her consent to the Holy Spirit coming upon her as well as being overshadowed by Most High (cf. vs. 35), he leaves in a flash. The suddenness involved is intimated by the more or less common verb *aperchomai* (to depart) coupled with the preposition *apo* (which is prefaced to the verb). In other words, we have a double kind of from-ness indicative of a near instantaneous departure. Although Gabriel’s meeting with Mary lacks details of such suddenness, almost certainly it was the same. Mary was aware of being sandwiched in between both which may have something to do with her immediate consent in vs. 38 summed up in “behold” or *idou*.

As for the additional statement of consent by Mary, when she said “according to your word” or *rhema* (that which has been uttered compared with *logos* more as expression), she’s mirroring the communication between God and Gabriel prior to being sent to both Zechariah and her. As for the actually coming of the Holy Spirit and foreshadowing by the Most High in vs. 35, we have no specific details as to the time-when. Chances are it happened just as rapidly as Gabriel’s departure. We get an intimation of this by three uses of the preposition *epi* or upon: *epi-erchomai* and *epi* along with *epi-skiazō* (to come upon, upon and to shadow upon). Upon-ness is suggestive of something dropping due to weight and suddenness from above, not in a gradual, lengthy sort of way.



## 25 December, Christmas

1) *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. 2) Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3) and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, 4) and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5) and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6) and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uri'ah, 7) and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, 8) and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, 9) and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10) and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manas'eh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11) and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. 12) And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of She-alti-el, and She-alti-el the father of Zerubbabel, 13) and Zerub'babel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, 14) and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, 15) and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, 16) and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. 17) So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations. 18) Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; 19) and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20) But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; 21) she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22) All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23) "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). 24) When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, 25) but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus. Matthew 1.1-25*

Matthew begins his genealogy of Jesus Christ as being a son of King David as well as a son of Abraham. To the latter also belong Isaac and Ishmael. Thus right away Jesus is identified with the “founder” of Israel’s religion and jumps ahead to the beginning of the kingship under David, that is, minus the tragic case of Saul. In other words, we have two fountainheads, both culminating in Joseph who is Mary’s husband.

As for Mary's side of the family, nothing is given as to her genealogy. It can be argued this is so because she is a woman...true enough...but the real reason is that she requires no lineage to establish her legitimacy as being mother of Jesus Christ. In other words, Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit who far outstrips any human lineage.

After the genealogy of Jesus, the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary as well as Joseph's doubts as to what was going on, Mary utters not a single word. Instead, attention is focused upon Joseph and rightly so because he was left in the dark, more so than Mary. In fact, vs. 20 has him considering these events, the verb being *enthueomai* which consists of the root *thumos*, an inclusive noun meaning seat of the passions, heart and even wrath. The verb is prefaced with the preposition *en-* or *in...*emphasis upon how deeply Joseph deliberated within himself. It also intimates, albeit indirectly, that he didn't share his deliberations with Mary although she must have sensed something wasn't quite right with her husband-to-be. As a side note, compare *enthueomai* with *suntereo* of Mary in Lk 2.19 ('pondering them in her heart'). The latter suggests a keeping-with, *sun* being the preposition whereas the former is more a deliberating (vigorously and passionately) *en* or *in* oneself.

The angel Gabriel had appeared first to Zechariah and then to Mary. However, the angel which appeared to Joseph in a dream goes unidentified. Then after the angel's departure we have the quote from Isaiah 7.14 which isn't attributed to him directly but can be presumed. The Hebrew runs as follows: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanu-el." The context is within the reign of King Ahaz who would refuse an 'oth or "sign. It consists of a "young woman" or *halmah*, a girl of marriageable age (compare with *betulah* or a virgin, not the same). Her identity isn't given which is secondary to the child to whom she will give birth although to Ahaz she must have been visibly pregnant. "Therefore the maidens love you" [Sg 1.3].

After this revelation, at once Joseph took Mary as his wife but more than likely didn't reveal to her the content of his dream. So during the nine months of Mary's pregnancy both did not discuss the matter, each knowing in essence what was transpiring.

### 31 December, Holy Family

22) *And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord* 23) *(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")* 24) *and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."* 25) *Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.* 26) *And it*

*had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27) And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, 28) he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29) "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word; 30) for my eyes have seen your salvation 31) which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32) a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." 33) And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; 34) and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against 35) (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also) that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." 36) And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanu-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, 37) and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38) And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39) And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40) And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Luke 2.22-40*

This excerpt revolves around Simeon as well as his wife Anna, a prophetess. Although both are associated with the Jerusalem temple, there's no other information about them. If Simeon were a priest, chances are it would be mentioned. However, identity of his wife Anna as prophetess suggests that he too had the same gift and was considered as a holy man. His implied prophetic gift is implied by the words in vs. 26, "looking for the consolation of Israel." *Paraklesis* is the noun which means a calling or summoning to one's side, *para* being the preposition suggestive of being in the close vicinity of. Simeon was expecting it, the verb being *prosdechomai*, to receive to oneself, the preposition *pros* suggestive of direction towards-which. Thus it's no wonder, almost an understatement, that the "Holy Spirit was upon him."

The Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to perform the rite of purification. Both parties didn't know of each other beforehand, being guided by the Spirit. Right away and without giving an explanation to the parents, Simeon exclaimed that Jesus is destined for a special mission: light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Israel. Mention of Gentiles first and Israel second must have caught Mary and Joseph off guard, for they would expect the reverse. Such is one part of the marveling when it comes to Simeon's words.

After expressing his joy, Simeon addresses Mary the mother, not Joseph the father, another reversal of traditional order, if you will. In addition to causing both the rise and fall of many in Israel, their baby is a sign to be spoken against, a *semeion* or portent subject to

*antilego*. Furthermore, a sword will pierce Mary's heart, *rhomphaia* being a large, two-handed weapon. "Piercing" seems almost surgical. *Rhomphaia* as the weapon suggests slashing Mary's soul into a thousand pieces. It's done, however, for a specific reason: to reveal the thoughts of many, *dialogismos* suggestive of machinations and plottings, not merely run-of-the-mill thoughts. Hitherto such machinations had been hidden. Now they are out there for all to behold. Such revelation of thoughts is akin to the above mentioned rise and fall of many. Those with good thoughts, if you will, will rise and those with bad thoughts will fall.

Right after these mysterious and forbidding words Anna, the wife of Simeon appears. Most likely she was in the background paying close attention to what was transpiring and all the while having keen insight into its significance. The text says that Anna didn't depart the temple (perhaps unlike Simeon) but remained there perhaps as part of an attachment of holy women who devoted themselves to a life of prayer, hence the designation prophetess. During the purification ceremony there seems to have been a number of people present such as other parents waiting in line. That's why vs. 38 says that Anna spoke to "all who were looking for the redemption of Israel," *lutrosis*. Again the verb *prosdechomai* is used as in vs. 25 concerning Simeon and his looking forward to Israel's consolation. Thus consolation and redemption are more or less one.

This excerpt ends with mention of Jesus growing, becoming strong and being filled with wisdom. More importantly, divine favor was upon him, *charis* also meaning charm, loveliness and grace which gives a more appealing picture. As for the aged Simeon and Anna, both continued with their own lives, knowing that they hadn't long to live, but that was insignificant in light of what just transpired in the temple. Surely Joseph and Mary got word of their deaths, for example, during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem as they did year by year for the Passover as vs. 41 states. Later told their son about the holiness of their lives as they had impacted him as an infant.

## **1 January, Mother of God**

*16) And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. 17) And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; 18) and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19) But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20) And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. 21) And at the end of eight days when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Luke 2.16-21*

Reference is to the shepherds to whom the angels appeared, compelling them to see “this thing” or *rhema* which occurred, this word noted in the 24 December entry as word, that which has been uttered, compared with *logos* more as expression. *Rhema* fits in nicely here in that it can represent the “Glory to God in the highest” (etc.) which the shepherds had just witnessed. Also *rhema* is that sign or *semeion* (also as portent) given by the angels in vs. 12. This was sufficient cause for the shepherds to hasten to Bethlehem, for they acknowledged that it was from the Lord, that he had made it known to them.

Upon seeing the infant Jesus with Mary and Joseph, there’s no record of them having said anything or remained there. Chances are a quick view was sufficient for them after which they “made known the saying” or the *rhema/semeion*. In a way, the shepherds assumed the role of the angels who announced Christ’s birth to them, pro-evangelists, if you will.

Word got around quickly which caused wonder (*thaumizo*) and just as quickly to Mary. In vs. 19 she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.” The two verbs are *suntereo* and *sumballo*, both prefaced with the preposition *sun* (*sum*) or “with.” The former suggests a keeping-with whereas the latter, a casting-with.

After this initial excitement the shepherds returned—to where isn’t specified—perhaps first for another quick visit to the Christ child or more likely to their sheep. After all, they had abandoned them at night in the open. Nevertheless, they trusted that the angels who had appeared to them filled in, this being part of their mission.

This passage may be summed up by the last verse: “what they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” The first two are self-evident whereas the latter is less so but the most important, for it refers to the shepherds’ initial contact with the angels and their willingness to abandon their livelihood that they may see what they had proclaimed, Jesus with his parents.

