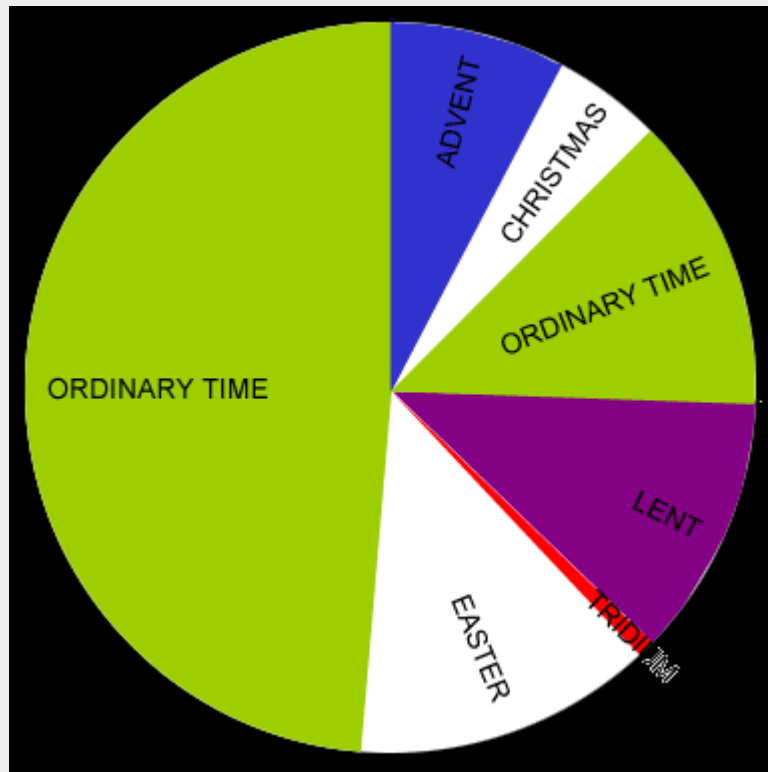


Liturgical Reflections 2015

The follow diagram is of a liturgical year, applicable to any other such year, which differs from our conventional calendars. It is inserted in last year's Reflections as well. This means that liturgical time, the "clock" by which the Church keeps time, is of an order wholly other than our familiar one of linear space and time.



30 November, First Sunday of Advent

For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. O Lord, why do you make us err from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage...We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name...as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did terrible things which we looked not for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you who works for those who wait for him. You meet him that joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we

sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls upon your name, who bestirs himself to take hold of you; for you have hid your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquities. Isaiah 63.16-17, 19 & 64.2-7

A quick note...A number of these Sundays take readings from the Book of Isaiah. A document entitled "Expansions on the Book of Isaiah" is being written concurrently although this project is still in its earlier stages. To be sure, this passage towards the end of Isaiah will receive treatment which means for the most part, any comments will be relatively brief. The same holds true for all other references to Isaiah later in the liturgical year.

For an Israelite to say that Abraham doesn't know his own descendants is as harsh as it gets. This claim means that Abraham, the greatest of all patriarchs, pretty much has disowned these descendants right down to the present day. It's putting very strong words in his mouth but at the same time reveals an honesty the Lord is seeking. So while Abraham's descendants may exist physically, they are dead both morally and spiritually. The verb "know" is *yadah* and intimates close, personal and even sexual knowledge. This meaning really drives home the point of memory as essential to life and forgetfulness as representative of death. Thus the people throw themselves upon the Lord as Father with, if we may put it so, Abraham standing there looking on as someone Israel has not so much rejected by passed by in favor of someone who will be accepting. The people call the Lord "our Redeemer," a participle of the verb *ga'al* which means to buy back and more fundamentally, to require bloodshed as a means of making a purchase. Such a name is from "of old" (*meholam*) and in the context of this passage, can be taken as going all the way to the patriarch Abraham. However, it's helpful to know that *ga'al* as used here isn't found that far back though the verb makes a more frequent appearance in Exodus and often with regard to celebration of the Passover.

While listening to these words which amount to an admission of guilt, complaint and wailing, the Lord can't help but feel a bit insulted because the people attribute their malaise to him, that is, they claim that he made them "err" and "hardened" their hearts. The verbs here are *tahah* and *qashah*. The former implies deception and the latter being stubborn and impudent. What makes this worse is that the people claim both prevent them from fearing the Lord.

Finally some common sense kicks in (vs. 19) with admittance that the Israelites are like people over whom the Lord never "ruled" or *mashal*. Actually this is a bold statement and reveals the depravity into which Israel had sunk. The rest of the passage at hand spells out this lack of divine *mashal*, the context of which could be the Sinai wilderness in which Israel had wandered for some forty years. This period of prolonged trial became a template, if you will, by which Israel would measure her spiritual growth (or lack of it). Clear references are made to that time as, for example, "you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence" [vs. 3]. Such words reveal that Israel hadn't forgotten the essence of their experience in the wilderness: "And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire" [Ex 19.18].

