

Liturgical Reflections 2020

This series of reflections¹ traces its roots to 2007 and has continued ever since. From that year until now all three readings have been examined sequentially. That is to say, they follow the pattern laid out for the Catholic Church in the United States, the year 2020 being “Year A.” As for last year (2019), the first readings were examined, usually from the Old Testament. This time around reflections are on the third reading (that is, the Gospel). As with them all, they are considered through the lens of *lectio divina*, that slow, meditative reading which has as its goal a prayerful resting in God.

Please note that I hadn’t looked to see if the excerpts here correspond with any from the previous years...perhaps yes, perhaps no. That, of course, is of no real issue. Always there is plenty of material waiting to be discovered. A good way to sum this is up is to quote from the conclusion of St John’s Gospel: “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.”

Many if not most entries in the previous documents attempted to take a given passage as a whole. That meant going through the text attempting to make notations on just about all the words. While that’s perfectly fine, in the case at hand attention is more on one feature of the text, that being either the direct or indirect (i.e., implied) quotes from the Old Testament. That will give this year’s treatment of the excerpts a slightly different twist.

For those not that familiar with the liturgical year of the Catholic Church, here is a brief outline lifted from the online liturgical calendar put out by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

PRINCIPAL CELEBRATIONS OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR 2020

First Sunday of Advent December 1, 2019
Ash Wednesday February 26, 2020
Easter Sunday April 12, 2020
The Ascension of the Lord [Thursday] May 21, 2020
Pentecost Sunday May 31, 2020
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ June 14, 2020
First Sunday of Advent November 29, 2020

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1 December, First Sunday of Advent

¹ Other major liturgical feast days are included.

37) *As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. 38) For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39) and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. 40) Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. 41) Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. 42) Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43) But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. 44) Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.* Matthew 24.37-44

The readings of the last few weeks of the previous liturgical year and those beginning Advent never cease to amaze by reason of their sameness. If there weren't any visible signs of a transition from one liturgical year to another, you'd never know it by their overall theme. That is to say, the two halves deal with "last things." The first (it includes the somber ambiance of November, month of commemorating the dead) winding down to the so-called end time whereas the second, a continuation of that theme but with preparing for the eruption into history by God in Jesus Christ.

As for today's Gospel, it's preceded by vs. 36 which helps put all this into perspective: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son but the Father only." Note use both of day and hour, a way of expressing a *kairos* event or a divine intervention. Here the context is Jesus using Noah and the coming of the Son of man. We could say that Noah was the only person in human history who knew the day and hour when God will destroy the earth (with water). Compare this knowing with vs. 42, "for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."

Such knowledge leads to the importance of Gn 6.5-6 when the Lord saw that wickedness abounded on the earth, a fact which caused him regret at having created them. One other huge disappoint in scripture, touching in many ways, is Israel's rejection of the Lord as king: "But they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" [1Sam 8.7]. After the Lord muses within himself in the next few verses of the Genesis text we have the important verse "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" [vs. 8]. The text goes on to say that Noah was righteous (an echo of Abraham?), etc., which, if you take the entire human race as presented here, is ridiculously tiny. Nothing, however, is said of his family participating in this righteousness.

As for this finding of divine favor (*chen* also as grace or good-will), the text is clear that Noah doesn't find it (the common verb *matsa'*) but the Lord does. You get the idea that the Lord had to go through a countless number of human beings as they are going about their evil ways--"not this one,' 'not that one,' etc.--until he hit upon Noah. Apparently Noah was unaware of this *matsa'* until in vs. 13 the Lord reveals his intent. This is expressed literally as "come to my face." The evil was so overwhelming that it hit the Lord smack in his face...again, not entirely dissimilar to Israel rejecting him as being their king.

As for making the Gospel text at hand jibe with the Genesis one, note in vs. 37 the two words *hosper* and *houtos*, so and as. The first corresponds to what was transpiring in Noah's time whereas the second carries this over to the present or when Christ is speaking. Thus the *hosper* of the "days of Noah" are transformed into the "coming of the Son of man." So instead of building an ark as with Noah, those listening to Jesus are to enter the ark of the new community, the church he's in process of establishing.

In response to this *hosper* and *houtos* or so and as and instead of entering a physical ark, Jesus bids his listeners to be ready (*hetoimos*) for something that will happen in the near future. The major difference between Noah and Jesus' coming is that Noah had advanced warning whereas those hearing Jesus are ignorant of when he will come. However, he leaves a hint. That consists of an hour which people don't expect, *dokeo* also as to think, to suppose, to imagine. In other words, people may hear Jesus' words and have plenty of *dokeo* about them which in the end is useless. So abandon *dokeo* and you'll be on the right path. Note that Jesus here speaks of "hour," leaving out "day" whereas vs. 36 has "day and hour." If we take that literally, the time frame is whittled down considerably, thereby allowing for more focus.

7 December, Second Sunday of Advent

1) In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3) For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." 4) Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5) Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, 6) and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7) But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8) Bear fruit that befits repentance 9) and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10) Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11) "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12) His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Matthew 3.1-12

The way the liturgical calendar presents events at times seems scattered all over the place. For example, last Sunday's reading was from the end of Matthew whereas today's is at the beginning. Such a mixture is seen as disjointed only from the vantage of temporal sequence. The liturgical calendar is not of that order but transcends it which doesn't mean you can breeze through it in a casual manner. For some, this seeming disregard may take some acclimation, but once you do, you're primed for a wholly different way of viewing events.

The last paragraph spoke of the liturgy's different way of viewing events. Now we have an example (though not disjointed), "In those days." This is an almost magical way...a cue...of introducing real historical events which help us get comfortable with them and be disposed for hearing a story about to unfold. The phrase has the unique ability to work as such regardless of how many times we've heard this story. Furthermore, the verb *paragignomai* or "came" enhances the mood. It means to be near, to attend, the preposition *para-* suggestive of a presence nearby but not quite within our reach. In other words, it intimates presence but one which we can't manipulate to our own end. Such is the case with the Baptist coming on the scene.

As for the days at hand, there's an unbroken link between the present (John the Baptist) and the past (Isaiah). That link consists of "repent" or *metanoeo*, literally as to put one's mind after (*meta-*). The reason for this putting of one's mind after, of reorganizing it? The kingdom of heaven is *eggizo*, literally to draw near. In other words, it isn't present but at the same time not far away. John quotes Isaiah as to him being the agent of this *eggizo*. That is to say, John's *eggizo* consists in being a voice crying in the wilderness. Note how it's effected, *qol* and *qara'*, voice and to cry, two similar sounding words.

As for this crying, it's aimed at persons who are not in the desert but sufficiently close and who are sensitive to hearing it, not unlike the moaning sound of wind blowing across the sand. The faintness of such *qara'* makes it all the more intriguing and downright mysterious. In the context at hand, plenty of people heeded this *qol*, for they went into the desert where they were baptized. In other words, they were completely mesmerized by the *qol qara'*.

The *qol* makes a second appearance in Isaiah which isn't mentioned but can be implied in today's Gospel. "A voice says, 'Cry!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All flesh is grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field" [vs 6]. A bit later on this *qol* and *qara'* mirrored by the first one finds its fulfillment in the fact "that the word of our God will stand forever." Now *davar* takes up both the *qara'* of Isaiah and John, for this noun implies word-as-expression, not unlike the Greek *logos*. Note that it literally "rises forever," the verb being *qum*, that it never sinks but grows continuously.

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 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

This passage begins with a specific time and place with regard to the angel Gabriel, focus of attention in these notations. Because of this, I include two excerpts lifted from **Expansions on the Book of Daniel**, also on this homepage. Gabriel is mentioned in just two verses of Daniel which run respectively followed by the excerpts:

8.16: "And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, 'Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.'"

Apparently Daniel's vision is focused towards the front or towards the appearance of the man, but suddenly he hears a human voice (*qol*, cf. 4.31) from behind. As soon as Daniel heard it, instinctively he knew it was better not to turn around but to remain stationary to see what would happen. The person behind the voice might approach him or prefer to remain unseen. The voice was not directed to Daniel but to Gabriel who as yet remains unidentified and is mentioned one other time in 9.21. After that he disappears from the narrative. After all, Gabriel is in the *mar'eh*...appearance...of a man, not a man proper which means he has some kind of heavenly nature.