## 7 January, Epiphany

*1) Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 2) "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." 3) When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him; 4) and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5) They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 6) `And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'" 7) Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; 8) and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying,*



"Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word that I too may come and worship him." 9) When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them till it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; 11) and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12) And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Matthew 2.1-12

Although this excerpt begins with a time-when and a place-where relative to Jesus' birth, in a sense the word *idou* or behold is more important insofar as it puts both into perspective. *Idou* introduces the wise men whose value lies in drawing attention to the mission of Jesus, not that his birth was unimportant. And that mission represented by the wise men consists in non-Israelites recognizing the universal role Jesus Christ will play. "From the East" is vague, deliberately so. There are many places from which these *magoi* may have come. Putting them in the east covers a lot of territory and can represent the first place where the Christian message will take root and do so with a strong mystical tradition. Even the word *magos* (singular) conjures up a whole sense of mystery, it being applicable to an interpreter of dreams, physician as well as a soothsayer. Even the verb used with regard to these *magoi* coming to Jerusalem conveys this sense of mystery, *paragignomai*, to come to the side of, to be beside (*para-*). It's as though the *magoi* came to accompany Jesus just as the star had and will accompany them. As for their number, no information is given. Let's say their counterparts came from the Mediterranean world...from the west...somehow the sense of mystery would not be as strong.

Right away the *magoi* associated a star in the east and associated it with the birth of someone special. Actually they were able to nail down his identity as king of the Jews. To say something like this in Jerusalem was, it seems, a bit naive, given the tense political situation between Israel and Rome. Perhaps the *magoi*, coming from an unidentified, vaguely defined east, were relatively clueless as to this. No small wonder that King Herod got word of their arrival and did so almost immediately, he and the entire city being disturbed, *tarasso* meaning to shake or to stir up.

Just as quickly as getting word of the arrival of these *magoi* and their request to see the king of the Jews, Herod summons the chief priests and teachers of the Torah as to knowing where the Christ or anointed one was to be born. Right away they responded that it was Bethlehem, getting their cue from the prophecy of Micah 5.2. The Hebrew text runs as "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."



Apparently this had been common knowledge among the priestly classes and teachers, so their response to Herod's inquiry came with ease and authority. Armed with that information, Herod summoned the *magoi* secretly which is rendered by the verb *akriboo*, alternately as to learn accurately. What he got was the time of the star's appearance which prompted him to send them to Bethlehem. They are to carry out a careful search which is rendered by the verb *exetazo* (the preposition *ex-* or 'from' intensifies the verbal root) and the adverb *akribos* being derived from the just mentioned verb *akriboo*. In other words, the *magoi* are made unwilling spies for the king.

As they set out, Herod must have sent agents to follow them although this isn't recorded. The priests and teachers concurred, wanting to see if the prophecy of Micah in which they put so much faith would prove true. If it did, this would put them in even greater favor with their master. Just as the star had guided the *magoi* westward, so it appeared once more and guided them to Bethlehem. The star must have drawn closer to the earth in order to hone in on the exact spot where Jesus had been born which confirmed their long search. Although the above mentioned officials knew about Bethlehem as prophecized by Micah, they hadn't a more specific idea of where Jesus might be, the star being invisible to them.

Having paid homage to the Christ child and having exchanged words with Mary (Joseph isn't mentioned), the *magoi* departed as quickly as they had arrived. Presumably the star disappeared as well. We have no details as to what words were exchanged nor of Mary's reaction, let alone the unmentioned Joseph. However, the words of Lk 2.19 certainly apply, that is, when the shepherds heard about Jesus' birth by an angel: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Just like Joseph in vs. 13, the *magoi* were warned by an angel in a dream to leave immediately and not report back to King Herod. Fortunately under the protection of the star leading them to Bethlehem all the way from the east and then from Jerusalem to Jesus, they were kept hidden from any spies. And so the word *idou* or behold which introduced this gospel excerpt comes around full circle having recounted the story of representatives from the east encountering Jesus Christ.

#### **14 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*35) The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; 36) and he looked at Jesus as he walked and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37) The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38) Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying? 39) He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was*

*staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40) One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41) He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). 42) He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). John 1.35-42*

This Sunday marks the return of Ordinary Time which lasts until 14 February, Ash Wednesday. The Gospels of all five Sundays deal with the beginning of Jesus' ministry which fills the gap between the Advent-Christmas cycle we've just completed. "Gap" isn't entirely accurate, for these Sundays can be taken as a preparation for the next grand cycle, Lent-East-Pentecost, the largest one of them all.

"The next day" or the day after John "saw the Spirit descend as a dove" [vs. 32] upon Jesus. That must have made for a sleepless night, one of vigil for John, as he pondered what that could possibly mean. Then he and two of his disciples saw Jesus walking, the feeling being that Jesus was not coming toward John but indirectly making himself known. The verb *emblepo* for "looked at" means more to look right in the face which made John exclaim *ide* or behold with regard to Jesus as Lamb of God. His two disciples certainly knew the significance of a lamb associated with God, that is, a sacrifice. The same applies to virtually everyone else present who were able to make the association.

As soon as John said *ide*, his two disciples left him immediately and followed Jesus, they technically being the first disciples. This incident is interesting in that it shows an abrupt break from John as center of attention to Jesus yet being connected by these two disciples. Also there's not the slightest hint that they were mindful of John; in fact, the same can be applied to him.

To the question as to what the two are seeking Jesus we have no answer. Their seeking, however, is on a higher plane than what they had been doing while with John. Then the two asked where Jesus was residing. The location apparently was still in the vicinity of the Jordan River where John was baptizing. Perhaps this was a lodging or even a friend of John. After all, John and Jesus were cousins.

The connection between John and Jesus, although broken ('snapped' might be just as close), retains a connection in that Andrew was present at the Jordan listening to John speak although nothing is said whether he was baptized or not. Nevertheless, he is the first named disciple and thus apostle of Jesus. Note that Andrew goes off right away to find his brother Simon, saying that we (first person plural, 'one of the two') have found the Messiah. He must have heard the Pharisees questioning John (cf. vs. 24), whether or not he was this person to which he responds that the Messiah already is present among you yet they don't know it. Thus Andrew knew Jesus as Messiah whereas the Pharisees did not.

When Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, Jesus called him Cephas or Peter which means rock. All throughout this excerpt there's swift movement from John to Jesus to Andrew to Peter and finally, Peter to Cephas. It's as though Jesus wished to build upon John's mission with Peter although at the time Peter hadn't a clue as to what was going on. Then vs. 43 begins as did this excerpt with "the next day" thereby signaling a shift in action, shades of laying the foundation of a new community that eventually will evolve.

## 21 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

*14) Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God 15) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." 16) And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. 17) And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." 18) And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19) And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother who were in their boat mending the nets. 20) And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. Mark 1.14-20*

It took John the Baptist to be removed from the scene (*paradidomai*, to be arrested; literally, to be handed over-beside, *para-*) in order for Jesus to begin his ministry. Without this, Jesus couldn't move forward despite the close connection between the two. This ministry primarily consists in preaching, *kerusso* fundamentally meaning to be or to act as a herald. While healing plays a major role, it remains subordinate to this. As for John, he was such a herald, *kerusso* being used in Mt 3.1: "In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea." In sum, we couldn't have two heralds functioning at once; that would create considerable confusion among the people.

The transition from one *kerusso* to another *kerusso* contributes to the meaning of "the time is fulfilled," *kairos* being a special event within space and time. Here *kairos* and the kingdom of God being at hand are pretty much the same, the verb *eggizo* meaning to be at hand, to approach. While the Baptist preached repentance, Jesus does the same but within this special *kairos/eggizo* which had been lacking in the former. The condition? Repent and believe, *metanoeo* and *pisteuo*, the former literally meaning to change one's mind, to put it after or *meta-* what one had been thinking formerly. As for the latter, it's related to the gospel, gospel being good news which is just beginning to be proclaimed (*kerusso*) here. That is to say, the gospel is brand new.

The message just stated isn't much on the surface but enough to get the ball rolling. Next Jesus begins to gather his disciples, knowing that this *kerusso* needs some kind of organization. As for the Baptist, he had his own disciples but lacked a coherent group to support his message. For this reason John remained where he was by the Jordan River until he was arrested. So while Jesus and his disciples started moving about in a more organized fashion, John in prison was delighted, not jealous, that the *kerusso* he had begun was taken up and being fulfilled ('the time is fulfilled').

## 28 January, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

21) *And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught.* 22) *And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes.* 23) *And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; 24) and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."* 25) *But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!"* 26) *And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.* 27) *And they were all amazed so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."* 28) *And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.* Mark 1.21-28

Mark is famous for his use of *euthus* or "immediately" which occurs three times in this excerpt. First Jesus and his disciples came to Capernaum, *eisporeuomai* with the preposition *eis* prefaced to Capernaum...i.e.: "he came into into," a double *eis*, if you will.

The first *euthus* suggests that Jesus entered (another *eis*) the synagogue almost in conjunction with the first two *eis*'s. By doing this, Jesus was getting down to the essential business of his mission, to teach, *didasko* being the common verb. The congregation was astonished or *ekplasso* meaning to be struck out of (*ek-*) their senses. We can only imagine what that experience had been but are left hanging, if you will. Such was Jesus' teaching or *didache* which derives from *didasko*. We have no direct information about the content of his teaching is its effect, that is, *ekplasso*. A second indirect piece of information, negative as it were, is that Jesus taught not as the scribes who had a position of authority to teach. vs. In other words, Jesus had this authority naturally, *exousia* here as belonging to a rabbi. Again, nothing is given as to Jesus' teaching which is inferred. This is deliberate in that it makes the reader wish to take a place in the synagogue and be attentive to Jesus as he was teaching. Then the read would come away *ekplasso*.