A bit later the Lord warned Moses to keep the people away "lest the Lord break out upon them" [vs. 22]. Once this had been set in place, the Lord gives the Ten Commandments to Moses on

Sinai which formed the heart of Israel's relationship with their God. If this is recalled, no longer will Israel have to say as in the passage at hand, "There is no one who calls upon your name." Even better in light of 64.7, there will be someone...a prophet in the likeness of Moses...who will bestir himself to take hold of the Lord, bold words in deed. *Hur* is the verb for "bestir" which means to arouse, hot or ardent and *chazaq* as "take hold of" is a sudden, almost violent grasp here with the preposition *b-*, literally, "grasps in" you. This means, of course, that this person will be able to see the Lord who has hidden his face, as vs. 7 recounts. This grasping-in will finally counter the people who said "in (*b-*) our sins we have been a long time" and "into (*b-*) the hand of our iniquities" [vs. 5].

1

7 December, Second Sunday of Advent

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: "I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I gird you, though you do not know me..." "Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'? Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in travail?'" Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands?" Isaiah 40.1-5 & 9-11

The following is an outline of all verses (1 through 11) as taken from some earlier notes on Isaiah. This part of the book is too be filled out later on; in the meanwhile, these preliminary notations are given.

Vs. 1: Comfort (*nacham*, twice): first noted in 1.24 with the alternate meaning, "will vent wrath."

Vs. 2: "Speak tenderly." The Hebrew text literally reads, "speak on the heart."

-Warfare (*tsava'*): first noted in 29.7, "fight." "It is over" (*malah*): the simple verb "to fill."

-Iniquity (*hawon*): first found in 1.4. It is "ended" (*ratsah*): fundamentally, "to take pleasure" with the other reference in Isaiah being 42.1, "in whom my soul delights."

-Double (*kevel*): the only use of this noun in Isaiah; the other two references are Job 11.6 and 41.3(5).

Vs. 3: This verse begins with "a voice cries" and is reminiscent of John the Baptist, quoted in the New Testament concerning Christ's coming. There only a few verses are cited concerning this, but if we consider the entirety of Chapter 40 throughout which the voice is crying, a lot more is implied concerning Christ.

-Wilderness (*midbar*): first noted in 17.14; from the verbal root *davar*, "to speak."

-Prepare (*panah*): first found in 8.21 with its fundamental meaning, "turn their faces upward."

- Make straight (*yashar*): the next reference is vs. 13, “instructed.” The other reference in Isaiah is 45.2, “and level the mountains.” This verbal root pertains to setting aright. “The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way” [Prov 11.5].
- Desert (*haravah*): cf. 33.9 and compare with *midbar*.
- Highway (*mislah*): first noted in 36.2.

Vs. 4: Lifted up/brought low. *Nasa'/shaphal*. Both verbs are first noted in 2.9, the former with the alternate meaning “to forgive.”

- Uneven ground (*haqov*): the only use of this adjective in Isaiah. The other two references are Jer 17.9 and Hos 6.8. *Haqov* is the verbal root for the proper name Jacob.
- Shall become level (*myshor*): the only use of the adjective in Isaiah whose verbal root is *yashar*, previous verse. “And lead me on a level path” [Ps 27.11].
- Rough places (*rakasym*, masculine plural): the only use of this word in the Bible.
- Plain (*biqhah*): the next reference is 41.18 with the alternate meaning, “valleys.”

Vs. 5: “Glory (*kavod*) of the Lord:” first noted in 3.8, “glorious presence.”

- Shall be revealed (*galah*): first noted in 5.13 with the alternate meaning, “go into exile.”
- “All flesh (*basar*):” first found in 9.20 and next in vs. 6. “Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” [Gen 2.23].
- “Mouth of the Lord has spoken.” I.e., in light of the “voice cries” of vs. 3.

Vs. 6: “A voice says “cry.”” Compare with the first crying of vs. 2.

- Grass (*chatsyr*): first noted in 35.7 and next found in vs. 7; cf Num 11.5, “leek.”
- Beauty (*chesed*): first noted in 16.5 with its fundamental meaning, “steadfast love.”
- “Flower (*tsyts*) of the field:” first found in 28.1 and next in vs. 7. “He flourishes like a flower of the field” [Ps 103.15].

Vs. 7: Grass (*chatsyr*, twice): cf. vs. 6. In the verse at hand, it “withers” (*yavash*); first noted in 19.5, “dry.”

- Flower (*tsyts*): cf. vs. 6. In the verse at hand, it “fades” (*naval*); cf. 24.4, “withers.”
- “Breath (*ruach*) of the Lord:” last noted in 33.11.
- Blows (*nashav*): the other use of this verb in Isaiah is 44.21. “He causes his wind to blow” [Ps 147.18].