9.21: "While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel whom I had seen in the vision and the first came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice." A bit later it goes on to say, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding."

As noted in the previous verse, this is the second use of *hod* or "while," continuous action which is put in terms of "speaking in prayer," *palal* (cf. vs. 20). The *shamah* so desperately wanted by Daniel from the Lord is answered by the re-appearance of Gabriel noted last in 8.16 who had the "appearance of a man" compared with here, "the man." There Gabriel made known the vision to Daniel. If he could do that, certainly he would assist now. Gabriel may not have the authority to restore Israel but certainly could take up Daniel's intercession and present it before the Lord. So all along he had been listening in on Daniel, this being the preferred means of communication rather than by sight...and decided to step in before the Lord. That is to say, Gabriel thought the Lord was delaying too long in his response, so he decided to step in.

Gabriel approached Daniel "in swift flight" which is rendered by the noun *yephaph* and (it means weariness) and the verb *yaphaph*, to be weary. The idea seems to be that being swift makes one tired quickly. "None who seek her need weary themselves" [Is 2.24]. Gabriel flies to Daniel at a special time, that of the "sacrifice" (*minchah*) which takes place at evening. Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice" [Ps 141.2]! This is the only use of the phrase in the Book of Daniel. While it hearkens back to the sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem, perhaps this tradition was carried on in modified form in Babylon. Since it is evening and smoke from the offering is ascending into heaven, it is the perfect disguise for

Gabriel to come without anyone knowing his identity except Daniel. The incident is reminiscent of Zechariah when Gabriel himself makes his appearance “at the hour of incense” [Lk 1.10] and makes a prophecy concerning the birth of John the Baptist. And so Gabriel seems fond of revealing himself, albeit partially, at evening and within a cloud of incense or smoke from burnt offerings.

Such is the identity of Gabriel, meager but significant, insofar as both quotes are the only ones which tie in with the Gospel. So between the time of Daniel and the present one Gabriel was doing nothing, pretty much so. After dealing with Mary, he passes off the scene for good. This is putting it somewhat crudely but intended to intimate how things spiritual interact with the material world where the element of space and time are secondary. Note that the two passages not speak of Gabriel as an angel, only Luke does this, *aggelos* fundamentally as messenger. While important, such a function is secondary to the one bearing it.

15 December, Third Sunday of Advent

2) Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3) and said to him, "Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?" 4) And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5) the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6) And blessed is he who takes no offense at me." 7) As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? 8) Why then did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings' houses. 9) Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you and more than a prophet. 10) This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face who shall prepare your way before you.' 11) Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Matthew 11.2-11

The interesting part about this passage is the separation between disciple and master. While it could have been possible for Jesus to visit John in prison, going there in disguise, there was no need. Two other instances come to mind as to this distance which Jesus chooses deliberately, rebuking Martha in favor of her sister Mary and the famous “Do not touch (or cling) to me” with regard to Mary after Jesus’ resurrection. The Gospels contain such instances which are subtle by reason of their indirectness. After all, Jesus is attempting to communicate something familiar (based on their Jewish religion) and something new. No small wonder that people often were at a loss. Reflection upon them much later on would come into clearer focus with the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

As to the question John the Baptist posed Jesus through his disciples, Jesus responds not directly but by the marvelous effect his deeds and words were having upon people. After imparting this message, Jesus waits a bit for the messenger to depart, for they didn’t hang around to hear him speak about himself in reference to the prophet Malachi. That, of course, is another sign of Jesus preferring to keep a certain distance. The reference at hand would have been known to John who

was familiar with the prophets speaking of Jesus' coming. It took a lot of spiritual discipline, not just study, to discern this. Most likely John continued to do his "research" in prison, consulting the scriptures as well visitors and those who acted as a go-between with Jesus.

Once John's disciples were sent on their way, Jesus could speak more freely about his mission. Before he situates it the context of Mal 3.1, note the rapid fire questions he poses to the people. Why were they drawn to the wilderness? They wanted to see something unusual. Some now had their doubts. Contrast this desire to seeing something extraordinary with Mt 3.3 cited above which centers around speaking and thus listening: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" In other words, seeing is superseded by hearing and in this instance is more reliable.

As for the Malachi quote, it runs in full as: "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." John the Baptist, of course, need not heard these words, for already he had proclaimed them using the prophet Isaiah. That's why Jesus referred to him as being so great. However, in comparison to anyone least in the kingdom of heaven, that person is far greater. This must have set the ears of Jesus' listeners on edge: both confused and joyous at the prospect. And so the people began not to listen to John even though his message still resounded from prison which did not detract from his life as a fulfillment of what he had realized earlier, "He must increase, but I must decrease" [Jn 3.30]. John knows that it's enough for him to hear the bridegroom's voice, that voice as *qol* noted in the Gospel excerpt above (Mt 3.1-12). There John applies the *qol* of Isaiah to himself which now has been transformed into the *qol* of Christ as bridegroom. In other words, *qol* moves from one person to another yet remaining essentially the same. To get the connection is to get the relationship between the two men and so become "greater than he."

22 December, Fourth Sunday in Advent

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, 5) but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus. Matthew 1.18-25

It's helpful to keep in mind the way this excerpt begins: "the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way" or *houtos* which can translate also as "thus." And so *houtos* invites the listener to pay close

attention to the sequence of events. Indeed, something precious would be missing if the sentence were phrased otherwise, having to do more with the attitude we should adopt. As for *houtos*, it centers around the quote from Is 7.14 which runs in full as “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.” So we have this verse waiting to be fulfilled (*pleroo*, to bring to completion) between the time the Lord addressed King Ahaz and the present or the birth of Jesus Christ.

Because this reminder of Isaiah’s prophecy took place in a dream, it wasn’t difficult for Joseph to associate Immanuel with Jesus who is yet to be born. If it were communicated otherwise as, for example, when he were awake, he would not have grasped the significance of this name. So within Joseph’s dream a sign or *’oth* was handed to him just as it was to King Ahaz who at first refused to ask for it. However, unlike Ahaz, Joseph complied without inquiring further. He maintained the silence for which he has become renowned. Such was the response by two completely different persons concerning the divine *hineh* or “behold.”

As for the *’oth* at hand, 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 because it’s subordinate to the child to whom she will give birth.

Upon waking up from his dream, we can visualize Joseph rushing to open the scroll referring to the passage at hand from Isaiah. Obviously he read the larger context of this verse. Vs. 24 says that an unidentified angel had quoted this verse to him. Almost certainly this same angel was present when the Lord addressed King Ahaz, kept that incident in mind and therefore was well prepared later on to act in a similar fashion with Joseph, Mary’s husband. In this way the angel was bound to get it right.

25 Christmas

Note four options with regards to the readings: vigil, night, dawn and day. The second one is presented here.

1) In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. 2) This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3) And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. 4) And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5) to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6) And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. 7) And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger; because there was no place for them in the inn. 8) And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9) And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. 10) And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; 11) for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12) And this will be a sign for

you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14) "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2.1-14

This passages opens with "in those days" which is similar in spirit to Mt 3.1, Second Sunday in Advent. That is to say, such words set the tone for us to hear the unfolding of a story at a specific period of time. It has nothing to do with a mythological approach as the birth of a god or the like. We witness a remarkable narrowing down all the way from the top of the political heap (Caesar Augustus) to obscure Joseph and Mary at the other end of the Roman Empire. The contrast couldn't be greater between Rome and obscure, troublesome Palestine. Despite this, one gets the sense that generally the entire Mediterranean world was at peace. It set up a perfect condition for what we call the Incarnation, the obscurity of the place of Christ's birth being an added layer of protection from forces that would seek his demise if they could. Even if word reached Caesar as to rumors surrounding what seemed unusual circumstances of a birth, he wouldn't bother noticing. There were far greater things to occupy his mind.

