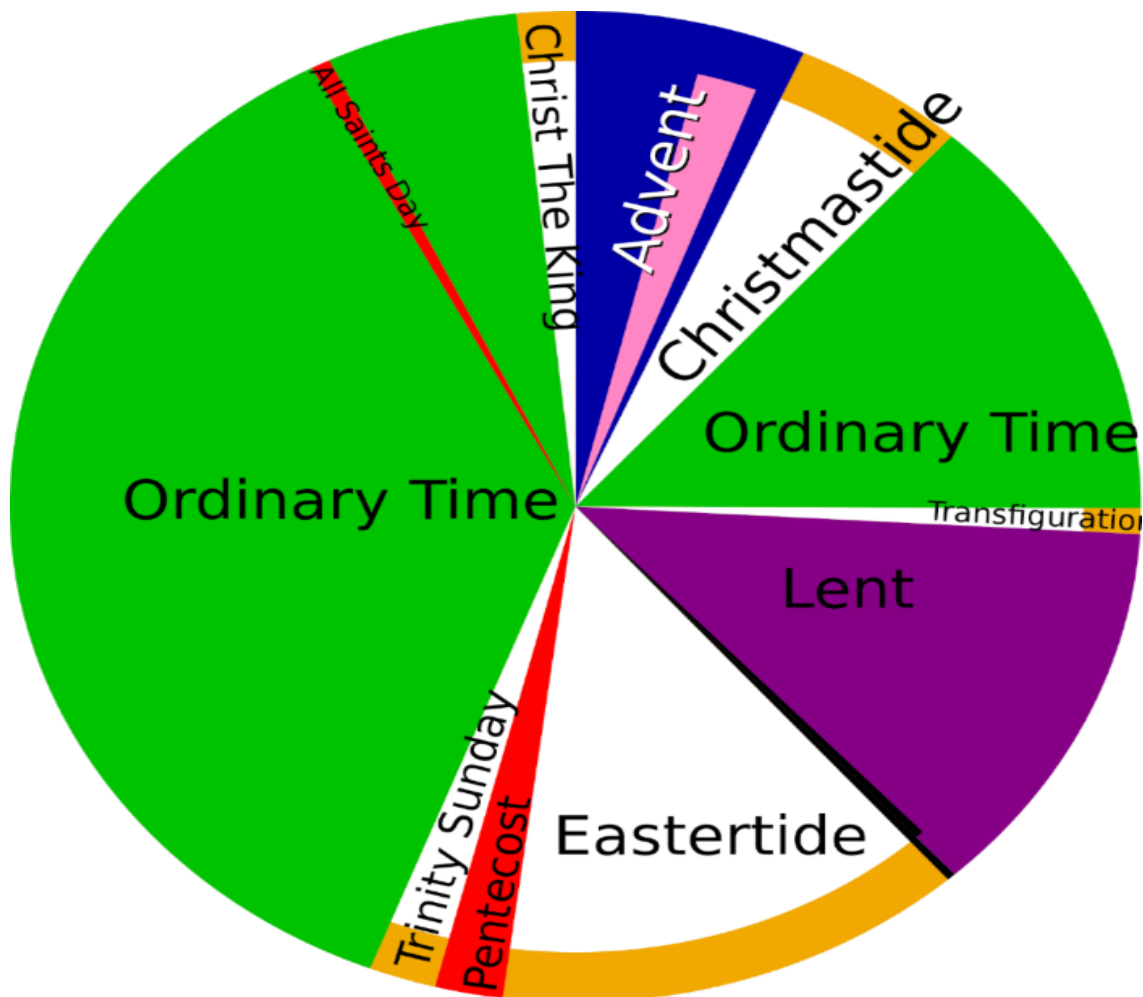


Liturgical Reflections 2018



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

3 December, First Sunday of Advent

32) *But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* 33) *Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will*

come. 34) *It is like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35) Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow or in the morning—36) lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37) And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.*" Mark 13.33-37

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

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

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

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

8 December, Immaculate Conception

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

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

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

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

Mary's response to Gabriel after such lofty words as her son reigning forever, etc., takes second place to her question which relates directly to her status in the community. That is to say, Mary says she has no husband, so if people find out she's pregnant, automatically she will be ostracized. Without missing a beat, Gabriel says that in place of a regular husband, the Holy Spirit will make her pregnant by coming upon her as well as the power of the Most High overshadowing her. Thus Mary will become pregnant by two divine entities which really caused her to *dialogizomai* more intensely than before. Wonderful as that sounds, try explaining that to the locals...