Vs. 8: Endures (*qum*): with reference to God’s *devar* or “word.” *Qum* literally means “to rise” and first noted in 7.7, “it shall not stand.”

Vs. 9: “Get up to a high mountain.” Note the adjective/verb, *haly/hal* which rhyme.

- “O Zion, herald of good tidings.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “O herald of good tidings (*basar*, participle used twice) to Zion.” The next reference is 41.27.
- “With strength (*koach*):” first used in 10.13.
- Lift up (*rum*, twice): first noted in 1.2, “brought up.”
- “O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem.”

Vs. 10: Might (*chazaq*, adjective): first found in 27.1, "strong sword." The verbal root is first noted in 27.5, "lay hold of."

-Rules (*masha*): first found in 3.12.

-Reward/recompense. *Sakar/pehulah*. The former is the one of two uses of this noun in Isaiah (62.11) though the verbal root is *sakar* is first noted in 16.14, "to hire." The latter is the next found in 49.4. Also the former is "with" the Lord whereas the latter is "before" the Lord.

Vs. 11: Feed/shepherd. The latter is derived from the former, *raha*, first noted in 5.17, "shall graze." The first use of "shepherd" is 13.20.

-Will gather (*qavats*): first noted in 11.12.

-Lambs (*tela'ym*): the only use of this plural noun in the Bible. Compare with *taleh*, 65.25.

-Arm: compare with vs. 10 where it "rules for him."

-Bosom (*cheyq*): the other two references in Isaiah are 65.6 and 7. "I have given my maid to your embrace" [Gen 16.5].

-Gently lead (*naha*): the other two references in Isaiah are 49.10 and 51.18. "He leads me beside still waters" [Ps 23.2].

-Young (*hul*, participle). The only use of this word in Isaiah but cf. 49.15 and 65.20 (noun). "From tending the ewes that had young he brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob his people" [Ps 78.71].

8 December, Immaculate Conception

But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"...The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Genesis 3.9-15 & 20

The following is excerpted from "Expansions on the Book of Genesis" which is posted on this, the Lectio Divina Homepage.

"The Lord God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" Note that God calls (the simple word *qara*) man alone, not the woman. This summons differs from previous evening strolls when God had met the man and woman, greeted them and passed on. This evening he got no response, hence his calling out. To that instance of God saying "Where are you?," the only response was that *ruach* ('cool') heard rustling among the trees. Awareness of that sound at evening as is the case at hand was more disconcerting than at other times. The rustling is more than a simple noise, for it highlights the absence of response and gives a foreboding sense that something is wrong. After what for God must have seen a terribly long interval came the response (it isn't recorded but is intimated), "I heard the sound of you...and I was afraid because I was

naked, and I hid myself.” We must give the man credit for responding quickly compared to the woman of which nothing is reported. The words “I heard the sound of you” is telling. Emphasis is upon hearing as opposed to seeing God which is not the case here. The text presents God only as *qol* and *ruach*, voice and cool, which call out to the man.

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

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

God’s curse upon the serpent is twofold: it goes...slithers...upon its belly or *gachon*, the only other biblical reference being Lev 11.42: “Whatever goes on its belly and whatever goes on all fours or whatever has many feet, all the swarming things that swarm upon the earth you shall not eat, for they are an abomination.” There the category is broadened to include “swarming things that swarm,” the verb being *sharats* which was noted in 1.20 as meaning to creep or crawl: “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures.” During that day of creation such creatures were deemed good and not deserving of a curse. However, one unattractive image conjured up by *sharats* pertains to frogs, especially their invasion of private spaces: “The Nile shall swarm with frogs which shall come up into your house and into your bed chamber and on your bed” [Ex

8.3/7.28]. Because the serpent and other animals like it live close to the ground, they do not eat grass but dust or *haphar* which is readily available. We encountered that word in 2.7 where it had a positive connotation: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground.” While this was going on, the man, more so than the woman who was fashioned from his rib, must have listened breathlessly because he was taken from the same *haphar* or dust. He must have thought to himself, will I be like the serpent and crawl on the ground eating the same *haphar* from which I had been taken? Not a happy prospect. God’s curse to the serpent was re-enforced by the words “all the days of your life.” That is to say, an intimation of mortality for the serpent which soon would apply to the man and woman.

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

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

Now for the first time the man bestows a name upon his wife (the second time this term is used; cf. 2.25), Eve or *Chawah* which resembles the word for living, *chay*. An interesting name (basically, Life), a kind of wish to stave off the finality of death which God just imposed. As for the newly named woman, not yet has she become mother of all the living, her assigned destiny. The “all” in “all living” applies naturally enough to humanity. One may wonder if it includes non-human beings as well such as cattle and birds.