This contrast is ideal for such a major event (*the* major event) in history. The larger world of the Roman Empire, regardless of how the Jews viewed it, offered a certain security and stability for what was to unfold. If it took place, for example, at a slightly later time in history, things wouldn't have worked out as they did. So "in those days" conveys a certain nostalgia for a world at peace. Later when the Jews revolted against Rome and were oppressed severely, people longed for such a world now lost forever. Recapturing such a period may be a temptation, a way of fencing in and freezing the overall atmosphere at the time. However, there had to be a break-out from "in those days" in the sense of an advancement. This attitude, if it were to be pulled off successfully, would have to build on them and bring them to another level.

Taking the long term view, "in those days" reaches fulfillment in the heavenly city depicted in the Book of Revelation. There the heavenly Jerusalem is a kind of second Incarnation "coming down out of heaven from God" [Rev 21.2]. Similar to to the anonymous angel's words "on earth people among men" we have in the next verse of the Revelation quote, "He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them." There the phrase "in those days" will not apply because there is no need for nostalgia which implies having lost something precious.

29 December, Feast of the Holy Family

13) Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14) And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15) and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." 16) Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men. 17) Then was fulfilled

what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 18) "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled because they were no more." 19) But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 20) "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." 21) And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22) But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 23) And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene." Matthew 2.13-15 & 19-23

Three specific instances from the Old Testament essential to the structure of this excerpt are noted here and run as follows:

1) "Out of Egypt have I called my son." The reference is Hos 11.1 which runs in full as "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Without explicit mention, reference is to the Exodus. It was Joseph who after having become second to Pharaoh, summoned his father and brothers to live in Egypt where their descendants remained for some four hundred years. While the Bible leaves us with a distinction impression that Israel had been maltreated in Egypt, in actuality it was only towards the very end of their long residence that this happened. And so for the vast bulk of their stay, the Israelites enjoyed life to the full while at the same time retaining their own identity. Furthermore, we have no reference to Israel having engaged in local religious practices. It seems this occurred only after having left Egypt. So while this verse has a consoling tone to it, the context is far from it. Right afterwards the Lord complains about the Israelites constantly sacrificing to idols which can apply to the forty year exile in the Sinai Desert as well as later once they are established in Israel. In light of this, the Lord must have had second thoughts of taking Israel from Egypt where apparently it was more faithful to him. Another way of looking at this summons is that the Lord is calling Israel to leave its comfort zone and embark on a venture that would involve many risks.

2) "Thus says the Lord: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children because they are not.'" Reference is Jer 31.15 which is fairly close to the one cited here. Both the Greek and original Hebrew are quite blunt as to Rachel's children, "they are not." In other words, blotted out. Compare with Enoch in Gn 5.24, a different "not-ness:" Enoch walks with God; and he was not, for God took him." As for the Jeremiah quote, it refers to the wife of Jacob who had died giving birth to Benoni or Benjamin and was buried near Bethlehem, birth place of Jesus.

3) "He shall be called a Nazarene." The reference is Judg 13.5 which runs in full as "For lo, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Also the critical text of the New Testament adds as a reference vs. 7: "Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son; so then drink no wine or strong drink and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death." Reference is, of course, to Samson who became a judge in Israel yet was seduced by Delilah. The Philistine lords approached her, hoping she could tempt

Samson and hand him over to them. This she did, and shortly afterwards with his own hands he destroyed the Philistine lords and many people gathered to sacrifice to their god, Dagon. Just before his death Samson begged the Lord to remember him just one last time. As for a Nazirite ('consecrated one'), it pertains to a person who took vows to the Lord described in Num 6.1-21 where emphasis is put on this person separating himself for this purpose.

And so the three references may be strung together as such: first, the Lord calls his son Israel from Egypt. As noted above, it can be taken two ways, from slavery and from a comfortable life style that lasted some four hundred years. Then we switch to Rachel who died in childbirth and was buried near Bethlehem, the House of Bread where Jesus was born. Finally Jesus can be represented as a kind of Nazirite who destroyed Israel's enemies. Like Samson, he did this at the cost of his own life.

1 January, Solemnity of Mary, 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 here is to the shepherds who decided to go to Bethlehem after an unidentified angel announced Christ's birth. In vs. 15 they call their sudden contact with the angel "this thing" or *rhema* which fundamentally means that which is spoken, the subject of speech in contrast to *logos* or word as expression. So with this *rhema* echoing within them, the shepherds hastened to Bethlehem, *spoudazo* conveying a sense of determination and earnestness. Nothing is said as to their sheep, whether they simply abandoned them or left them in the care of underlings.

Once at Bethlehem, the shepherds couldn't restrain themselves but immediately made known the saying which here is a second mention of *rhema*. That is to say, it took a *rhema* or word-as-spoken to recognize *Logos* or Word-as-expression. There's no mention of them remaining there or interacting with Mary and Joseph. Perhaps even they didn't realize the shepherds' presence. It's as though as soon as they reached Bethlehem they left. No reason, actually, to linger or carry on a conversation with Mary and Joseph. Seeing the *Logos* in one short but intense glance was enough to affect the rest of their lives.

After having become in a very real way the first evangelists, the shepherds did not return to their flocks right away. They were taken up with eagerly spreading the good news, using their original *rhema* to proclaim the *Logos*. Finally it dawned that they had to get back to those left in charge who similarly received the good news thereby allaying any feeling of having been abandoned. Even if the sheep had been scattered, it didn't matter now.

As time went on, did the shepherds continue with their work? They must have followed very closely the result of their initial evangelization, especially if it had spread. That leads to another question. Did they deal with Jesus while he was young? What, if any, was the connection between the two? Most likely there was no connection, for as noted above the shepherds left Jesus at once satisfied that they had been privy to such a unique event. And like Mary, they kept all these things, pondering them in their hearts. As time went on they shared this pondering and couldn't help but close tabs on Jesus to see how he would develop. Perhaps much latter some even became his followers. Even Jesus' description of himself as Good Shepherd may have been influenced in part from what he had told them.

After eight days came the circumcision when Jesus received his name. This name had been given by the angel who isn't identified here but clearly refers to the angel Gabriel who brought the message to Mary. As for Gabriel, there's nothing to say he was the angel who had appeared to the shepherds. Furthermore, for a full week the baby had no formal name but remained nameless.

5 January, Epiphany of the Lord

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

The attention of all characters within this passage—Herod, the wise men and all Jerusalem—is focused upon a quote from the prophet Micah, 5.2 which runs in full as “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel whose origin is from old, from ancient days.” The insignificant town of Bethlehem (House of Bread) is singled out which is synonymous with Ephrathah (translated as Fruitful). It's mentioned first in Gn 35.16 where Rachel, wife of Jacob, had died after “hard labor”

giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob erected a pillar upon her grave “still there to this day.” In other words, the memory of this place is familiar to virtually everyone.

In the verse at hand the Lord addresses Bethlehem/Ephrathah directly as if it were a person. One could say that he had in mind Rachel and Jacob as well including all the memories between that sad event until the present day. After all, the tomb remained and continues to remain a popular pilgrimage site. The Lord calls this place “little” or *tsahyr* usually in the sense of being the least with regard to Judah’s clans. Despite being *tsahyr*, Bethlehem/Ephrathah will give birth to a ruler in Israel, *moshel*, the alternate verbal root meaning to be like or to be similar.

As for this ruler’s origins, despite coming from insignificant Bethlehem/Ephrathah, they do not lay there. Apart from this, the place is a point of reference in conjunction with Rachel’s tomb. Also it could imply her other son Joseph, destined to become virtually the ruler of Egypt when he invited his family to live there. After some four hundred years they left under Moses’ guidance and returned home or what to them seemed an alien land.

With regard to the unidentified ruler, note the twofold mystery: “from old” and “from ancient days.” The preposition *min* (*m-*) or “from” is prefaced to both, *qedem*, often translated as “before” and prefaced to *yom* (days) which here are *holam*, signifying a remote time. The two are different ways of saying that this unknown and mysterious ruler somehow associated with the significance of Rachel’s tomb cannot be traced even to there. In short, he’s eternal. Both *yom* and *holam* are associated with the ruler’s origin or *motsa’h*, literally a going out.