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

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

10 December, Second Sunday of Advent

1) *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* 2) *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face who shall prepare your way;* 3) *the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight --* 4) *John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* 5) *And there went out to him all the country of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.* 6) *Now John was clothed with camel's hair and had a*

leather girdle around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7) And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8) I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Mark 1.1-8

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

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

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

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

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

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

17 December, Third Sunday of Advent

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

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

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

As for John being the embodiment of testimony and bearing witness, the words are *marturion* and its verbal root *martureo*. Thus the two are one and the same; the noun

represents stable presence and the verb indicates ongoing activity. Note that the noun is prefaced with the preposition *eis* or into, literally “into witness,” indicative of a thoroughness with respect to that mission.

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

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

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

24 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

26) In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27) to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28) And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29) But she was greatly troubled at the saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. 30) And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31) And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the

throne of his father David, 33) and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34) And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" 35) And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. 36) And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37) For with God nothing will be impossible." 38) And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. Luke 1.26-38

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

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

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

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

same. Mary was aware of being sandwiched in between both which may have something to do with her immediate consent in vs. 38 summed up in “behold” or *idou*.

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

25 December, Christmas

1) The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. 2) Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3) and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, 4) and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5) and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6) and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uri'ah, 7) and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, 8) and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, 9) and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10) and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manas'eh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11) and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. 12) And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of She-alti-el, and She-alti-el the father of Zerubbabel, 13) and Zerub'babel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, 14) and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, 15) and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, 16) and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. 17) So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations. 18) Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; 19) and her husband Joseph, being a just man and

unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20) But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; 21) she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22) All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23) "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). 24) When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, 25) but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus. Matthew 1.1-25

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

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

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

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

will give birth although to Ahaz she must have been visibly pregnant. “Therefore the maidens love you” [Sg 1.3].

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

31 December, Holy Family

22) And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23) (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") 24) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." 25) Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26) And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27) And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, 28) he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29) "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word; 30) for my eyes have seen your salvation 31) which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32) a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." 33) And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; 34) and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against 35) (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also) that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." 36) And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanu-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, 37) and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38) And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39) And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40) And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Luke 2.22-40

This excerpt revolves around Simeon as well as his wife Anna, a prophetess. Although both are associated with the Jerusalem temple, there's no other information about them. If Simeon were a priest, chances are it would be mentioned. However, identity of his wife Anna as prophetess suggests that he too had the same gift and was considered as a holy man. His implied prophetic gift is implied by the words in vs. 26, “looking for the

consolation of Israel.” *Paraklesis* is the noun which means a calling or summoning to one’s side, *para* being the preposition suggestive of being in the close vicinity of. Simeon was expecting it, the verb being *prosdechomai*, to receive to oneself, the preposition *pros* suggestive of direction towards-which. Thus it’s no wonder, almost an understatement, that the “Holy Spirit was upon him.”

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

After expressing his joy, Simeon addresses Mary the mother, not Joseph the father, another reversal of traditional order, if you will. In addition to causing both the rise and fall of many in Israel, their baby is a sign to be spoken against, a *semeion* or portent subject to *antilego*. Furthermore, a sword will pierce Mary’s heart, *rhomphaia* being a large, two-handed weapon. “Piercing” seems almost surgical. *Rhomphaia* as the weapon suggests slashing Mary’s soul into a thousand pieces. It’s done, however, for a specific reason: to reveal the thoughts of many, *dialogismos* suggestive of machinations and plottings, not merely run-of-the-mill thoughts. Hitherto such machinations had been hidden. Now they are out there for all to behold. Such revelation of thoughts is akin to the above mentioned rise and fall of many. Those with good thoughts, if you will, will rise and those with bad thoughts will fall.

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

This excerpt ends with mention of Jesus growing, becoming strong and being filled with wisdom. More importantly, divine favor was upon him, *charis* also meaning charm, loveliness and grace which gives a more appealing picture. As for the aged Simeon and

Anna, both continued with their own lives, knowing that they hadn't long to live, but that was insignificant in light of what just transpired in the temple. Surely Joseph and Mary got word of their deaths, for example, during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem as they did year by year for the Passover as vs. 41 states. Later told their son about the holiness of their lives as they had impacted him as an infant.