14 December, Third Sunday of Advent

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. Aliens shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; but you shall be called the priests of the Lord, men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory. Instead of your shame you shall have a double portion, instead of dishonor you shall rejoice in your lot; therefore in your land you shall possess a double portion; yours shall be everlasting joy. For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. Isaiah 61.1-2 & 10-11

The following is an outline of all verses in Chapter Sixty-One as taken from some earlier notes on Isaiah. This part of the book is too be filled out later on; in the meanwhile, these preliminary notations are given. The same type of notice is posted in last Sunday's entry.

Vs. 1: "Spirit (*ruach*) of God:" last noted in 48.16.

-Has anointed (*mashach*): cf. 21.5 as "oil."

-Bring good tidings (*basar*): last noted in 60.6 as "shall proclaim."

-Afflicted (*hanaw*, singular): last noted in 29.19 as "meek."

-To bind up (*chavash*): last noted in 30.26.

-Broken-hearted: the adjective is *shavar* (participle) last noted in 45.2 as "will break in pieces."

-To proclaim (*qara*): last noted in 59.4 as "enters suit" and found in the next verse.

-Liberty (*deror*): the only use of this noun in Isaiah. "To proclaim liberty" [Jer 34.8].

-Prison (*qoach*): the only use of this noun in the Bible.

Vs. 2: Favor (*ratson*): last noted in 60.10 as "mercy."

-"Day of vengeance (*naqam*):" last noted in 59.17.

-To comfort (*nacham*): last noted in 57.6 as "shall be appeased." Note the similarity of sound with *naqam*.

-Mourn (*ava*): last noted in 57.18 as "mourners" (participle) and found in the next verse.

Vs. 3: Garland/ashes: *pe'er/epher*. The former is first found in 3.20 and the latter in 44.20. Note the similarity of sounds.

-"Oil of gladness (*sason*):" last noted in 35.10.

- Mourning (*'evel*): last noted in 60.20.
- “Mantle (*mahateh*) of praise:” the only use of this noun in the Bible.
- “Faint (*kahah*) spirit:” last noted in 42.4.
- “Oaks (*'yley*, singular) of righteousness:” last noted in 57.5.
- May be glorified (*pa'ar*): last noted in 60.21.

- Vs. 4: “Ancient ruins (*charbah*, singular): last noted in 58.12.
- “Former devastations (*shamam*, participle; used twice):” last noted in 59.16 as “wondered.”
 - Shall repair (*chadash*): the only use of this verb in Isaiah. “And you renew the face of the earth” [Ps 104.30].
 - “Ruined (*chorev*, noun) cities:” last noted in 25.4 as “heat.”

- Vs. 5: Aliens (*zur*, participle): last noted in 29.5 as “foes.”
- Shall feed (*raha*): last noted in 44.27 as “shepherd” (participle).
 - Foreigners (*nekar*, singular): last noted in 56.3.
 - Plowmen/vinedressers: *'ikar* (singular)/*kormym*. The both are the only uses of these nouns in Isaiah. “The plowmen were ashamed” [Jer 14.3]. “The poor of the land for vinedressers” [Jer 52.16].

- Vs. 6: Priests (*kohen*, singular): last noted in 24.2.
- Minister (*sharath*): a verb last noted in 60.10.
 - “Wealth (*cheyl*) of the nations:” this phrase was last noted in 60.11.
 - Riches (*kavod*, singular): last noted in 60.13 as “glory.”
 - Shall glory (*'amar*): the common verb “to speak.” The other use of this word with this meaning is Dan 11.20: “through the glory of the kingdom.”

- Vs. 7: Double portion (*mishneh*, twice): the only use of this noun in Isaiah. “Their sin is double” [Jer 16.18].
- Shame/dishonor: *bosheth/kelimah*. The former is last noted in 30.3 and the latter in 45.16 as “confusion.”
 - Shall rejoice (*ranan*): last noted in 54.1 as “sing.”
 - Lot (*cheleq*): last noted in 57.6 as “smooth” (noun).
 - “Everlasting joy (*simchah*):” last noted in 55.12.

- Vs. 8: Robbery (*gazel*): the only use of this noun in Isaiah with three other references in the Bible: Lev 6.2(5.21), Ps 62.10 and Ezk 22.29.
- Wrong. The Hebrew text has “burnt offering” or *holah* last noted in 56.7.
 - Faithfully. The Hebrew text literally reads “in faith.”
 - Recompense (*pehulah*): last noted in 49.4.
 - Will make (*karath*): last noted in 57.8 as “have made a bargain.”
 - “Everlasting covenant (*beryth*):” last noted in 59.21.

- Vs. 9: Descendants/offspring. The first noun (*zarah*, singular) is last noted in 59.21 as “children” and the second (*tse'tsaym*) in 48.19. The former is “in (*b-*) the nations” whereas the latter is “in the midst of (*betok*) the peoples.”