Vs. 23 introduces the second *euthus* where an anonymous man with an unclean spirit (*pneuma*) is noted as being present in the synagogue. Implied is that he had entered

unnoticed with the crowd and made himself known almost simultaneously with the *euthus* of Jesus entering the synagogue and teaching. Surely this man was known in the community, small as it is. His uncleanness wasn't physical as leprosy or the like but invisible. It manifested itself in the form of two questions tinged with contempt and anger, the first reading literally as *ti hemin kai soi* or "what to us and to you?" The second...and this ties in with what apparently some could interpret as Jesus teaching...is that he had come on a mission of destruction. But what astonished the congregation is that this man with an unclean *pneuma* knows that Jesus is from God. If that were true, then the destruction he blurts out may have some merit to it.

Upon hearing all this Jesus rebuked the man, *epitimaō*, which has the verbal root meaning to honor or to revere prefaced with the preposition *epi-* or upon. This rebuke consists of two verbs, the first being *phimōō* or to muzzle as you'd do with an ox and *exerchomai* with the preposition *ex-* (from in the sense of out of) with *ex* as free standing, if you will, "from him"...a double from. This reprimand directed at the unclean *pneuma* threw the man into convulsions and a loud cry as it came out of him, another use of *exerchomai* with the preposition *ex*.

The congregation's response was naturally one of amazement (*thambeō*), making them to question among themselves who exactly might be this Jesus. They recognize a certain authority, an *exousia* as with his teaching mentioned above, most likely while Jesus himself was standing there not taking any answers. And so *exousia* is tied in both with teaching and healing.

The third and final example of *euthus* applies to the swiftness with which Jesus' fame spread throughout the area, *akoe* meaning a hearing which implies rapid spreading of news by word of mouth. Vs. 29 (not in this excerpt) has another *euthus* worth mentioning. Jesus left the synagogue with the same immediacy as he had entered. Nothing is said of the man possessed with the unclean spirit who may or may not have tagged along with Jesus. Even if he didn't we can be sure that he paid close attention to events that followed, this being only natural. Also the congregation must have felt a certain unease coupled with wonder the next time they gathered in the synagogue with this man. In fact, in a short time that may have driven him away to seek out and follow Jesus.

#### 4 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

29) *And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. 30) Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her. 31) And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them. 32) That evening at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or*

*possessed with demons. 33) And the whole city was gathered together about the door. 34) And he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him. 35) And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. 36) And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, 37) and they found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you." 38) And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out." 39) And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. Mark 1.29-39*

This excerpt begins with Mark's famous *euthus* or "immediately" noted in the last section and occurs a second time in vs. 30. As for the first *euthus*, it's when Jesus left the synagogue, having forced an unclean spirit out of a possessed a man. Vs. 29 has the preposition *ek* or "from" with the same preposition prefaced to the verb *exerchomai* (left). This "double *ek*," if you will, is pretty much along the same lines of *euthus* by reason of the fast-paced action of the narrative. This sets the stage for Jesus to enter the house where Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever, *puresso* with *pur* meaning a fire. We don't have this woman's identity nor that of the wife of Simon who shortly is to be called Peter, chief of the apostles. It can be taken as a somewhat humorous interjection, given that mothers-in-law are traditionally the butt of jokes, most likely even at this time in history. As for the response of this woman, it isn't recorded, just that she went about serving her guests. Obviously she served plenty of people before but never with such joy and enthusiasm as now.

The very same evening of this cure people brought to Jesus sick people as well as those possessed with demons, the latter being a verb, *daimonizomai*. Not only that, the entire city (*polis* can also mean a village which this was), so the crowd must not have been terribly big. Note the time of day, sundown. This is a transition from day to night when the light is fading quickly and people had to light torches, etc., to see what was going on. The situation must have been quite dramatic with both sick and especially those possessed most likely howling and so forth. Thus Jesus found it necessary to shut them up. If the demons which knew Jesus were allowed to speak, their screeching sound would drive everyone away in fear and perhaps provoke a riot which would either kill or injure people.

By the time Jesus finished curing all these people, it must have been fully dark. People felt safe to return to their homes knowing that the expelled demons wouldn't harass them. However, they must have wondered and talked among themselves about the demons knowing Jesus. They may have wondered whether Jesus was one of them, something he and his companions were aware of. In light of this, Jesus left "well before day" rendered by the three words *proi ennuxa lian* which reads literally as "early at night exceedingly." The *lian* gives a hint that Jesus wanted to avoid contact with the people in case they change their mind and apprehend or even stone him for the demons recognizing him.



Jesus sought out a “lonely place” in order to pray, the adjective being *eremos* which also means bereft or deserted. Because Simon and his companions knew the area well, it wasn’t long before they found him. Instead of returning to the place in which he did his recent cures, Jesus decides to move on to other towns in order to do some preaching. The reason? It’s put literally as “into this I have come out (*exerchomai*).” Given the reputation just gained, Jesus continues preaching and casting out demons. Perhaps this time he decides not to allow the demons speak in order to quell rumors that he just might be one of them or even their leader.

## 11 February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*1) And a leper came to him beseeching him and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." 41) Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I will; be clean." 42) And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43) And he sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 44) and said to him, "See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded for a proof to the people." 45) But he went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter. Mark 1.40-45*

With this last Sunday in Ordinary Time we bid adieu until 10 June when it resumes with the Tenth Sunday. In other words, we’re on the threshold of the Lenten-East-Pentecost cycle.

As for this leper, most likely he approached Jesus on the outskirts of a town, being banished to live out his days without human contact except with fellow lepers. His coming and beseeching are one and the same, the latter being *parakaleo*, literally to call out beside (*para-*). This is the verbal root for Paraclete or the Holy Spirit. Jesus similarly is a *parakletos*, “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ” [1Jn 2.1]. With this in mind, inadvertently we could say that the leper was calling out to Jesus as an advocate, someone he knew by reputation who would cure him.

Instead of any recorded introductory words, Mark has Jesus as “moved with pity” or *splagxnizomai* which literally means to be moved in one’s bowels or deepest self. So when Jesus says that he wills the leper to be clean, this *splagxnizomai* extends through his hand and directly (we could say *euthus* or ‘immediately’) into the man’s leprosy. As far as this disease goes, it’s put not in turns of being cured but of being cleaned which intimates the abhorrence which people felt towards it as being transmitted easily.

Interesting the *splagxnizomai* just noted takes a sudden turn to the opposite when Jesus charged the leper sternly. The verb here is *embrimaomai* or literally to snort as in the case of a horse. It's enhanced further by Mark's famous *euthus* or "immediately" as well as an injunction not to speak of his cure. Instead, the man is to approach a priest and make an offering as prescribed by Moses as a proof of his cleansing, *marturion* being the word for "proof" which also means witness (martyr). Leviticus 14.2-14 gives the procedure by which this is to be carried out. Since the leper had approached alone and outside the city, similarly the priest is required to "go out of the camp and shall make an examination" [vs. 3]. We have no record of who this priest might be or his attitude toward the man, let alone Jesus. Perhaps once the two went through the necessary ritual they decided to follow Jesus.

Naturally (and who wouldn't, given the debilitating nature of leprosy?) the cured leper blurts out to everyone his cure, *kerusso* being the verb which means to preach in the sense of proclaim along with *diaphemizo* which infers spreading abroad much like a wildfire. The result is that Jesus couldn't enter a town openly which means he had to be out in the country. Instead of regretting this, it turned out to be a benefit for him, giving a greater chance to pray as in that "lonely place" noted in the last excerpt. Nevertheless, people came out perhaps following his companions who knew where Jesus was praying.

## 18 February, First Sunday of Lent

12) *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.* 13) *And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.* 14) *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God* 15) *and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* Mark 1.12-15

The haste and urgency suggested by Mark's famous *euthos* (immediately) is backed up by the three uses of the conjunctive "and" in vs. 13 followed by "now" introducing vs. 14. To top it off, we have yet another "and" at the beginning of vs. 15. So after being with John the Baptist, Jesus is driven into the wilderness, *ekballo* suggestive somewhat humorously of being kicked out...again, in haste, *euthus*-like. Nothing is said of John's response. In fact, he wasn't surprised and was expecting it, for the Spirit or *Pneuma* which descended upon Jesus now came...*euthus*...the agent for thrusting away Jesus from society. Jesus arrives on the scene to be baptized, hangs around the Jordan River a short time, and disappears just as quickly as he arrived there. All in all, a rather unusual introduction for someone whose mission is to save the world. This serves to both conceal Jesus' real identity as well as to make people search him out with serious intent. If he were to manifest himself in some kind of glorious form or the like, chances are high he'd be rejected outright.

So once in the wilderness for forty days, the same amount of time (time here as a *kairos* event) Moses spent on Mount Sinai (cf. Ex 24.18), Satan tempted Jesus, the verb being *peirazo* which implies an actual solicitation to do evil. No details are given, but the *peirazo* must be linked directly to Jesus' recent baptism, that is, the Holy Spirit having descended upon him. Satan thought wrongly that this new power from on high empowered him to do anything he wishes. Mention of the wild beasts can be taken positively, companions of sorts which while guarded Jesus while at the same time respecting his own space. Along with them are angels who ministered to Jesus, *diakoneo* suggestive of bringing food and water and any other necessities. Thus the wild beasts and angels worked hand-in-hand to serve Jesus. So despite the isolation for forty days, by no means was Jesus lonely. In fact, it was quite crowded in that wilderness.