1 January, Mother of God

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 January, Epiphany

1) Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 2) "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." 3) When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him; 4) and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5) They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 6) `And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'" 7) Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; 8) and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word that I too may come and worship him." 9) When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them till it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; 11) and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12) And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Matthew 2.1-12

Although this except begins with a time-when and a place-where relative to Jesus’ birth, in a sense the word *idou* or behold is more important insofar as it puts both into perspective. *Idou* introduces the wise men whose value lies in drawing attention to the mission of Jesus, not that his birth was unimportant. And that mission represented by the wise men consists in non-Israelites recognizing the universal role Jesus Christ will play. “From the East” is vague, deliberately so. There are many places from which these *magoi* may have come. Putting them in the east covers a lot of territory and can represent the first place where the Christian message will take root and do so with a strong mystical tradition. Even the word *magos* (singular) conjures up a whole sense of mystery, it being applicable to an interpreter of dreams, physician as well as a soothsayer. Even the verb used with regard to these *magoi* coming to Jerusalem conveys this sense of mystery, *paragignomai*, to come to the side of, to be beside (*para-*). It’s as though the *magoi* came to accompany Jesus just as

the star had and will accompany them. As for their number, no information is given. Let's say their counterparts came from the Mediterranean world...from the west...somehow the sense of mystery would not be as strong.

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

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

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

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

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

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

14 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

35) The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; 36) and he looked at Jesus as he walked and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37) The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38) Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying? 39) He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40) One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41) He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). 42) He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). John 1.35-42

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

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

knew the significance of a lamb associated with God, that is, a sacrifice. The same applies to virtually everyone else present who were able to make the association.

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

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

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

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

21 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

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

of Zebedee and John his brother who were in their boat mending the nets. 20) And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. Mark 1.14-20

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

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

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

28 January, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

21) And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. 22) And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes. 23) And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; 24) and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." 25) But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" 26) And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27) And

they were all amazed so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28) And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. Mark 1.21-28

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

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

Vs. 23 introduces the second *euthus* where an anonymous man with an unclean spirit (*pneuma*) is noted as being present in the synagogue. Implied is that he had entered unnoticed with the crowd and made himself known almost simultaneously with the *euthus* of Jesus entering the synagogue and teaching. Surely this man was known in the community, small as it is. His uncleanliness wasn't physical as leprosy or the like but invisible. It manifested itself in the form of two questions tinged with contempt and anger, the first reading literally as *ti hemin kai soi* or “what to us and to you?” The second...and this ties in with what apparently some could interpret as Jesus teaching...is that he had come on a mission of destruction. But what astonished the congregation is that this man with an unclean *pneuma* knows that Jesus is from God. If that were true, then the destruction he blurts out may have some merit to it.

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

convulsions and a loud cry as it came out of him, another use of *exerchomai* with the preposition *ex*.

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

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

4 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

29) And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. 30) Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her. 31) And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them. 32) That evening at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33) And the whole city was gathered together about the door. 34) And he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him. 35) And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. 36) And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, 37) and they found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you." 38) And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out." 39) And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. Mark 1.29-39

This excerpt begins with Mark's famous *euthus* or "immediately" noted in the last section and occurs a second time in vs. 30. As for the first *euthus*, it's when Jesus left the synagogue, having forced an unclean spirit out of a possessed a man. Vs. 29 has the preposition *ek* or "from" with the same preposition prefaced to the verb *exerchomai* (left). This "double *ek*," if you will, is pretty much along the same lines of *euthus* by reason of

the fast-paced action of the narrative. This sets the stage for Jesus to enter the house where Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever, *puresso* with *pur* meaning a fire. We don't have this woman's identity nor that of the wife of Simon who shortly is to be called Peter, chief of the apostles. It can be taken as a somewhat humorous interjection, given that mothers-in-law are traditionally the butt of jokes, most likely even at this time in history. As for the response of this woman, it isn't recorded, just that she went about serving her guests. Obviously she served plenty of people before but never with such joy and enthusiasm as now.

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

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

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