-Shall acknowledge (*nakar*): the other use of this verb in Isaiah is in 63.16. "Its place knows it no more" [Ps 103.16].

Vs. 10: Shall greatly rejoice (*sus*): last noted in 35.1 as "shall be glad." The verb is used twice for emphasis.

-Shall rejoice (*gyf*): last noted in 49.13 as "exult." The Hebrew text uses *nephesh* (soul) for "I."

-"Garments of salvation (*yeshah*):" last noted in 51.5.

-"Robe (*mehyl*) of righteousness:" last noted in 59.17 as "mantle."

-Bridegroom (*chatan*): the other use of this noun is in 62.5.

-Decks himself (*kahan*): the only use of this verb in Isaiah from which "priest" is derived (cf. vs. 6).

-Garland (*pe'er*): last noted in vs. 3.

-Bride (*kalah*): last noted in 49.18.

-Adorns herself (*hadah*): the only use of this verb in Isaiah. "Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels" [Jer 31.4].

-Jewels (*kely*, singular): last noted in 54.16 with the alternate meaning, "weapon." Note the similarity of sound of this word with *kalah*.

Vs. 11: Shoots (*tsemach*, singular): the other use of this noun is in 4.2 as "branch."

-To spring up (*tsamach*, twice): last noted in 58.8.

-Praise (*tehilah*): last noted in 60.18.

21 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Now when the king dwelt in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies round about, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you." But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in?...Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more as formerly from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom...I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.'" 2 Samuel 7.1-5, 8-12, 14, 16 (NB: vs. 15 included though not officially part of the excerpt)

There seems to be a correspondence between the king (i.e., David) dwelling (*yashav*) in his house and the Lord giving him rest (*nuach*) from enemies. The former means to sit, to abide whereas the other, while including *yashav*, is more a relaxation after strenuous activity. Now David could

sit...*yashav*...within his house which no longer is the center of a circle of enemies “round about” him. This absence of war was difficult for David to get used to, so he decided to consult the prophet Nathan. In other words, should he continue along this line or take another course of action?

So with some unaccustomed leisure on his hands, David becomes more aware of his surroundings, especially the contrast between his relatively palatial accommodations made of cedar (from Lebanon, most likely) and the tent containing the ark of the Lord. There was no special rush to get this ark into a permanent dwelling because the Lord had accompanied Israel for so many years in the desert and later in Canaan before the Israelites were able to get established. Thus the tent symbolized the fact that the Lord continues to travel with the Israelites even though they are now settled down. Nathan was hoping David would make this distinction and heartily approved which is why he said “Do all that is in your heart.” In other words, David shouldn’t be afraid to have the ark of the Lord dwell in a permanent structure or temple. In a way that’s a loss of a reminder of a special period in Israel’s history. In another way it’s a step forward, of having the ark at last being safe and sound.

The urgency of this proposal first offered by David and ratified by Nathan is brought out by the words “that same night” or right away the Lord spoke to Nathan to follow through with his plan. Some of this urgency may have been due to the fact that the Lord himself was weary of being carted around and wishes to rest permanently among his people. So the Lord communicates what he wishes Nathan to hand on to David, that he had chosen him from humble origins and established him over Israel. Like Moses throughout the forty years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness, the Lord has “been with you wherever you went” and prospered him in his enterprises. Reading back over that account does reveal that David had been aware of divine favor, so he must be credited for that. The Lord must have had some hesitation, if we may put it like that, when he said “I will make for you a great name like the name of the great ones of the earth.” Clearly he remembers Israel’s clamor for a king when they had chosen the ill-fated Saul: “now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations” [1Sam 8.5]. “Like all the nations” sounds harmless enough, but that the prophet Samuel soon spells out in no uncertain terms.

A bit later in his words to Nathan which harken back to the *yashav-nuach* connection of the first paragraph, the Lord says that he “will appoint a place...and will plant them that they may dwell in their own place.” *Maqom* is the noun for “place” and has a broader connotation as a permanent dwelling place as well as the land in which this dwelling is located. Such permanence is emphasized by reference to planting. This will be most welcome, of course, compared to earlier days when Israel was at the whim of “violent men” during the time of the judges. And so beneath these favorable words about David and the kingship, the Lord is back-tracking a bit on his harsh words about establishing a king instead of the judges. In other words, he got over it and is willing to work with the situation now at hand. Not even that, the Lord will look after the kingdom, David’s successors, forever.

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. 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. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9.1-6

Please note: this excerpt is taken from "Expansions on the Book of Isaiah" posted on the Lectio Divina home page.

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.

This verse is 8.23 in the Hebrew text.