The next stage begin in this excerpt begins in vs. 14 with "now" taking the place of *euthus* but having the same intent, that is, when John was arrested while Jesus was preaching. Here the *kerusso* or heralding is about the "Gospel of God" or the good news of God. Once again no details are given, that being left to the reader's imagination, deliberately so, not by way of omission. After all, Mark presents Jesus as on the move *euthus*.

The Gospel or good news Jesus is proclaiming omits direct reference to the recent arrest of John the Baptist. Of course, most people knew about it and were dismayed. That makes Jesus' message about the time or *kairos* being fulfilled all the more noteworthy, *pleroo* implying coming to a conclusion or completion. Similarly, God's kingdom is at hand, the verb *eggizo* being used which also means to approach. So with these two ideas being thrown out to people, especially with the arrest of John, it was easy to confuse a temporal deliverance with a spiritual one. Those who were attentive enough could draw this distinction right away when Jesus asked for repentance and belief in the Gospel or good news. As for this Gospel, the details are sketchy. It may indeed have consisted of oral remarks as to the above mentioned *kairos* and *eggizo* of God's kingdom, embellished to some degree by plenty of reference to the Torah.

## 25 February, Second Sunday of Lent

2) *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, 3) and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. 4) And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. 5) And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." 6) For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. 7) And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." 8) And suddenly looking around they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only. 9) And*

*as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of man should have risen from the dead. 10) So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant. Mark 9.2-10*

The last entry noted Mark's famous *euthus* or "immediately" which isn't mentioned here except for the similar *exapina* or "suddenly." However, the conjunctive *kai* ('and') in most verses of this excerpt clearly are a long the lines of *euthus*. By this time a reader may wonder why the rush...why the *euthus*...the answer of which isn't given. Instead, Mark is taking us along for a ride to show how Jesus is working until his account culminates in a lengthy description of his real work or passion and death.

The Gospel at hand opens with Jesus taking to himself (*paralambano* implies putting right beside him) three trusted disciples. Reaction by the others isn't given but might be parallel to the dumbfounded-ness and wonder as the Israelites watched Moses ascend Sinai. In such a situation you simply don't ask questions but go along with the action. The phrase "by themselves" can be taken as re-enforcing this.

Once upon the mountain Jesus is transfigured or *metamorphoo*. The verbal root applies to the giving of shape to something. The preposition *meta-* prefaced to it suggests that which comes after this act of giving shape. With this in mind, it seems that Jesus arrived on the mountaintop as a regular human being. Then he stepped outside...put-after or *meta-*...this human form and entered a divine reality lacking form. The physical result? The text describing Jesus in terms of whiteness--the lack of color--is the only ploy available in a situation like this.

When Elijah and Moses come on the scene, they appeared, *horao* meaning to see which means they had human form while we could say that Jesus was with them minus such a form. So Peter tried to make some king of small talk with Jesus amid all that brightness by suggesting setting up a temporary shelter on the mountaintop. The two prophets must have smiled knowingly at Peter, realizing that they had acted the same in their own way. Surely their glance toward Peter was sufficient to quiet him.

In vs. 7 a cloud overshadows "them" which seems to be everyone present upon the mountain. Once a voice usually identified as the Father spoke of Jesus being a beloved (*agapetos*, i.e., one being the recipient of *agape*) son, the cloud lifted. Jesus returned to his human form if we can put it that way somewhat imperfectly in light of the *metamorphoo* described above. While this unidentified voice exclaimed Jesus to be his son (and a son implies a father), it's followed by another voice, the one of Jesus, who orders the three disciples to remain quiet as to what had happened. Only after his resurrection will they be allowed to speak of this *metamorphoo*, but at the moment putting the two together simply

was beyond their reach. Besides, at this stage they would surely confuse *metamorphoo* with rising from the dead.

Apparently the order to remain silent applies to the other disciples, something virtually impossible to do. Just look at some of the people Jesus cured, he telling them to remain silent. Yet there's no direct evidence of having blabbed about the event. Even if it happened and Jesus found out, end of story. All were insufficiently untrained in spiritual matters to grasp what Jesus was conveying to them, and he understood that well. However, Jesus relied upon their keen ability to recall events, one of the most common ways for ancients to make sense of their world, and later transmit to others and eventually have written down.

As for this excerpt's concluding verse, it seems to be a paradox hard to be maintained. The three kept the discussion (*logos* or word-as-expression) among themselves which indeed involved considerable effort to do. Yet the mysterious words about Jesus rising from the dead kept creeping into their conversations and remained unsolved. Surely the other disciples got wind of this ongoing discussion behind their backs, wondered about it, but with Jesus present, they didn't dare to ask, let alone try to listen in.

#### **4 March, Third Sunday of Lent**

*13) The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14) In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money-changers at their business. 15) And making a whip of cords, he drove them all with the sheep and oxen out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16) And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." 17) His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume me." 18) The Jews then said to him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" 19) Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20) The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21) But he spoke of the temple of his body. 22) When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. 23) Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did; 24) but Jesus did not trust himself to them 25) because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man. John 2.13-25*

This is the first mention of a Passover in John's Gospel suggesting that in the not distant future Jesus would be going to Jerusalem not to make an offering but to be offered. Having come to the temple, he found the place thronging with all sorts of vendors selling animals,

the sound of which made it even more chaotic. Jesus heard this din from quite a distance which caused him to become furious at the knowledge of what was transpiring both in this sacred place and during the most sacred time of the year. Coming upon the scene, he began driving the vendors out. Perhaps the situation was less dramatic than supposed because the area was one gigantic market place thronging with people, and his actions got subsumed in all the confusion. Famously Jesus says that the temple is his Father's house and not one of trade or *emporion*. Implied by this cleansing is that those in charge of the temple were complicit in transforming the sacred place into an *emporion*. Always it was such but has grown more commercial with the passage of time.

Although it's often said that the disciples were simple men (true enough), we tend to forget that ancient people had excellent memories. So as soon as they saw what was transpiring, they recalled both as individuals as well as a single group...the two being in many ways indistinguishable...the words of Ps 69.9. It reads in full as "For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." Zeal or *qin'ath* implies jealousy found in another verse the disciples possibly had in mind: "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this" [Is 9.7]. As for the rather dramatic English "consume," the Hebrew is more prosaic, *'akal* being the common verb for to eat.

Interestingly the Jews who saw what amounted to a localized commotion as opposed to one spread through the entire area asked what kind of sign Jesus had for his action, *semeion* applicable to that which portends a remarkable event. Although it's not mentioned, implied is that while the Jews took for granted the external part of the temple as an *emporion*, it could become one single *emporion*. After all, it was a major source of income, especially as now, the Passover.

Jesus startled his questioners with the improbable demand for them to destroy the temple, *luo* meaning to loosen. Even if this *luo* could be carried out, Jesus says confidently that he'll raise it up in three days. Although the text says he's referring to the temple (*naos*) of his body, neither the questioners nor disciples present could make sense of his words. Here *naos* refers to the Holy of Holies in contrast to *hieros* as in vs. 14 where animals were being sold. Thus when Jesus speaks of his body as *naos*, he means the most sacred place of the temple. After the resurrection when the disciples preached in that area they couldn't help but recall this incident. As for the merchants, invariably they flooded back selling their animals, etc.

As typical with the disciples when they heard something they didn't understand about Jesus, they came to see it in a wholly different light later on as "when he was raised from the dead" [vs. 22]. So if Jesus accomplished everything as he set out to do and was put to death but did not rise, his words and actions would be meaningless. In other words, the resurrection is the key that unlocks all biblical passages such as Ps 69.9, this being an important reference since it involves temple worship in Jerusalem and Christ-as-temple.



Also his resurrection bestowed the natural ability to recall events with an even greater precision.

As at the beginning of this excerpt, vs. 23 says that Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover, the second mention perhaps intended to remind the reader of this, his first visit during the feast and more importantly, the future transfer of worship from the temple to Jesus-as-temple. Also it prepares for an intersection between Jesus and the Passover, the institution of the Eucharist followed by his passion and death.

So while in Jerusalem many came to believe in Jesus by reason of the signs they witnessed, a second use of *semeion*. However, the nature of these signs isn't delineated because as the next verse says, Jesus knew all men...had *gignosko* of human nature as with the recent incident concerning the money changers, etc. Such *gignosko* precluded any need for a witness (*martureo*) as to human nature, he knowing it all too well.

Jesus and his disciples remained in Jerusalem for the Passover, leaving pretty much when the crowds made their way home. Perhaps at this time he took the first steps of initiating his disciples into the distinction he had made between the Jerusalem *hieros* and his body as *naos*, all in remote preparation for his final Passover.

## 11 March, Fourth Sunday of Lent

1) *As he passed by he saw a man blind from his birth.* 2) *And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"* 3) *Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned or his parents but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.* 4) *We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work.* 5) *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."* 6) *As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay,* 7) *saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.* 8) *The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?"* 9) *Some said, "It is he;" others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man."* 10) *They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"* 11) *He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight."* 12) *They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."* 13) *They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.* 14) *Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.* 15) *The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."* 16) *Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them.* 17) *So they again said*

to the blind man, "What do you say about him since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." 18) The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19) and asked them, "Is this your son who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20) His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind; 21) but how he now sees we do not know nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." 22) His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. 23) Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him." 24) So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner." 25) He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26) They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27) He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?" 28) And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29) We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30) The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31) We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32) Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33) If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34) They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. 35) Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?" 36) He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" 37) Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you." 38) He said, "Lord, I believe;" and he worshiped him. 39) Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." 40) Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, "Are we also blind?" 41) Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains. John 9.1-41

A lengthy excerpt which consists largely of dialogue, giving the impression that what's recorded is quite accurate.