While this single verse is intended as a reference to Jesus’ birth, those familiar with the prophecy of Micah knew it can’t be lifted out of context but situated within those verses in the same book coming before and after it. In other words, it has a larger context. The former consists of one verse beginning Chapter Five where the Lord addresses Israel as being under siege, those doing it striking the ruler of Israel but apparently not killing him. The verses afterward speak of this ruler who continues to remain unidentified. Shortly after the siege, Israel will be abandoned until an equally unknown woman will give birth a child and who is responsible for restoring Israel. Thus there’s an apparent connection between Rachel (and her son Joseph) and this woman whom we could designate as her successor and new comforter to Jacob.

12 January, Baptism of the Lord

13) Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14) John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15) But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16) And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him; 17) and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3.13-17

Note that the adjective in the last words of this paragraph refers to Jesus as God's beloved son, *agapetos* which derives from *agape*, that untranslatable word pertaining to divine love. There's a striking parallel to the Transfiguration which runs as "This is my *agapetos* son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" [Mt 17.5]. In the first the voice comes from heaven whereas in the second, from the cloud. The second has the Father as being well pleased, *eudokeo* also as to consent followed by the command to listen to Jesus. Surely *eudokeo* applies to the first, but is not appropriate, if you will, at this beginning of Jesus' ministry. He has to not so much to prove this *eudokeo* but make it manifest before being acknowledged as such.

The first has the Spirit or *Pneuma* of God in the form of a dove alighting upon Jesus; the second lacks it. The first has Jesus led into the wilderness to be alone; the second has him and the disciples descending the mountain or leaving the wilderness. So the voice or *phone* of God is operative in both instances. In the first it seems restricted to John who had just baptized Jesus and in the second, to the disciples with him. Also the divine *phone* connects both instances.

Reference to a dove in the first can be seen as an intimation of the Holy Spirit as *Pneuma* after the *phone* had completed its mission on Pentecost with the *Pneuma* descending and resting upon the twelve apostles. Note the difference: in the passage at hand, the *Pneuma* alighted upon Jesus, the common verb *erchomai* meaning to come along with the preposition *epi*, upon. Implied is that the *Pneuma* doesn't just make an appearance and goes away but comes constantly upon Jesus. In the Pentecost account, the *Pneuma* first fills the house and rests on the head of each apostle. The verb is *kathizo* which means to take a seat in a permanent way; also it has the preposition *epi*.

19 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

29) *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30) This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.' 31) I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel." 32) And John bore witness, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. 33) I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34) And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."* John 1.29-34

As for this "next day," it takes place after a delegation from the Pharisees approached John the Baptist as to whether he is the Christ or Elijah. To their question he answered that there's one among them whom they don't know but goes no further than that. This threw them off guard, each man eyeing each other but in the end denying what John had just claimed. So during the rest of the day and that night John must have pondered who exactly is this Christ or Anointed One and when (or if) he will make his appearance. Although was uncertain, he had an inkling that this will occur shortly and it did, the "next day."

John saw Jesus approaching him and immediately exclaimed that he is the Lamb of God, knowing for certain that Jesus is before him. Note the two words signifying this before-ness: *emprosthen* and *protos*. The former also means in front of and the latter first, temporarily speaking. Because of this, John did not know Jesus yet acknowledges his coming. So how do you reconcile such knowing with two instances of before, the latter implying ignorance? John did so by going about his business of baptizing with water which, of course, he was doing all along. During his interaction with so many people over time he knew it would lead to Jesus being revealed, *phaneroo* signifying to be clear or evident. One can just imagine baptizing this person and saying "No, not him" and so forth down the line. Note that such *phaneroo* isn't to John but to Israel which means the nation as a whole would come to recognize Jesus.

Harkening back to before the birth of both John and Jesus, the two had met in the person of their pregnant mothers, Elizabeth and Mary. "For behold, when the voice of your (Mary) greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy" [Lk 1.44]. So right from the beginning, even before his birth, John recognized Jesus through the voice or *phone* of Mary. This voice echoed throughout John's life until he recognized that he is "the *phone* of one crying in the wilderness" [Jn 1.23]. This *phone*, of course, belongs to Isaiah who utters in in Is 40.3. So the original *phone* of Isaiah echoes down to the *phone* of Mary and finally to the *phone* of John the Baptist. Thus we have three instances of *phone*, all tied in with prophecy about the Christ who is the Word or the *Logos* or that which is uttered by the divine *phone*.

As for this triple *phone*, it's appropriate for the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time which comes after the Advent-Christmas season. This year there are seven such Sundays prior to Ash Wednesday, usually a short period of time before the longest stretch of time in the liturgical calendar is celebrated. That is to say, it runs from Lent through Easter to Pentecost.

26 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

12) Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; 13) and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14) that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 15) "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – 16) the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." 17) From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 18) As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19) And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20) Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21) And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father mending their nets, and he called them. 22) Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. 23) And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. Matthew 4.12-23

This Gospel is built around Is 9.1-2 runs in full and is divided here into two parts in accord with **Expansions from the Book of Isaiah** also on this homepage:

Vs. 1: But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

Muhaph is the noun for gloom, the only use of the term in the Bible whose verbal root suggests darkness and is similar to *mahuph* in 9.22. It is related closely to the presence of anguish or *mutsaq* (note similarity in sound) which has two other biblical references, Job 36.16 and 37.10, the former being cited here: “to a spacious place free from restriction.” “For her” most likely is Jerusalem living in fear of the Assyrian invasion.

The Lord singles out Zebulun and Naphtali, both of which had suffered the most during the Assyrian invasion and had been “brought into contempt” or *qalal*. It suggests having been cursed, that is, by the Lord through the agent of the Assyrians. Both Zebulun and Naphtali are mentioned in a quote of this verse (a different version) and the next in Mt 4.15: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.” This is cited at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry when he resided in Capernaum “which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali” [vs. 14].

Note the contrast between two times or *heth* which is not unlike the Greek *kairos*, a proper time or opportunity where the notion of temporal duration is secondary: that which is former and that which is latter. The verb *kaved* as “will make glorious” with respect to the *derek* or way of the sea suggests travel and transport of merchandise by the Mediterranean Sea. This making *kaved* will start there and extend inland, hence the mention of Galilee beyond the Jordan, that region designated as “of the nations” (*goy*), a term which often applies to non-Israelites.

Vs. 2: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

Compare darkness or *choshek* with *muhaph* of the previous verse which is more in reference to the light of the sun. To have walked in such darkness is not to know where one is going. As for the light (*or*), nothing is said regarding its source but seems to appear not at once illuminating the darkness but more as a guiding beacon even though it is called great. Compare with the Magi who came to Jesus at his birth: “We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him” [Mt 2.2].

A second category, if you will, follows those who walked in darkness, persons who dwelt in a land of deep darkness or *tsalmaveth* which is a compound of *tsel* (shadow) and *maveth* (death). They may be called resides of Sheol or the underworld. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil” [Ps 23.4]. For persons in this *tsalmaveth* the same light or *or* has shined upon them, the verb being *nagah* which has five other biblical references, one of

which is 13.10: "The moon will not give its light." Here the light is above shining below compared with the people who have seen a great light, that is, from a distance.

In Mt 4.14 after having quoted the above two verses, we have "From that time on Jesus began to preach. 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'"

2 February, Presentation of the Lord

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." Luke 2.22-32

Please note: an article entitle **Simeon and Anna** is posted on this homepage under the banner "New Testament." It goes into more detail as to the Presentation.