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 which were "brought into contempt" or *qalal* noted last in 8.21. 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* (cf. 6.10) as "will make glorious" with respect to the *derek* or "way" (cf. 3.12) of the sea suggests travel and especially 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*, cf. 2.4), 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* (cf. 8.22) 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 suddenly, not at once, illuminating the darkness, 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].

In addition to the general category of those who walked in darkness is a second one, if you will, of persons who dwelt in a land of “deep darkness” or *tsalmaveth* which is a compound of *tsef* (shadow) and *maveth* (death). They may be called resides of Sheol or the underworld (cf. 7.11). “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil” [Ps 23.4]. For those 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.’”

Vs. 3: You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

Ravah is the verb for “multiplied” which can mean to become great and is found last in 1.15 but not noted there whereas here it is used with respect to *goy* or “nation” (cf. vs. 1). Compare this multiplication with *gadal* (cf. 1.2) or “increased” which also refers to becoming great usually in the sense of growth. Here such *gadal* implies an organic growth, one from within, concerning the nation (Israel) or more accurately, it’s “joy” or *simchah* which has an air of gladness about it. “Joy and gladness are taken away from the orchards” [16.10].

The verbal root to *simchah* (again as ‘joy’) or *samach* translates as “rejoice” with respect to harvest. “Even the pine trees and the cedars of Lebanon exult over you” [14.8]. Another verb is used for the second “rejoice” or *gly* which means to dance in a circle, to leap for joy. “Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation” [25.9]. In the verse at hand, *gly* gives the image of conquerors around a campfire after a battle when they share the enemy’s spoil among them.

Vs. 4: For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

The elements of oppression and slavery are presented in the context of the “day” (*yom*, cf. 3.7) of Midian, this term being not unlike a *kairos* event transcending the limits of space and time yet including them. Reference to Midian concerns Gideon’s stunning defeat recounted in Chapter Seven of Judges, of three hundred men who overwhelmed a massive army.

Here “yoke, staff and rod” are symbols of oppression which can be broken by a small band of determined people. Note the three terms which are similar in that they are used as sticks for punishment or beating. All three are “broken” or *chatat* (cf. 8.9) which connotes fear:

1) *Hol* as related to *sovel* (‘burden’) where the two are found in 10.27: “In that day their burden will be lifted from your shoulders.” [10.27].

2) *Mateh* as related to *shekem* (‘shoulder’): “Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger” [10.5] and 10.27 cited in #1.

3) *Shevet* (also it refers to ‘tribe’) as related to *nagas* (‘oppressor,’ cf. 3.12). For the alternate meaning, see 49.6: “to raise up the tribes of Jacob.”

Vs. 5: For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

This verse continues the image of Gideon's victory over Midian or rather, its aftermath when the remnants of the battle will be destroyed. Perhaps Isaiah had in mind how the Midianites turned against each other unwittingly: "When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords" [Jud 7.22].

Rahash is the noun for "trampling" and fundamentally means noise, tumult. "The Lord Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise" [29.6]. It modifies "warrior" or *sahan* (participle) from which is derived *se'on* or "battle." Both are the only uses in the Bible.

Simlah means "garment" used by both men and women, usually an outer one, and noted last in 3.7.

Vs. 6: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Yeled is the noun for "child" along with the verb from which it is derived, *yalad* ('is born') found last in 8.18 but not noted there. Note two uses of "to us" (*lanu*) which brings home the point although neither the name nor the parents of the child is known. It could be Maher-shalal-hash-baz of 8.1, the child Isaiah was commanded to have by the prophetess. Still, there is no clear link between the two, and the child in the verse at hand disappears from the scene. Perhaps the Magi had this passage in mind once they got word concerning "the one who has been born king of the Jews" [Mt 2.2]. Although they had seen his star, this seems to have occurred after they got word of the child's birth. Thus any information about how the Magi discovered this is not given, deliberately so, for the reader to discover on his own.

Misrah is the noun for "government" which has one other biblical reference in vs. 7. The verbal root is *sarah* which fundamentally means to place in a row, to set in order. Such rule will be placed on the child's "shoulder" or *shekem* noted in vs. 4. Although this *misrah* isn't spelled out, most likely it will be a king according to the line of David who is mentioned in the next verse.

The four names of this mysterious child with an important destiny are:

1) "Wonderful Counselor" or *Pele' Yohets*. The first word is a noun suggestive of being distinct and therefore set apart. "You have done marvelous things" [25.1]. The second word is a participle of the verb *yahats* found last in 8.10.

2) "Mighty God" or *Gibor* found last in 5.22 which often refers to a warrior's prowess in battle.

3) "Everlasting Father" or *'Avyhad*, the only use of the term which is a compound of *'av* (father) and the verb *yahad* (to appoint).

4) "Prince of Peace" or *Sar-Shalom*. The first is found last in 3.14 and the second is the well known word for peace found in the next verse.