Jesus' disciples asks him about the connection between sin, that is, whether the blind man was sinful or inherited it from his parents. He responded that the reason for such blindness was to set the stage for a divine miracle put in terms of *ergon* or work of God which is to be made known. Then he alludes to a darkness far greater and more pervasive than the unfortunate situation at hand, namely, that it's impossible to work or *ergazomai* (root of *ergon*) once night falls. Before that inevitable time comes, it's necessary to *ergazomai* the *ergon* of him who sent Jesus. Jesus doesn't speak directly as to what this is but insinuates it by reason of the blind man before them and the disappearance of light when night comes on. All this has one aim, that is, Jesus referring to himself as light of the world.

We have no response by the disciples concerning this dramatic saying which come on the heels of Jesus claiming his body to be a *naos* or temple. Instead, Jesus cures the blind man and bids him to wash in the pool of Siloam, John inserting its meaning as "Sent." Perhaps it's intended to show that Jesus was sent by the Father, this in light of the words above concerning *ergazomai* the *ergon* of him who sent Jesus.

The cure of the blind man launches an extended dialogue between him, his parents and Pharisees, all having different opinions as to what happened. When pressed for an answer, his parents deferred to their son, being fearful of retaliation. Apparently they had let their son go out begging on his own perhaps no longer having means to support him. Still, there seemed to be a cordial relationship between them.

During the rather heated give-and-take the man whose sight is newly restored stands his ground. In despair at not getting the answer they were seeking, the Pharisees bring up the matter of being born in sin, the cause of his blindness. Now that he was cured, he was in a unique position to teach them. In other words, the table is turned. We have a direct challenge to the Pharisees' role of teaching. Furthermore, anyone associated with Jesus (for they accused him of being his disciple) was suspect. Their attitude is revealed clearly by the simple words of vs. 35, "And they cast him out."

Jesus got word of this man's plight and sought him out, asking if he believed in the Son of man." At this point the poor fellow was unable to make the association but was willing to trust Jesus. After this man's conversion, if you can put it as such, Jesus brings the whole dramatic dialogue to a conclusion. Jesus had come into the world for judgment (*krima*). Such *krima* is built upon what the dialogue reveals between the blind man who sees and those (i.e., the Pharisees) who don't or better, prefer not to see. Jesus was speaking publicly; in fact, he was doing so deliberately so that the nearby Pharisees could hear his words which they did. They asked Jesus if they were blind not so much to get a yes or no answer but as a way to express contempt. Then he comes off...rather concludes...with the statement that if blind, they'd lack guilt. However, their claim to see (which seems to infer their claim to teach) makes them guilty or better put, their guilt remains. *Hamartia* is the noun here which also means since and with the verb *meno* which connotes abiding or not going away anytime soon.

As for the blind man as well as his parents, nothing is said of them after this incident. Chances are they were treated as outcasts by the Pharisees. Even if they didn't become active followers of Jesus, surely they paid close attention to how the rest of his ministry unfolded and even may have joined the budding Church shortly afterwards.

## 18 March, Fifth Sunday in Lent

*Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2) It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. 3) So the sisters sent to him saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4) But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it." 5) Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6) So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7) Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." 8) The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9) Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world. 10) But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him." 11) Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep." 12) The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13) Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14) Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead; 15) and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16) Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go that we may die with him." 17) Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18) Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19) and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20) When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him while Mary sat in the house. 21) Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22) And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23) Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24) Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26) and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27) She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world." 28) When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29) And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30) Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. 31) When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32) Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33) When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; 34) and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35) Jesus wept. 36) So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37) But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38) Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. 39) Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time*

*there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." 40) Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" 41) So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you hast heard me. 42) I knew that you hear me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you sent me." 43) When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." 44) The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45) Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him; 46) but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. John 11.1-46*

Given the relatively short space for making notations in this document, the richness of the Gospel excerpt can't be touched upon in full. Thus a few highlights will be offered.

The words "a certain man" have the air of preparing us for a dramatic story which indeed does follow. Also they can be seen as a preparation for the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus a mere week beforehand.

When Lazarus becomes ill, Martha and Mary don't approach Jesus but send word which means either a friend, relative or servant. In this message they don't identify their brother by name but instead use the touching words "he whom you love," the verb *phileo* meaning love in the sense of being kindly disposed which involves emotion compared with the more ethereal *agape*. Jesus responds in kind, that is, he sends a message back saying that Lazarus' illness will provide an opportunity for the Son of God to be glorified, he speaking of himself as if this title belonged to another person. It was time now for Jesus to speak like in a more frank and open manner of his true nature since the redemption he was about to effect was close at hand.

The last chapter has Jesus across the Jordan River where John had baptized and "remained there" [10.40] while many came to him. Such was the place where the messenger from Martha had to go, easy to find due to the attention Jesus had attracted ('and many came to him,' 12.41). Being at this place shortly before his betrayal and death is significant in that it gave him time to ponder the beginning of his ministry. Here the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon him followed by being in the wilderness forty days and nights.

After a delay of two days which includes Jesus speaking with his disciples, he sets out to visit his friends, this delay being deliberate. Perhaps he wanted them to have time to realize more fully what this Son of God reference meant in the context of Lazarus' death as well as his impending death of which they must have had an intimation. Then in vs. 11 Jesus speaks of Lazarus as having fallen asleep, a way of saying that he had died although word came to him that he had been ill. Jesus did know that Lazarus had died, an event that touched him profoundly as foreshadowing his own death a few days later. However, Jesus



and his disciples arrived quite late, four days after Lazarus was put in the tomb meaning he had missed the funeral and interment. As for Martha and Mary as well as other close friends, they were quite indignant at this slight and must have questioned Jesus' sensitivity about their friendship.

At last Jesus sets out. However, when word arrived of his approach, Martha went out to meet him. Nothing is said of how far off he was but presumably not much. While hastening there Martha already was rehearsing words of rebuke she had prepared beforehand. Then she blurted them out, that is, about Jesus not being present so as to prevent Lazarus from dying. This interior rehearsal may be contrasted with Mary who decided to remain at home. Chances are Martha bounced her frustration off her sister who counseled against saying them. In fact, when Martha does meet Jesus she modifies her rebuke by acknowledging that whatever Jesus asks from God, it will be granted. We can thank Mary for that although she wouldn't take credit if asked.

Historically Martha has been pretty much reprimanded for her impetuosity and Mary praised for her so-called contemplative attitude. However, it is Martha who elicits from Jesus the all important words of him being the resurrection and the life. She doesn't quite know how to absorb this which is why she leaves Jesus standing there and goes back home to summon her sister. Martha must have walked home slowly in quite a different mood than when she rushed out to Jesus. Instead of trying to absorb all this, she simply summon her sister saying that Jesus is calling for her. She figured that Jesus would say pretty much the same thing to Mary as he had just done to her

In the meantime Jesus remained some distance from the home, another instance of a delay he deliberately makes. What's transpiring here is so important that to rush through things would not be beneficial for all involved. After all Lazarus was dead, not ill, so that's another need not to make unnecessary haste. When Martha finally makes her way back home, she informs Mary. She does so quietly or *lathra* which also means secretly, perhaps not so much to keep Jesus' arrival secret but his words about being the resurrection and life. Some things are simply too important to be broadcast. As for Mary going out to meet Jesus quickly (*tachu*), it's parallel to her sister's going out but quite different.

Despite the clear and distinct words by Jesus to Martha as him being the resurrection and the life, Mary pretty uses much the same words of rebuke about him not being present to save Lazarus. This double reprimand, if you will, put Jesus on the spot, who decides that now was time to make his move. On top of it, the ever observant Jews picked up on what was going on and threw in their rebuke as well. Jesus revealed his feelings in two ways. First, he was "deeply moved in spirit (*pneuma*)," that is, *embrimaomai* or fundamentally to snort as a horse. Secondly, he was troubled or *tarasso*, to shake, the two occurring



simultaneously. *Embrimaomai* is mentioned a second time as he approached the tomb, knowing full well that in a week's time all this will be played out with respect to him.

The dramatic rest of the story is well known, of course, but ends with an ominous note which overshadows this lengthy excerpt. Although many Jesus believed in Jesus, some couldn't wait to rush off to the Pharisees and inform them of what had happened. From then on Jesus's death sentence was effectively written. As for Lazarus, we have little further information of him except in the next chapter when the chief priests wished to put him to death as well as Jesus. This must not have trouble Lazarus who so recently had come back from the dead. He knew what it was like and not afraid of a second death, knowing full well that Jesus would make his rise again. However, as to his experience of death, nothing is recorded, only left for us to imagine. Then Lazarus passes off the scene completely. He's spared, however, at being a celebrity and asked about what it was like to come back from the dead by reason of the events that followed Jesus' death and resurrection. All attention is centered there as it should, thereby relieving Lazarus from a heavy burden and allowing him to look forward to a second death...and resurrection.