The Greek text has "days" for "time" with regard to the purification in the temple which totals forty days after the woman has given birth. The number forty is considered sacred for Israel and is equivalent to forty years of wandering in the Sinai desert after having left Egypt. In many ways that extended period was the best in Israel's history, that is, when she was closest to the Lord. Forever it is ingrained in the nation's collective memory. As for the forty days at hand—note too that Jesus was in the desert after his baptism for this amount of time—the parents of the newly born child are held in a kind of sacred abeyance or suspension. Furthermore, awareness of this time is transmitted to the child even if unaware of its reality. Multiply it out for every child who has been born, and you're bound to have everyone be aware of it. As for each individual child, it isn't a full-fledged member of society until this sacred amount of time before entering the temple has passed. However, at least the child had been named eight days after birth.

As for the Law or Torah of Moses, the reference to this purification is Ex 13.2: "Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast in mine." *Qadash* is the verb for consecrate, fundamentally meaning to be pure or clean and the root for the familiar adjective "holy." Actually this is the first time *qadash* appears in Exodus suggesting that it was unfamiliar to the Israelites. In the present context it's bound up with the notion of redemption which the Lord spells out later within this chapter. To demonstrate the exclusivity of the first born, the Lord says "is mine" or in Hebrew, "is to (*L*) me." Part of the reason

for the importance attributed to the first born among ancients is the high infant mortality rate. The second born would (presumably) move into the first position should the first born die, and such must have been the case in many instances. Thus with the added promise of divine protection the first born would have a higher chance of surviving the early years of childhood.

So when the sacred time of forty days is complete, Mary and Joseph eagerly make their way to Jerusalem. Like all other parents, they counted down the days until the time finally arrived while at the same time realizing the vital significance of the number forty. The verb *paristemi* translates as “presented,” the preposition *para-* suggestive of being in the vicinity or near someone or something. And so the child is handed over handed “beside” the Lord in the temple through the priest. At this point the parents present their offering mentioned in vs. 24 which reads in full from Lev 12.8 as “And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two your pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” *Kaphar* is the verb to make atonement and essentially means to cover. Most likely this consists in offering prayers. Now with the number forty behind them, the parents and child can enter a full relationship with the community.

As for this *kaphar* or covering, Simeon seemed to act almost against it. That is to say, he took the child and blessed the Lord after which he asked to be dismissed or to die. It was sufficient for him that his eyes be opened to see Jesus as a “light of revelation.” This light of *apokalupsis* or literally an uncovering is not for just for Israel but for the Gentiles which must have shocked everyone present, especially the parents. No small wonder that they marveled at Simeon’s words (cf vs. 33). However, this marveling turned into a dire warning with his prophecy to Mary that the child is destined for the rise and fall of many people. Such is the transition of the expected *kaphar* taken literally as covering to its opposite, an *apokalupsis*.

9 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

13) You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. 14) "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. 15) Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16) Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.
Matthew 5.13-16

This excerpt follows on the heels of the beatitudes where Jesus gives three examples of implementing them. The first suggests that they become salt by anyone who absorbs them. Not only are they applicable to that person but amazingly, the entire earth or *ge*, more properly earth as an element. In other words, the salt is sown into this *ge* by the person who has embodied the beatitudes. Jesus gives a warning as to this salt by way of a rhetorical question. The verb here is quite vivid for loosing taste, *moraino* or to become foolish. Such foolishness, if you will, becomes next to impossible to restore, the verb *halizo* meaning to salt. Should this happen, the salt is to be cast out and trampled under foot. The two verbs here show this vividly, one having the

preposition *exo* or outside and the other prefaced with the preposition *kata* or down...i.e., a thorough and permanent rejection.

Jesus gives a second example, this with regard to the world or *kosmos* which fundamentally means a decoration or order. Compare with *ge* above, the physical earth. In the example at hand, light (*phos*), just like salt in the earth which is invisible, shines forth for all to behold. If such a light is to illumine the entire *kosmos*, the stand or mountain must be the highest on the earth. Similar to this all-pervading light is a city upon a hill which remains visible all around.

The third and final example pertains to a lamp being put on a stand instead of hiding it under a bushel which is a vessel for measuring grain. The lamp on a stand gives light to a house compared with the salt of the earth and light of the world. That is to say, a house (*oikia*) is more restrictive. However, the light described here illumines works which are good, the adjective *kalos* often used as beautiful. Thus the works or *ergon* have a quality which become more than good; they are elegant or *kalos*.

In light of the salt/earth, light/world and lamp/stand Jesus concludes with the exhortation to shine before men, favoring, if you will, the second analogy but by no means excluding the other two. This shining is more or less passive, dependent upon the oil or wax as fuel coming from within. Those seeing it—and they don't have to—give glory (*doxazo*) to God the Father in heaven. Those doing the shining function independently of what people think of them. That is, it's a question of getting the "let shine" (*lampo*) in operation. Once this is accomplished, everything is out of the person's control.

As so as a result of the beatitudes which come before this Gospel excerpt, the three examples of implementing them may be outlined by way of conclusion:

light → works → glorify

16 February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

20) *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* 21) *"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.'* 22) *But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire...27) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'* 28) *But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart...33) "Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'* 34) *But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God 35) or by the earth, for it is his footstool or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36) And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.*
Matthew 5.20-22, 27-28 & 33-34

This Gospel excerpt may be divided into three parts and here is treated accordingly where Jesus quotes from scripture, bring it to another level in accord with his own authority.

Part #1

“For I tell (*lego*) you” conveys a sense of authority not so subtly contrasted with the legitimate authority or *lego* of the scribes and Pharisees. For Jesus even to propose to common people that their righteousness goes beyond those of people who inspire both fear and respect can be taken as tantamount to treason. *Dikaiosune* suggests the state of a person as he ought to be and thus practically speaking always is partial. Note the verb *perisseuo* or to exceed in the sense of a fixed measure or number. Surely if the leaders got wind of this, they’d take Jesus into custody right on the spot. However, the news that a common person’s *dikaiosune* can go way beyond that of his religious leaders was almost too good to be true. This was more than enough motive for them to shield Jesus from any attempt to arrest him.

Jesus quotes part of Ex 20.13 which is the same as the original, he presuming that most people were familiar with such a basic tenet of their faith (‘you have heard it said’), it being part of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not kill.” The rest of vs 21 are Jesus’ own commentary on this commandment where he brings in liability to (divine) judgment.

Part #2

Ex 20.14 or “You shall not commit adultery,” this coming on the heels of the one above pertinent to killing and therefore not dissimilar to it. The change Jesus makes is that looking at a woman lustfully is an adulterous act. *Blepo* is the verb, also to see and connotes the power of sight. Note the use of two prepositions: *pros* or to, toward and *epi* or upon, the latter prefaced to the verb *epithumeo*, to desire or long for. Thus we have *pros* → *epi* or direction towards-which and upon, indicative of the immediacy of such *blepo*.

Part #3

The quote from Lev 19.12 runs in full as “And you shall not swear by my name falsely and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.” *Sheqer* is a noun, also as a lie which leads to *chalal*, literally perforating or in common parlance, shooting God’s name full of holes. Jesus takes this basic command to task in that virtually he abolishes such swearing either by heaven, earth or one’s head. Thus one is left with no option—no up, no down, no oneself—which makes you wonder about the value of swearing an oath. While not abolishing them, he substitutes something more direct: one either says yes or no, nothing more. Anything added comes from the evil one or *poneros* which also means useless, base, cowardly or knavish. Such is the pitfall of making an oath, of not keeping it.

23 February, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

38) "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39) But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; 40) and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; 41) and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42) Give to him who begs from you and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. 43) You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46) For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47) And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48) You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5.38-48

"You have heard that it said" is used twice which means that Jesus' listeners have heard in the synagogue what he is about to quote from the Book of Exodus and use it as a take off point for his own teaching. Thus he establishes a threefold link: listeners, Exodus and himself. The quote itself (21.23-24) runs in full: "If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." *Ason* is the noun for harm, also as mischief which implies wrongdoing. Note the seven pairs resulting from such *ason*, each balancing themselves off, as it were.

While the seven pairs represent a direct, primitive form of justice, Jesus takes them and brings them one step further, thereby upsetting the balance. However, he counters the first "You have heard that it was said" with "But I say to you." The former hearing is passive whereas the latter is active. Such is the point from which he launches into a seemingly lopsided and unfair way to treat any injustice which had been dealt out. In other words, the seven pairs are undone, if you will, by Jesus' own five: strikes on the cheek, sue for a coat, forced to travel one mile, give to one who begs and do not refuse a borrower.