28 December, Holy Family

Listen to me your father; O children; and act accordingly, that you may be kept in safety. For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother...O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not

despise him. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you. Sirach 3.2-6, 12-14

NB: vs. 1 is not in the official selection but included here by reason of it setting the tone for the passage.

The father's word's "listen" to his son is not a command *per se* but reflects a paternal desire for him, like the similar desire of Wisdom in the first chapters of Proverbs, to live a godly life. *Sozo* is the verb for "kept in safety" and means precisely that. As for an example similar to the one hand, consider 1.8: "Hear, my son, your father's instruction and reject not your mother's teaching."

The author of Sirach echoes the words of Ex 20.12, the Ten Commandments: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your gives you." Note the relationship between length of days and "land" or *'adamah* which the Lord is about to give to Israel. *'Adamah* refers more to the physical nature of the land compared with *'erets* which often is interchangeable with the identity of a people. Interestingly, the divine command to honor one's parents follows the sixth of the Ten Commandments which, like this honoring, is to be done with full awareness of at last having a land...a physical place (*'adamah*) to at last call one's own. It's difficult to appreciate what this means unless we take into consideration living in Egypt for four hundred years followed by some forty years of roaming in the Sinai wilderness. So to have an *'adamah* all one's own is difficult to conceive for the Israelites. Throughout the long years of exile when Joseph bade his father and brothers to come to Egypt memory of that *'adamah* had been kept alive along with the hope of being restored to it.

The connection between father and son is vital if the relationship between them and *'adamah* is kept in mind, for the two contribute to an unbroken chain of inheritance. Should that be severed, the connection with *'adamah* and hence one's family is severed forever. It would have been better to remain in Egypt.

Anapauo is the verb for "refresh" or the son towards his mother. Fundamentally it means to desist from something and thus has some negative connotation about it. However, here it seems to mean that by honoring his father, a son causes his mother to be at rest...be at peace...so that the inheritance between this vital ;aternal connection and *'adamah* is maintained.

And so the honor a son is to show to both father and mother is situated within the context of the Ten Commandments or more specifically, in reference to the sixth one. Immediately afterward Mount Sinai is filled with the dramatic images of thunder and lightning. Note that before Moses gives this code of living he had been on Sinai. Thus the impartation of the Commandments is right in the middle of God's manifestation on that mountain on two separate occasions, squeezed in, if you will. The Lord "spoke all these words" [Ex 20.]. That is to say, he did not write them down nor have Moses do the same. Insertion of these commandments into Israel's collective memory is vital which is why they come in between two dramatic revelations on Mount Sinai.

1 January, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

The Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron and his sons, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them." Numbers 6.22-7

Although today begins a new calendar year, the Church is disinterested in this mode of marking time. Instead she is focused upon the one week commemoration of Christ's birth commonly designated as the octave. The real beginning of the new (liturgical) year had taken place a month ago with the First Sunday of Advent.

A footnote in the **RSV** says "This blessing was undoubtedly used in the temple services at Jerusalem."

The well known blessing at hand is situated within the larger context of Chapter Six, the vow of a Nazarite, that is, a person who is "to separate (*nazar*) himself to the Lord" [vs. 1]. Even the "double l" emphasizes this fact of setting apart: the preposition *l-* (to) is prefaced to the verb and "Lord." Shortly before the blessing proper the Lord speaks of an offering by such a consecrated person; that is to say, one seamlessly flows into the other as though they were connected. This is another example, fairly typical, where the conjunctive *v-* is prefaced to the first word of vs. 22: "(*And*) the Lord said to Moses."

There are three stages involved in the blessing. First comes the source or the Lord himself. Secondly comes Moses to whom the Lord speaks. Thirdly comes Aaron (and his sons), Aaron being Moses' "prophet:" "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet" [Ex 7.1]. Thus the blessing is filtered down through Moses and then his sons and given back by the people, if you will, in reverse fashion. This threefold-ness is mirrored by the three uses of the verb "to say" which consists of the common verbs *davar* and *'amar*, the former suggestive of speech and discourse and the latter of word as well as discourse: the Lord (*davar*) to Moses (*'amar*) to Aaron to the people (*'amar*).

The blessing which comes to the people by a threefold impartation similarly is three fold, again where the conjunctive *v-* (and) serves to connect each pair:

"Bless and keep" or *barak* and *shamar*. The latter often occurs in Psalm 119 with regard to the divine Law or Torah, for example, vs. 5: "O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!"

"Face to shine and be gracious" or *'or* and *chanan*. *'Or* is associated with God's face, and in the context at hand, can't make people recall Moses' relationship with the Lord. His face was so radiant that he required a veil to cover it. "And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the veil off until he came out" [Ex 34.33-4]. *Chanan* means to show favor which flows from *'or*.