## 25 March, Palm Sunday

*1) Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2) There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. 3) Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. 4) But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, 5) "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" 6) This he said not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. 7) Jesus said, "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. 8) The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." 9) When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. 10) So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus also to death 11) because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. 12) The next day a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. John 12.12-16*

Six days before being condemned to death Jesus returns to Bethany for a visit, eager to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead just a few days ago. Without a doubt, it would be fascinating to eavesdrop on that conversation. Lazarus had died, came back to life and faces a second eventual death. Thus he's unique in every respect, even compared with someone like Enoch of Genesis and the prophet Elijah, both of whom were taken up into heaven directly from earth. Although we have no account of what Lazarus had

experienced, here he is in between two deaths in the company of Jesus who is about to die but will return to life shortly thereafter. Did the two carry on a conversation like Jesus had done at his transfiguration, that is, with Moses and Elijah? Peter, James and John were present for that event and noted that the three discusses Jesus' "departure which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" [Lk 9.31]. Perhaps the only living human being who could understand fully that conversation was Lazarus.

In light of this most remarkable discussion at Bethany, Mary's anointing of the feet of Jesus takes second place, if you will. She and her sister Martha were present, of course, and must have pressed their brother for information about what it was like to have died and return to life again. Even more intriguing was the question everyone ponders, what happened in between? The intervention of Mary put a stop to that. She had premonition of his death though we have no information about this, just that she did. Thus Mary is confronted with her beloved brother who had died but returned to life and Jesus who is about to die, he claiming to her sister Martha that he is the resurrection and the life. All in all a perplexing situation in which to be. As for Jesus and Mary, both were operating on the same level, if you will. This makes Judas lame question about wasting expensive nard all the more absurd.

Then there's Lazarus sitting there in silence watching all this with a certain foreknowledge of her sister's activity. As for Martha, she's present, to be sure, but indirectly tied in to this. She's pretty much off on her own serving everyone but certainly had an ear tuned in to the conversation. How couldn't she be curious?

A large crowd had assembled while this meal was going on, having heard about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Although they came out of curiosity, who wouldn't want to see this remarkable gathering and get tidbits of the conversation? Some of these people must have informed the chief priests because it's noted that they decided here not to kill Jesus (that is mentioned right after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead) but Lazarus. Then they must have wondered, if he came back to life and we kill him a second time, will Jesus or someone else bring him back to life? It was a thorny issue that had to be decided once and for all.

Despite the threat against his life, his second life, Lazarus wasn't fearful of what the authorities might do to him. He had experienced "the other side," knew what was there, and was prepared to do it again. So when "many of the Jews were going away," they knew that when they died, they had a chance of coming back to life. However, they failed to understand that this return to life as through the unique example of Lazarus was not permanent but in a sense temporary.

We have no further information about what became of Lazarus. Without a doubt, he followed the ensuing events very closely though from afar. More than any of the disciples he

knew that Jesus would rise from the dead as he was brought back to life. So when reports about Jesus' resurrection reached him, he took it all in stride, knowing full well that this would happen.

## 1 April, Easter Sunday

*1) And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. 2) And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3) And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" 4) And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back--it was very large. 5) And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. 6) And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. 7) But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." Mark 16.1-7*

For the three women involved, the sabbath that has just passed was the longest in their entire lives. They couldn't wait for sunset to get it over with. In order to maintain their sanity the three devoted followers of Jesus decided to get together and prepare spices for the ritual anointing of his body. Most likely nard was among the spices, the same Mary had used just a few days earlier to anoint Jesus' feet. Chances are that given the small, closely knit band of Jesus' friends, these women knew each other; thoughts of Mary's anointing certainly must have occupied the three, wondering how these events all tie in with each other. After all, the recent the words of Jesus to Martha about him being the resurrection and life were echoing in their ears.

So when the three made their way to the tomb *lian proi* literally as "exceedingly early" which seems to be at the crack of dawn. This infers that they didn't sleep the night before...impossible...and once having prepared the spices, set off. During this time the three barely spoke with each other; their sorrow was too deep but was matched by their determination to honor their friend. While making their way to the tomb they seemed to have forgotten one important thing, the stone blocking its entrance. This is reminiscent of the stone over the well which required a number of shepherds to remove (cf Gen 29.1+). However, Jacob was able to do it on his own. Familiarity with that story must have encouraged the women that someone...perhaps Jacob himself...had their best interests at heart.

The three women seemed to enter the tomb without hesitation which shows their courage and determination to honor Jesus. Then their torches caught sight of a young man (*neaniskon*) already there sitting down most likely near where Jesus' body had been placed.

Nothing is said of his identity, the white robe in which he was clad could be part of the burial shroud of Jesus. As for Mary Magdalene, the other Mary and Salome, we have no response; in fact, there's no need to record it since it's so obvious. Indeed, the *neaniskon* in the tomb could have been Jacob himself sent to remove the stone to its entrance. Getting back to that incident, Jacob had just experience his dream at Bethel where angels were ascending and descending a ladder set up between heaven and earth. Thus he's a likely candidate for being the young man. The three women didn't dare to ask because it was self-evident.

The young man's first words, stated in a rather matter-of-fact way, are "do not be amazed" or *ekthaumbeo*, to be alarmed thoroughly, *ek-* or "from" intensifying the sense of this verb. It's something Jacob himself might have said, another clue that the young man just might be he. Next he points out the place where Jesus' body had been placed (again, matter-of-factly) and tells Mary Magdalene, the other Mary and Salome to go to Peter. That must have confused, even angered them. They were fully aware that Peter had betrayed Jesus which may have made them question the young man's identity. In other words, was this a hoax, he even being the devil in disguise instead of Jacob?

And so the three women decided to follow what the young man had told them. Why not at this point? If it were a hoax or deception, they'd meet Peter and rebuke him roundly for his betrayal of Jesus. Note that the young man says "he is going," *proago* (also as to lead forth, *pro-*, before) being in the present tense which means Jesus is in the act of going to Galilee. This means that he is walking there, not be transported as by an angel or the like. You'd think that the young man would tell them to hasten after Jesus and if possible, overtaking him before reaching Galilee. No, instead, they are to tell Peter about what had happened...this going apparently a going in exact opposite direction of Jesus. So for them to act on this command shows their great faith and devotion.

## **8 April, Second Sunday of Easter**

*19) On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20) When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.*

*Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21) Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." 22) And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23) If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24) Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25) So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my finger in the mark of the nails and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

26) Eight days later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27) Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless but believing." 28) Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29) Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." 30) Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; 31) but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. John 20.19-31

*Kleio* and *phobos* or shut (doors) and fear, pretty much summing up the apostles' condition after the crucifixion of Jesus. Their first tendency is naturally to self-preservation which they did not individually but as a group. This is significant because it says something in their favor although they didn't realize it at the time. Automatically they bonded together instead of fleeing this way or that which seems to have been the case after Jesus was crucified. The minds of the apostles were *kleio* and *phobos* as they recalled their cowardly behavior and regretted it bitterly. Here is a perfect condition not just for disagreement but for a fight among themselves, another factor working on their behalf.

With *kleio* and *phobos* hanging over the disciples' heads Jesus came and stood among them. Nothing is said of his coming, of how he penetrated the two barriers, but he did so. The verb "to be" is used for the RSV's "stood" implying a certain being from there to here (for lack of a better way of putting it) and reads literally as "into the midst" or *eis to meson*, that is, into the very center of the disciples. Obviously Jesus knew their state of minds which is why he said "Peace (*eirene*) be with you." He didn't elaborate on this as all looked on but showed them his wounds.

Vs. 20 says in an apparent prosaic manner that the disciples were glad to see him, accurate enough, because they were caught in between their joy and that *kleio* along with *phobos*. Because of this Jesus repeated his greetings and without going into any explanations or the like gets right down to business. Now he is sending the disciples (*apostello*) in the same way the Father has sent (*pempo*) him. Immediately they recalled his words uttered just a few days ago, "As you have sent (*apostello*) me into the world, so I have sent (*apostello*) them into the world" [17.18]. Note that the first first has two verbs for sending, *apostello* from which apostle is derived and *pempo* which connotes a dismissing or sending forth. As for the second verse, *apostello* is used twice showing that the mission (into the world, that is) is identical with regard to Jesus and his disciples.

Again before the disciples could speak (the reason why Jesus speaks so quickly as to preclude this), he gives them the Holy Spirit, *emphusao* with the preposition *em-* as "in." I.e., Jesus breathed in the disciples, not upon them. Fundamentally the idea behind this

verb is to play a musical instrument, to blow into it. After such blowing-in the disciples are to receive or *lambano* (also as to take) the Holy Spirit, the divine *Pneuma* or divine breath. Sequentially put, first they are the objects of Jesus' breathing-in without them asking for it and then receive it as *Pneuma*. Such a twofold gesture of *emphusao* into *Pneuma* effected as one has a purpose, namely, for both forgiving and retaining sins. At this point the disciples hadn't a clue as to what this meant. That would come later with the descent of the *Pneuma* at Pentecost. For now they are to husband this *Pneuma* which will reveal the meaning of this forgiving and retaining. The difference between this and that *Pneuma*? It isn't twofold or divided; the one at hand is ministerial and the second to come is ecclesiastical.