After delivering what seems something virtually impossible to carry out, Jesus doesn't stop to explain in the sense of mollifying his teaching. Right away he counts the second "You have heard that it was said" with "But I say to you." In other words, a second hearing, one passive and the other active. This time the quote is from Lev 19.18 which runs in full as "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." The Greek has *agapao*, verbal root for the well-known *agape* which translates the Hebrew *ahav* which connotes desire, breathing after. If that's taken into consideration, *ahav* is just as meaningful if not more so than *agapao*. Regardless, both balance hating one's enemy. Jesus redirects this *agapao/ahav* towards one's enemy. Realizing that it isn't quite enough, he adds praying for them, *preseuchomai* more as to intercede. That makes taking the injustice done to oneself easier to bear but in reality, still difficult to accomplish.

The benefit for something nearly impossible to carry out is that one becomes sons of the Father in heaven. From that position (traditionally and commonly understood as 'up there somewhere'), a son can participate with his Father making the sun rise on both evil and good people as well as

sending rain upon those who are just and unjust. No problem where the rays and rain fall as long as they simply fall down. Thus upon second look, it's easier to carry out.

This excerpt concludes with four rhetorical questions meant to urge Jesus' listeners on...in short, to try out what he had just said. The result is being perfect as one's Father in heaven, the adjective being *teleios* which connotes bringing to an end or completion. This understanding of *teleios* isn't the same as the heavenly *teleios* but tending toward it not out of a realization of personal deficiency but out of love and desire.

26 February, Ash Wednesday

1) Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2) "Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3) But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing 4) so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 5) And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you... 16) And when you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17) But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18) that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18

Interestingly this Lenten season begins with a Gospel excerpt which follows one for the last Sunday in Ordinary Time. We won't see this time for quite a while, that is, several months from now after the course of Lent→Easter→Pentecost has run its course. And so with the closeness of the two Gospel excerpts, we can appreciate better how the two seasons are connected.

As for the Gospel excerpts themselves, many if not most quote directly or indirectly from the Old Testament. Pointing this out and expounding upon such associations is the overarching approach of the comments for this year's series of excerpts. Such is not the case here. However, we can center in upon a key theme, the room of vs. 6, *tameion* also as magazine, treasury or storehouse. This suggests a richer field of understanding, not simply any old room in one's house. In other words, it's the place where valuables are kept under lock and key. Entering there means entering a secure place as down in the basement where one's valuables are stored out of sight from prying eyes.

As for this *tameion*, vs. 6 suggests a quote from Is 26.20: "Come, my people, enter your chambers and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past." The sequestration here is not unlike the Israelites in Egypt when they confined themselves for

celebration of the Pasch as well as to avoid their first born being slain by the Lord through smearing a lamb's blood on their doorposts (cf. Ex 12.21-23). In the verse at hand the Lord makes direct appeal, "My people." *Cheder* as chambers (the *tameion*) usually refers to an inner room or apartment. "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord searching all his innermost parts" [Prov 20.27]. Within the deepest recesses of their dwelling the people are to hide or *chavah* which has four other biblical references although similar to *chava'* of the same meaning. "Hide yourselves there (in the hills) three days until the pursuers have returned" [Jos 2.16]. Such hiding is for a short time or until the "wrath" or *zaham* (cf. 13.5 as indignation) has passed.

Within this *tameion* the Father sees (*blepo*, also to look, to have the power of sight) in secret (*en to krupto*, or what's unrevealed). He has the capacity because already he is in secret. As for him giving a reward, it too is done in secret, all within the *tameion*.

Because a *tameion* is a storehouse for what's most valuable as had been pointed out, the best disguise to adopt with a view of thwarting any potential thief or busy-body is to make it not stand out but be ordinary. That's why Jesus says its best to maintain a clean, respectable appearance. If it were otherwise (as the hypocrites), attraction would be drawn to the *tameion*.

1 March, First Sunday in Lent

1) Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2) And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. 3) And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4) But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" 5) Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6) and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" 7) Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" 8) Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; 9) and he said to him, "All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me." 10) Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" 11) Then the devil left him and behold, angels came and ministered to him. Matthew 4.1-11

Offered for consideration are four instances where we find the phrase *gegraptai* ('it is written'), which for the sake of convenience are underlined in the text above. Jesus uses three whereas the devil uses one, that being the second. Jos 8.31 is the first instance with reference to the Law (*Torah*) of Moses from which many such references flow. That is to say, all Jewish observance is referred to the *Torah* or *gegraptai* because it was handed down to Moses on Mount Sinai by the Lord himself. "And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord" [Ex 24.4]. So when we hear *gegraptai* not only here but elsewhere, this divine inscribing is behind it all. As for the three instances where Jesus uses it as well as the one time by the devil, it comes as no surprises that both are familiar

with the quotes at hand...not just those but virtually every other text from *Torah*. The same applies to many ordinary people who had committed much of the *Torah* to memory.

Gegraptai #1: Dt 8.3 which runs in full as “And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.” Note three uses of the verb *yadah* or to know as applicable in an intimate way. After the first two did-not-knows the Lord brings up the third one caused, if you will, by the Lord or by an action which is indirect. I.e., he disposes the person (also can apply to the nation of Israel) to such *yadah* as it pertains to (*hal-*, literally as ‘upon’) everything coming from the Lord’s mouth, the common verb *yatsa’* or to exit, to go out. This, of course, concerns what the Lord is speaking, not just the subject of manna as noted in this verse. As quoted by Jesus, this “everything” (*kal-*) is put in terms of *rhema* or word, a noun referring to that which has been uttered or any sound. It has a precise meaning whereas *logos* is broader or more inclusive such as discourse, the act of speaking or faculty of speech.

Gegraptai #2: Ps 91.11-12 which runs in full as “For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” Note that emphasis is upon not one but multiple ways (*derek*, singular), this along with the adjective *kal-* or “all.” That is to say, not just a few ways are singled out but each and every one, that is, all human activity. It, in turn, is subject to divine *shamar* or watching, a verb suggestive of what a watchman on a city gate does, especially during the night hours which are the most vulnerable. As for *shamar*, it isn’t by the Lord but by his angels (plural), *mal’ak* fundamentally as messenger. They will use their invisible hands to raise a person up in order to prevent injury. And so being borne aloft by angels will substitute the need for walking or for where *derek* is substituted for being above it.

Gegraptai #3 consists of the devil quoting scripture, that is, Dt 6.16 which runs in full as “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test as you tested him at Massah.” Note the two uses of the verb *nasah* or to tempt, to try. The first, of course, takes place within the context of the second but may be singled out not to tempt the Lord in general. This overall *nasah* carries over to a particular instance, Massah as recounted in Ex 17.2-7. Note that it takes place right after the Lord had provided quail and manna in the desert or where the people are complaining about the lack of water. Already they have forgotten the miraculous provision of such food, not thinking that the Lord would do essentially the same regarding water. Keeping in mind that this quote comes from the devil, it can infer the speed with which a person can forget past divine interventions in light of a present crisis.

Gegraptai #4: Dt 6.13 which runs in full as “But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.” Here the Lord speaks or *davar* which is fuller in Hebrew, as to give expression which the Lord does to Moses and Aaron. It is followed by a charge, the verb *tsawah*, also as to command. Note that it applies to two foes, Israel and Pharaoh, and consists of Israel being allowed to leave Egypt to worship the Lord.

8 March, Second Sunday in Lent

1) And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother and led them up a high mountain apart. 2) And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. 3) And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with him. 4) And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5) He was still speaking when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." 6) When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were filled with awe. 7) But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." 8) And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. 9) And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision until the Son of man is raised from the dead." Matthew 17:1-9

The words "and after six days" are important to introduce this text. What, then, comes before it and is worthy of mentioning such an interval? The last few verses of Chapter Sixteen deal with discipleship where Jesus lays down certain conditions about coming after him. That is to say, one must be prepared to lose one's life in order to gain it. Then the chapter concludes somewhat enigmatically that some standing with Jesus, that is, hearing these words about discipleship, won't taste death before seeing the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

As for the pause of six days, it makes sense only after the transfiguration, not before, that time allowing for the disciples to bridge the gap between the two as Jesus had intended. While on the mountain Jesus indeed was "in his kingdom." There he was transfigured or *metaphoroo* meaning to change into another form, *morphe* often taken as an external appearance. Once having changed his *morphe*, Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus, the conversation of which isn't given but left to the disciples to interpret later on.

As for any words being uttered, they came from a voice in the cloud telling the disciples to listen to Jesus; that is, they aren't to listen to Moses and Elijah who, if it may be added, already were listening to Jesus in their conversation. In light of the concluding words of the last chapter, they were among those who won't taste death because they had seen the Son of man coming in his kingdom. As for Elijah, this is true literally, for a chariot had taken him into heaven. As for Moses, the Lord himself buried him in secret, and no one knows his burial place. Perhaps this is to conceal the fact that later he too was snatched into heaven.

As for the vision on the mountain, Jesus sternly bids the disciples not to tell anyone about it until after his resurrection. That must have been virtually impossible, given that Jesus took only Peter, James and John. They were bound to silence even among their co-disciples who must have pestered them continuously about their experience. As for speaking of the transfiguration after Jesus' resurrection, there doesn't seem to be any reference to it. In the time before this, however,

the three disciples must have ransacked the scriptures to find references to Moses and Elijah in order to see how both fit in with that unheard conversation on the mountain.

15 March, Third Sunday in Lent

5) So he came to a city of Samaria called Sychar near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6) Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7) There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8) For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. 9) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. 10) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11) The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? 12) Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well and drank from it himself and his sons and his cattle?" 13) Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, 14) but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15) The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." John 4.5-15

The setting for this conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is Sychar. Note that the woman is unidentified which makes the incident all the more intriguing. If, for example, we knew her name, some of the mystery of this incident would be lost. As for Sychar, refer to Gn 33.18-19 where Jacob pitched camp and bought the land. Vs 20 fleshes this out with "There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel (God, the God of Israel)." In other words, Jacob takes the common Semitic word for God (El) and transforms it into the God of Israel. Now the very land and God are linked together indissolubly. Note an apparent incongruity: Jacob pitches his tent which means he's in the process of moving on, not staying put. Compare this with purchasing the land. To do so suggests strongly that Jacob would build a permanent home. Instead of this, he sticks with his tent and builds the altar (a permanent structure) on the land. Even should he move on, that altar would stand as a lasting memorial.

It is precisely on this very spot where the land and God have been wedded that Jesus speaks of living water, that is, in conjunction with the well dug by Jacob but not found elsewhere. Presumably he had dug a well in the land where he had pitched his tent. Not to do so would have made the purchase useless. Anyway, the association of this well with Jacob naturally prompted the woman to ask if he were greater than Jacob. This is both a natural and practical question, for she was wondering if Jesus could dig a well as the patriarch had done. However, Jesus had in mind another type of digging, that is, inside oneself.

So when it comes to Jesus and water, his giving isn't in the present but in the future, all the verb being in that tense: "that I shall give," "will never thirst," "that I shall give" and "will become a spring." The intriguing possibility of having such water kind of peters out. That is to say, Jesus

doesn't answer her request for it but shifts the tone of the conversation to her having had five husbands. This doesn't embarrass her in the least, for she acknowledges it,

22 March, Fourth Sunday in Lent

1) As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth...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." John 9.1, 6-9

While this excerpt is somewhat abbreviated (a longer one also is given) according to the liturgical calendar presented by the USCCB, we can consider some parts which are not in the excerpt.

The opening words of this passage ('as he passed by') suggest that someone had gotten Jesus' attention which, of course, is the man born blind. Never did he see Jesus nor could conceive processing information that came to him through sight. It turned out that this apparently casual passing by ended up with a lengthy conversation, perhaps more so than Jesus would have wanted. Jesus' disciples were intrigued by this, wondering how such a person could get along in the world. Without missing a beat, they equated (and wrongfully so) that a severe physical defect resulted from sin. This was only natural because so many people at the time suffered from countless afflictions that were beyond any cure.

What started off as a more or less casual encounter symbolized by "as he passed by," turns out to be an incident where "the works of God might be made manifest" in this blind man. *Phaino* is the verb, more to bring to light or to appear as applicable to divine *ergon* or works, also as deed or action. Note the plural, not singular, which you'd think. Perhaps the plural use of the noun refers to the later controversy Jesus has with the Jews as to how this miracle came about. It is followed by Jesus says that while he's in the world, he is the light. To see this light is far more important than the blind man who can't see physical light. To him, this sounds fine, but it's theoretical. Living without the faculty of sight and wanting to have it is something that can't be appreciated unless one is in that situation.

Once Jesus has made a paste and applied a paste to the blind man's eyes, he bids him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The text can give the impression that he went as though he could see his way but most likely was guided there by friends or relatives. This pool was located on the original site of Jerusalem and fed by a spring. As for the meaning of Siloam, a footnote in the **RSV** relates it to Jesus as "he being 'sent' from God to give light." And so the blind man does with vs 7 saying simply that he "came back seeing." He didn't require assistance to find his way back to Jesus who must have hung around teaching and perhaps explaining what his audience could learn from this incident. Surely no one left, for they were wholly intrigued.

The text is remarkably subdued as to the man's reaction upon gaining sight, a faculty he never experienced until now. However, it was subdued in the negative sense because the Pharisees hounded him, calling him a sinner and so forth. In other words, this man born blind became a witness to Jesus which is a deeper form of seeing.

29 March, Fifth Sunday in Lent

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." John 11:3-7

A short excerpt on the threshold of Jesus entering Jerusalem for the last time where he will be condemned and put to death. Lazarus is the person involved whose two sisters are Martha and Mary. While all three are dear to Jesus and he to them, only Lazarus is called "he whom you love" or he whom you have *phileo*. At first you might think we'd have the verb *agapao* (*agape* being the noun), but in this instance, that would be a bit exalted, almost too removed for such an intimate relationship. *Phileo* suggests friendliness...familiarity...of enjoying a person on the same level which ties in nicely here.

Note that the two sisters sent either a message or a messenger to Jesus. They didn't go themselves, thinking that would be an imposition but were confident that Jesus would respond immediately. However, his response didn't seem to concur with the notion of *phileo*. Rather, Jesus was stand-offish. Although Jesus speaks about Lazarus' death, it doesn't seem to be in person or with Martha and Mary. Perhaps it was through a message or messenger in the same way as they had communicated with him. So while Lazarus is ill, we have this busy going back and forth which means a substantial time gap is involved.

So when the message got back to Martha and Mary (most likely they didn't inform Lazarus right away), they were a bit miffed and understandably so. At the same time they were consoled by Jesus saying, albeit not in person, that Lazarus isn't ill unto death. He got in this condition to manifest the glory of God as well as for the Son of God to be glorified. Note the noun *doxa* and the verbal root from which it's derived, *doxazo*. The first applies to God and the second to Jesus. Fine, theologically speaking but small comfort for the two sisters even though they knew Jesus a long time.

While *phileo* applies to Jesus and Lazarus, *agapao* applies to Jesus' relationship with Martha, Mary and Lazarus. In other words, all three are the object of *agape* whereas Lazarus has the added bonus of *phileo*.

In addition to the message going out from Martha and Mary to Jesus plus the response in a similar way, this delay—and Lazarus remains ill throughout—is intensified by Jesus staying where he was two days longer. The sisters weren't aware of this directly but only after the exchange of messages. Only after this interval of two days went off with his disciples. And so we have set in motion the death of Lazarus and his subsequent raising from the dead. One thing is clear up to this point, the profound love and respect between Jesus, Martha, Mary and Lazarus and how he relates to them in a way that isn't common or the way most people would expect. Such is the lesson the two sisters had learned a bit later when Jesus restored their brother to life.