Thomas wasn't present with the disciples, the reason for which isn't given. Eight days later all assembled in apparently the same house but with a slight difference, a *klieo* of the doors but no *phobos* implying that the disciples were at the halfway point of recovery, if you will. While this was going on within them, they and Thomas must have been arguing about his failure to have shown up the first time. He came off with all kinds of excuses not knowing whether to simply run away and be down with it or come back under strong persuasion by his companions. Now as in vs. 19 Jesus "was" (i.e., not 'stood') *eis to meson*. Now Jesus invited Thomas to actually put his hands into his wounds that he may believe. Such words may have prompted John, author of this gospel, to write later with Thomas' being consulted "that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the world of life" [1Jn 1.1].

### 15 April, Third Sunday of Easter

*35) Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. 36) As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them. 37) But they were startled and frightened and supposed that they saw a spirit. 38) And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? 39) See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have." 41) And while they still disbelieved for joy and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42) They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43) and he took it and ate before them. 44) Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45) Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures 46) and said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47) and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. 48) You are witnesses of these things. Luke 24.35-48*

This excerpt comes on the heels of the disciples having encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Upon rushing back to Jerusalem, the two who had met him (one is Cleopas; the



other remains anonymous) informed the eleven how he was known (*gignosko*, to recognize) in the breaking of bread. What's interesting here is that the two aren't recorded as being present at the so-called Last Supper just a few days ago. In this short interval the two men experienced a second Last Supper, if you will, implying that a primary way of recognizing Jesus...*gignosko* him...is in the context of a supper which takes place at evening, and evening can be associated with the beginning of the Sabbath.

Then as if he were watching inside from the outside, Jesus makes his appearance and "stood among them." This is a situation identical to the one of the previous Gospel where Jesus doesn't stand but is into the midst, as it's put literally (*eis to meson*). The Greek text has "Peace be to you" which is lacking in the RSV. Obviously the disciples were startled and frightened, *ptoeo* and *emphobos* or to be terrified and cast into fear, *em-* as prefaced to the second word suggestive of this in-ness...in sum, frightened through and through. To them Jesus was a spirit or *pneuma*, here in the rather derogatory sense of being a breath.

Jesus knew he had a captive audience while their *eis to meson*, so he made the best of it by asking why the disciples were troubled and were filled with questionings. *Tarasso* suggests being agitated whereas *dialogismos* are what give rise to such agitation...in sum, a whole slew of uncontrollable images and thoughts rushing through (*dia-*) the mind. Then in a gesture similar to that of Thomas noted in the previous excerpt, Jesus asks everyone to take turns to what amounts to feeling him. The verb *pselaphao* is revealing, for it means not just feeling but groping about as a blind man. One also gets the idea of this verb applied to feeling fruit and vegetables in the market, that is, to test their character. *Pselaphao* is the verb quoted in 1Jn 1.1, again as in the excerpt above: "that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the world of life."

Vs. 41 puts the disciples' response interestingly: they failed to believe out of sheer joy. In other words, their joy was the point of recognition but didn't catch up yet with their minds which still needed time to grasp what was going on. To dispel this, Jesus changes the subject immediately by asking for something to eat, the disciples looking on with remnants of that disbelief characterized by sheer joy. Again, it's helpful to keep in mind that Jesus is *eis to meson* or at the very center of the disciples with all eyes transfixed upon him as he simply ate.

Jesus was fully aware of the situation's awkwardness which prompts him to change the subject matter. He explains, albeit briefly, that what Moses had put down in the law...the Torah...along with the prophets and psalms had to be fulfilled, *pleroo* meaning to come to completion. Until then, these three foundations of Judaism remained weak and not capable of supporting much weight, if you will. This led Jesus into opening the disciples' minds, *nous* being singular, "the mind of the disciples." *Dianoigo* is the verb to open, the preposition *dia-* suggestive of through-ness, of passing from one point to another. Such

opening-through is aimed at an understanding of the scriptures, *suniami*, a bringing or sitting together (*sun-*). The idea is that Jesus did not or could not, given the restraints of time, go through a detailed explanation of scripture pertaining to him but set in motion the process of *dianoigo*, or opening-through in their regard. This, of course, is to be continued in the church after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and continue along the lines of studying Torah as the Jews are accustomed to do it.

The infinite amount of work remaining to be *dianoigo* is not unlike John's concluding remarks, "But there are also many other things which Jesus did were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" [Jn 21.25]. Surely Luke must have had this in mind from his fellow evangelist author.

Jesus gives a general twofold aim of the *dianoigo* at hand, that is, he speaks of "thus it is written" concerning his sufferings, inferring Hos 6.2: "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him." That's the first and primary aim followed by the second, the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sin, the well-known *metanoia* and the lesser one of *aphesis*. Jesus doesn't say outright that the disciples are to do this preaching. Rather in vs. 48 he says that they are to be witnesses of these things (*martus*) which are to be done literally "into all the nations." Implied is that they are to watch the preaching of *metanoia* and *aphesis*.

The disciples were left quite confused, of how to reconcile all these things which seem contradictory. Jesus recognized this which is why he sends the promise of his Father, his *epaggelia* (also as consent) upon them. This is in vs. 49 which isn't part of today's gospel excerpt but added for clarity. Note the double use of the preposition *epi* or upon: prefaced to *epaggelia* and with regard to the disciples. Vs. 49 concludes with Jesus bidding the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high, the preposition *en-* prefaced to *enduo* suggestive of in-ness.

## **22 April, Fourth Sunday of Easter**

*1) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12) He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13) He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. 14) I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, 15) as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16) And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. 17) For this reason the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it again. 18) No one takes it from me, but I lay it*

*down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father." John 10.11-18*

To many of those listening this passage evokes the first verse of Psalm Twenty-Three, "The Lord is my shepherd." It's not surprising since for them as well as for countless generations down to today it has been a source of support. *Rahah* is the noun for shepherd from which is also derived *raheyah* (love) as found in nine places in the Song of Songs, one being 2.10, "Rise up, my love, my fair one." Also the adjective "good" or *kalos* fundamentally means that which is beautiful, and Christ seems to go out of his way to apply it to himself as a means of identification..."the beautiful shepherd," if you will.

The "beautiful" shepherd differs from one who is hired or *misthos* about whom there is nothing *kalos* because he flees at the sight of danger such as a wolf. As if to drive home the point of this *kalos*-ness, Jesus calls himself such a second time with regard to knowing his own and they knowing him. Thus between him and them is a shared *gignosko* or intimacy. Furthermore, such *gignosko* is between the Father and Jesus which is why Jesus can transfer it to those under his guidance.

In vs. 16 Jesus speaks of having other sheep whom he must bring into his fold which means they need to share in the twofold nature of *gignosko* outline above. Until then, they lack it and know it. This means that already they are in his possession; it's a question simply of moving them. As for these sheep, usually they are viewed as not belonging to Judaism. Uniting the two flocks is why the Father loves Jesus, *agapao*, the verb from which *agape* is derived. More specifically, this *agapao* takes the form of Jesus laying down his life to take it up again...*tithemi* and *lambano* being the verbs alternately as to put and to receive. As for taking away Jesus' life, no one has the ability to do so because it's a charge from the Father, *entole* also as commandment or injunction. To be more specific with regard to this *entole*, Jesus has it *para* the Father, that preposition connoting being alongside him or close by him. So in the long run, *para* as it stands in relationship to the two divine persons is what Jesus wishes to impart to the two flocks. Once they realize what it means with their relationship, they won't view each other as antagonistic. This may sound idealistic but is based on the relationship between two divine Persons.

## **29 April, Fifth Sunday of Easter**

*1) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2) Every branch of mine that bears no fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prune, that it may bear more fruit. 3) You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. 4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5) I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it*

*is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6) If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. 7) If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. 8) By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15.1-8*

The following is taken from **St. John's Gospel 14-17** posted elsewhere on this homepage.

Vs. 1: I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser.

Vine (*ampelos*): two other reference in St. John's Gospel, vss. 4 & 5. For another verse, cf. Mt 26.29: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." In the verse at hand, the adjective sets off Christ from other vines who may imitate him. There is no adjective pertaining to the Father as vine dresser.

Vine dresser (*georgos*): the only use of this term in St. John's Gospel which more specifically pertains to a farmer. "There was a householder who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it and dug a wine press in it and built a tower and let it out to tenants (*georgos*) and went into another country" [Mt 21.33].

Vs. 2: Every branch of mine that bears no fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit.

Branch (*klema*): the only New Testament uses are in vss. 4, 5 & 6.

Of mine: the Greek text reads "in (*en*) me."

Bears (*phero*, three uses): next reference is vs. 4. It is the common verb which alternately means to carry.

Fruit (*karpos*, three uses): the next reference is vs. 4. "He who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together" [4.36].

He takes away (*airo*): the verb connotes a lifting up or a transference from one place to another. "And no one will take your joy from you" [16.22].

Prunes (*kathairo*): the only other New Testament reference is Heb 10.2 as to cleanse: "If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin." Although *kathairo* and *airo* are two different verbs, note the similarity of their sound with the context of vs. 2.

Vs. 3: You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you.

Made clean (*katharos*): an adjective. Two reference in St. John's Gospel, 13.10 & 11.

By (*dia*) the word (*logos*): the preposition suggests through-ness or penetration by the *logos*.

Vs. 4: Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine neither can you unless you abide in me.

Abide (*meno*, three uses): first noted in 14.10 with respect to the Father in Christ.  
In (*en*) me: this phrase is used twice and is countered by "in you."  
In vs. 2 the Father prunes the branch whereas here it abides in the vine or Christ.

Vs. 5: I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

"I am the vine:" compare with vs. 1, "I am the true vine." Perhaps the adjective true is a way of contrasting it with the disciples as branches.