5 April, Palm Sunday

14) Then one of the twelve who was called Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests 15) and said "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16) And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him. 17) Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" 18) He said, "Go into the city to a certain one, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" 19) And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. 20) When it was evening, he sat at table with the twelve disciples; 21) and as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." 22) And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" 23) He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me, will betray me. 24) The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." 25) Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Is it I, Master?" He said to him, "You have said so." 26) Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27) And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; 28) for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26.14-27

In vs. 24 the Lord makes impersonal reference to himself, as though he were out there, if you will, of what had been written of the Son of man. This indirect way of speaking is a way of taking a personal situation or incident and literally abstracting (drawing-out) it so others may get a clear picture of what's going on. Obviously the situation at hand is full of tension, so it applies here. Yet as the Gospels recount, the disciples continue in their ignorance of Jesus vis-a-vis scriptural foreshadowings. It was only after Pentecost or the descent of the Holy Spirit do we find them getting the point. From then on their discourses are jammed-packed with them; actually it's amazing how they rattle off reference after reference after reference.

As for the scriptural references in this excerpt, no explicit ones are given. However, after Pentecost the disciples recalled the incident and easily could situate them. For illiterate or barely literate people memory was everything. Their ability to recall past events was far more developed than ours today, so credit must be given to this important though little recognized fact.

The critical text of the Greek New Testament has a footnote with regard to the implied scriptural references which follow below. Excerpts from existing texts posted on this homepage are inserted accordingly.

Psalm 22.7-8 and 16-18

Vs. 7: All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads.

A reference to Christ on the cross comes to mind: “And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads” [Mt 27.39]. In the Psalm verse note three aspects of disgrace: 1) *Lahad* or to mock as in Ps 2.4 which implies speaking in a barbarous fashion. 2) *Patar* in reference to mouths in the sense of spitting and alternately to open (as the womb). It implies greater contempt, coming, as it were, from deep inside the person who does the *patar*. The Hebrew of this verse reads graphically, “shoot out of the lip.” 3) To wag the head (singular) or *nuah* which also can apply to drunkenness: “The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut” [Is 24.20].

Vs. 8: He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!

To commit derives from the verbal root *galal* meaning to roll, so these words may read, “He rolled to (‘el) the Lord.” Also cf. Ps 37.5 (‘Roll upon the Lord your way’). The act of rolling takes place downhill, so the psalmist can be seen as gradually rolling down a slope into divine hands ready to receive him.

Palat as to deliver (cf. Ps 17.13) is the first of two taunts directed towards the psalmist, the second one being *natsal* (to deliver) which also means to draw out as well as to deprive; usually it is associated with exiting as “I will deliver my flock from their mouth” [Ezk 34.10]. *Chaphats*, to delight (cf. Ps 1.2) with its sense of bending (down) aptly fits in this verse as God were stooping over to pluck the psalmist from danger.

Note that vss. 16-18 have no notes but are included here: 16) Yea, dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet -- 17) I can count all my bones -- they stare and gloat over me; 18) they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.

Vs. 19: But you, O Lord, be not far off! O you my help, hasten to my aid!

“But” is the conjunctive *v-* usually translated as “and” which shows a close connection between two events or things. This is developed considerably in other documents related to biblical books on the homepage. The verse begins with “you” which stands in contrast to the above mentioned laments over the psalmist’s miserable condition. His desire for *YHWH* not to be far off (*rachaq*) is similar to the same request in vs. 11 where it is from me, a phrase lacking here. In such a state, God is identified with help or *hazar* which according to Ps 20.2 comes from the divine sanctuary, *quodesh*.

Isaiah 53.9: And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Nothing is said about the identity of “they” but most likely refers to the people of Israel, again, not specified, but perhaps her religious leaders.

The last verse is a rhetorical question as to the fate of the servant while the one at hand begins with the conjunctive *v-*, “and.” That is to say, it continues this question or more precisely, that the servant is buried with the “wicked” or *rashah* (cf. 50.9) which is similar in sound to *hashyr* or the “rich man.” No information is given as to the place where the servant is buried.

Chamas means “violence” and found next in 59.6: “Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands.” *Mirmah* is the noun for “deceit:” “The Lord abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful men” [Ps 5.6].

12 April, Easter Sunday

1) Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulcher. 2) And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat upon it. 3) His appearance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow. 4) And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5) But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6) He is not here; for he has risen as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7) Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you." 8) So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. 9) And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10) Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." Matthew 28: 1-10

In this excerpt note frequency of the two conjunctives *kai* as “and” and *de* which is either “now” or but.” Both serve to move along the narrative at a quick pace, matching the two Marys hastening to the sepulcher. Note that vs 6 is the only verse lacking such a conjunctive. Due to the importance of this fact, the conjunctives are listed as follows. Just reading them in and by themselves can leave one breathless. Hopefully this outline will imitate the experience of the two Marys:

Vs 1: now after the sabbath

Vs 2: and behold: earthquake

and came

and rolled back the stone

and sat upon it

Vs 3: his appearance (lacks explicit mention of *de*)

and his raiment

Vs 4: and for fear of him

and became like dead men

Vs 5: but the angel said

Vs 7: then go quickly

and behold

Vs 8: So they departed quickly

and great joy

Vs 9: and behold
and they came up
and worshiped him
and there they will see me

Thus when reading this resurrection narrative (Jesus speaks only in the last verse), pause after each occurrence of a conjunctive. Next continue reading until you've gone through all eighteen of them and observe how quickly the conjunctives move you along. However, they do it at a pace adjustable to each reader. And "now after the sabbath" as the first reference may be joined to "and there they will see me" as the last reference.

19 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

Vs 30 is intriguing because after the dramatic meeting of the disciples with Jesus we have something that resembles an appendix as indicated by *oun* or "now." That is to say, Jesus had done "many other signs" or *semeion*, also as a token or manifestation. John is careful to note that these signs were done in the presence of the disciples, *enopion* also as in the sight of. Implied is that such signs weren't done with other witnesses around and most likely pertain to the time after his resurrection. Their mention can be misunderstood as injecting an embellishment to make the presentation of Jesus after his resurrection palatable to a wider audience. That is, the signs may or may not be based on fact. Also it can be taken as some kind of pious concoction. However, should Jesus have performed signs to a larger audience, chances are that people would not believe him, let alone accept that he had come back from the dead. John was keenly aware of this fact.

As for the signs, they aren't recorded in John's Gospel account. To do so would have detracted from his main point of showing that Jesus Christ truly is divine, the *Logos* of the Father. Should John have included signs, they'd be considered a kind of glorified laundry list with little or no lasting impact. Note that vs 31 has "but these are written." This reveals a certainty by John which offsets the lack of signs, showing that Jesus' presence among his disciples and Thomas' confession of faith are sufficient unto themselves. Anything else would be superfluous.

Although it isn't part of this excerpt, it's worth including the last verse of John's Gospel because it has direct bearing on what we have here. "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." John makes a seemingly exaggerated claim, *oimai* also as suppose. He uses that verb, most likely having in mind the many signs noted above. Not that during the time between his resurrection and ascension Jesus worked signs non-stop. Again, while they are important, such signs in the end are secondary, for they pale in comparison to what he had laid down in his Gospel.

Also the world as some immense library insufficient to record what Jesus had done is true in a more profound way. All one has to do is examine what had been written from the Gospels onward down to the present day. Even today there is no sign of exhausting the subject matter. This push to record, if you will, got started immediately after Pentecost with Peter's sermon and quoting from the Old Testament. He did this automatically, accessing the text by memory and with great accuracy by reason of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Returning to the Gospel excerpt itself, it concludes with John's intent, namely, what he had written is to foster belief in Jesus Christ and to have life in his name. Those who take such words literally find a need to record them in one way or another. Without that, there would be nothing what we've come to call the Christian tradition or the deposit of faith. So it turns out that the 99.99% of humanity who hadn't seen Jesus Christ as vs 29 puts it, has substituted the sight enjoyed by the apostles for belief. And that belief turns out to be more certain than sight or any other information garnered by the senses.