Much fruit (*karpos*): the result of the mutual in-ness with respect to abiding, *meno*.  
Apart (*choris*) from me: connotes apartness in contrast with the use of in.

Vs. 6: If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.

*En/meno*: contrasted with being cast forth (*exo*) or thrown outside. Compare with the pruning action of vs. 2.

Withers (*xeraino*): the only use of this verb in St. John's Gospel. "But when the sun rose they (seeds) were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away" [Mt 13.6].

Are gathered (*sunago*): note the preposition *sun* (with). "He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life" [4.36].

(Are) thrown (*ballo*): location is into (*eis*) the fire.

(Are) burned (*kaio*): the other use of this verb is 5.35, "He was a burning and shining lamp." Note the passiveness of the three verbs with no specification as to whom is doing it.

Vs. 7: If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you.

Abide (*meno*): two uses in conjunction with the preposition *en* (in) but with the distinction of Christ's words (*rhema*, cf. 14.9) as opposed to himself or the Holy Spirit.

Will (*thelo*): also as desiring and wanting. "Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am" [17.24].

Vs. 8: By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

By this: in other words, the disciples abiding in Christ.

Is glorified (*doxazo*): first noted in 14.13 with respect to the Son. The verb implies a sense of holding in honor as well as recognizing.

Much fruit (*karpos*): the same phrase last noted in vs. 5.

Prove to be: the Greek text has the verb *ginomai*, to become.

My disciples (*mathetes*, singular): connotes being a learner, a pupil. This is the first use of the term in this document, the next being 16.17.

## 6 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

9) *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.* 10) *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.* 11) *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* 12) *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* 13) *Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* 14) *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* 15) *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.* 16) *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.* 17) *This I command you, to love one another.* John 15.9-17

Please note that this excerpt is lifted from another file on the lectio divina home page entitled St John's Gospel 14-17.

Vs. 9: As the Father has loved me so have I loved you; abide in my love.

As/so (*kathos/kago*): the latter is a contracted form of *kai ego*, "and I."

*Agapao* (twice): last reference is 14.31 with reference to Christ concerning the Father.

Abide (*meno*): the last reference is vs. 7 also with respect to Christ's words.

My love (*agape*): here with the preposition *en* (in); the first use of this term in this document, the next being vs. 10.

Vs. 10: If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Keep (*tereo*): last reference is 14.24 with respect to "my words."

Commandments (*entole*, singular): last reference is 14.21 where the person already has them.

You will abide (*meno*): first time this verb occurs in the future tense intensified by the preposition *en* (in) with respect to *agape*.

I have kept (*tereo*): past tense or action already accomplished and contrasted with the disciples' "if." This is first reference with respect to Christ and the Father's commandments which are not specified.

In (*en*) his love (*agape*): compare with "in my love."

Vs. 11: These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

My joy (*chara*, twice): first use of this term in this document, the next reference being 16.24 with respect to "your joy."

In (*en*) you: Christ's joy which is changed, as it were, to "your joy."



May be full (*pleroo*): compare with 17.13, “that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”

Vs. 12: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

May love (*agapao*): conditioned upon *kathos* (as). Compare with the plurality of “my commandments” in vs. 10.

Vs. 13: Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Lay down (*tithemi*): alternately, `to put,` `to place.`

His life (*psuche*): as opposed to biological existence. St. John`s Gospel has two other uses of this noun, 13.37 & 38.

For (*huper*): genitive case used; the accusative means `beyond.`

His friends (*philos*, singular): the next reference is vs. 14. `The friend of the bridegroom...rejoices greatly at the bridegroom`s voice` [3.29].

Vs. 14: You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Command (*entellomai*): the other use of this term in the Gospel is 14.31 with reference to Christ and the Father.

Vs. 15: No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Do I call (*lego*): the common verb which alternately means `to speak` and from which is derived *logos*.

Servants (*doulos*, singular and used twice): alternately as “slave” and next used in vs. 20.

Master (*kurios*): alternately as “lord” and next used in vs. 20.

Friends (*philos*, singular): last noted in vs. 13. Thus one verse contains three social strata: servant, master and friend.

From (*para*) my Father: by reason of being beside him from which comes this hearing and friendship.

Made known (*gnorizo*): the other use of this term (twice) is 17.26, “But I made known to them your name, and I will make it known.” *Gnorizo* has a causative sense, of recognizing, compared with *ginosko* as in 14.7.

Vs. 16: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Choose (*eklego*, twice): with the connotation of choosing for oneself; next reference is vs. 19, “out of this world.” Note the preposition *ek* (from) prefixed to the verb.

Appointed (*tithemi*): cf. vs. 13 for an alternate meaning.

Should go (*hupago*): cf. 14.28. Note the preposition *hupo* prefaced to the verb.

Bear fruit (*karpos*, twice): last noted in 15.8, “much fruit.”

-Should abide (*meno*): first noted in 14.10 as “remain” and from which “room” is derived, 14.2.

In (*en*) my name: the place, as it were, where the disciples are to make their requests.

Vs. 17: This I command you, to love one another.

This: the Greek text has “these.”

Command (*entellomai*): cf. 14.31 with reference to the Father.

Love (*agapao*): cf. vs. 12 for a similar passage.

## 10 May, The Ascension

*15) And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. 16) He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17) And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18) they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." 19) So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20) And they went forth and preached everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen. Mark 16.15-20*

The small, seemingly insignificant conjunctive “and” has direct bearing upon the contents of this excerpt. There Jesus upbraids the eleven disciples for not having believed those who saw him after his resurrection. This seems to refer to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome...in other words, witness by women was not to be relied upon. More to the point, the disciples are guilty of not assenting to a first-hand witness which is essential to the transmission of the new faith and as well as to the very beginning of the Christian tradition. If the witness of those who held converse with Jesus Christ after his resurrection can't be believed, might as well stop there and go no further. And so the disciples were in a bind: either accept female testimony or not. If not, the essence of the Christian message is pretty much dead on arrival..

At the same time Jesus had to overlook this, knowing that he had to rely upon the disciples. At least Pentecost is around the corner which will transform them. With that ultimate goal in mind he bids them to go not into the world but into the *whole* world...in other words, to go everywhere on the planet which for starters, was limited essentially to lands adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea. As for the gospel or good news at this early juncture, it boils down to the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Again, it has its origins with three women. Anything else pertinent to his life and teaching can be worked backward from that

point. So the disciples are commissioned to fulfill what they had denied and for that reason must have felt quite embarrassed.

Baptism is the prerequisite for membership in what will become a new community, this rite familiar to their exposure to John the Baptist, directly or indirectly. After all, Jesus himself was baptized by John. Jesus puts baptism in stark terms: the person who doesn't accept it will be condemned. He doesn't spell out how or even if newly baptized people will stick together, that being left pretty much in the air but presumed. The main thing is for the disciples to preach the basics concerning Jesus' message, the good news.

Those who have heard the preaching and believed will be accompanied by signs, *seimeion* also applicable to a prodigy or portent. *Seimeion* takes on a rather dramatic character as recounted in vss. 17-18, not as an end but pretty much as an incentive. The problem with *seimeion* is weaning people off them, not the most important nor immediate task of the disciples who are to focus is to go out "to the whole world."

What Jesus had just given as a commission is simple and leaves the rest...actually a lot...to be worked out, a fact which must have concerned the disciples during this interim period between the Resurrection-Ascension and Pentecost. After Pentecost this dilemma would be solved. They simply started to preach and to heal.

Vs. 19 says in a straight-forward way that Jesus was taken up into heaven where he sat down at God's right hand. Chances are the disciples didn't see this literally. If taken as such, it would be not unlike the naked eye trying to follow a rocket while being launched into space. One way of absorbing this is to compare the ascending of Jesus with the soon to come descent of the Holy Spirit. Once filled with this (descended) Spirit, the disciples were in a better position to articulate their experience of Jesus after the resurrection. Yet the Spirit doesn't descend, technically speaking. A sound (*echos*, more a roar) from heaven fills the house. In other words, the Spirit-as-*echos* precluded them from sticking with resurrection-like terminology. If they did, they'd run into all sorts of difficulties in their attempts to explain where Jesus is...or is not. In other words, Jesus has to get out of the picture to enter it more fully which he does through the mediation of another divine person.

Vs. 20 closes with a paradox: right after Jesus ascended, the disciples went out preaching, he working with them. Also he confirmed the message or the *logos* (word as expression, the disciples accompanied by Christ the *Logos*) by signs (*seimeion* again) that went with them. The verb here is *epakoloutheo*, to follow closely or after, the preposition *epi-* meaning upon, literally, to follow upon. It gives the picture of Jesus being present yet absent simultaneously, he being *epi* or upon them, just out of their sight (*epi* as upon fits in well with his ascension) yet felt as hovering in a kind of weighty though protective way. It ties in

well with two dynamics at work: Jesus ascended (*ana-lambano*) and Jesus working with the disciples (*sun-ergeo*)...*ana-* and *sun-* or upward and with taken as one. As for as the latter, most likely the text is referring to what the disciples did after Pentecost, not before, for other scriptures state how fearful they were prior to the Spirit's presence.

All in all, Mark's gospel is very succinct, giving just the basics. It's presented this way as a kind of outline enabling, members of the new Christian community to flesh out its meaning in this way and that but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So what began in conjunction with vs. 14 as Jesus upbraiding his disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart, ends with a softening of these hearts.