"Lift up his countenance and give peace." Such lifting (*nasa'*) again brings back those contacts between the Lord and Moses although "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" [Ex 33.20]. So in place of this direct seeing we have a divine lifting or raising of his face which can

be taken as overshadowing the people, again reminiscent of the cloud in which Moses communicated with the Lord. Joined with this lifting of God's face is the giving of peace or *shalom* or better, placing it as the verb *sum* intimates.

After this threefold blessing of Israel, they--Moses, Aaron and his sons--shall put the Lord's name upon the people, another use of the verb *sum*. Note the similarity of sound regarding *sum* and "name:" *samu/shemy*. This *sum* is necessary to effect a blessing by the Lord himself compared with the three doing it or with which the blessing begins. In a very real sense, then, this blessing is a form or recollection or *anamnesis* where the people of Israel recall the sacred covenant given at Sinai to Moses. We could say that such *anamnesis* corresponds to the divine lifting up (*nasa'*) of his countenance upon Israel. Without it they would not have any real identity.

4 January, Epiphany of the Lord

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

On one hand the Lord bids his people to "shine" ('*or*) along with "arise" (*qum*) while on the other hand the divine "glory" or *kavod* is something of the past, if you will. In other words already this *kavod* "has risen" upon the people, *zarach*. Thus we have two verbs pertaining to similar realities, light. *Qum* here is a simple getting up from the gloom of sin at the Lord's invitation whereas *zarach* is an active springing up or scattering, a more general and even lateral action as it pertains to divine glory. *Zarach* is an apt word because often it applies to the rising of the sun. "Then shall your light rise in darkness and your gloom be as the noonday" [Is 58.10].

Such imagery stands in sharp contrast to the situation at hand because both "darkness and thick darkness" (*choshek* and *haraphel*) are obstacles to light and glory. The former is a more general term whereas the latter involves clouds and connotes obscurity. This is a suitable image for the context in which God reveals himself to Moses: "And the people stood afar off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was" [Ex 20.21]. In the case at hand, the combination of *choshek* and *haraphel* are so thick that only the Lord can dispel them which is why *zarach* with its notion of scattering is mentioned a second time.

The divine *kavod* is to be stationary upon the people of Israel and be both a "light and "brightness" ('*or* and *nogah*, the latter suggestive of shining or splendor. *Nogah* applies to Israel's "rising" or *zerach*, and the latter is from the verbal root *zarach* noted above.

By reason of its own light and divine glory, Israel lifts up her eyes not just straight ahead but looks around 360 degrees. People who had once been affiliated with Israel (sons and daughters) are

returning and waiting to enter Jerusalem. Chances are that Israel hadn't been aware of these wayward children because she had been dwelling in darkness and required that divine light and glory to see them. Then again, these long-lost sons and daughters could have been under Israel's nose all along. She simply lacked the capacity to see them there, having been overtaken by a darkness not unlike the one that had afflicted the Egyptians: "Stretch out your (Moses) hands toward heaven that there may be darkness (*choshek*) to be felt" [Ex 10.21].

By now Israel become illumined and aware of her past gloom. As for the sight of her sons and daughters before her, not only will she see them but will "be radiant" or *nahar*, another verb pertinent to light. This one, however, is derived from the same root as "river" and suggests flowing as with regard to water which is an outward movement, more physical in nature than the giving off relative to light. As for the collective "heart" (*lev*) of Israel, it will both "thrill and rejoice" or *pachad* and *rachav*. The former suggests trembling and terror whereas the latter spaciousness, being wide open.

In addition to receiving lost sons and daughters, the sea's "abundance" will come to Israel, the noun here being *hamon* which is suggestive of a tumult or noise (the roaring of waves, for example). The sea is to the east of Israel whereas the camels come from the south, Midian and Ephah being places on the Arabian peninsula. As for Sheba, that's associated with mystery, for example, the unidentified queen who had sought the wisdom of King Solomon. Not only will all three bring gold and frankincense, two gifts associated with the Magi who visited the infant Jesus, they will "proclaim" the Lord's praise, *basar* being the verb which connotes gladness instead of bad news. And like the Magi, already they have been doing this in their respective homelands but will bring their *basar* to perfection once in Jerusalem. In other words, they will be following that star in the dead of night with which the passage at hand begun.

11 January, Baptism of the Lord

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

An interesting point about Christ's baptism...The time gap between his birth (Christmas) and today is approximately thirty years. Then Jesus runs off into the desert for forty days and forty nights, essentially disappears. This, of course, is preparation for his short ministry of some three years. As for the liturgical year, the bulk of Jesus' chronological life is condensed into little more than two weeks whereas his ministry is spread out over the rest of the year. That is from now until the last day of Ordinary Time or the threshold of Advent. Just pondering these two times is quite amazing. Clearly the Church runs on a wholly different schedule.

Vs. 5 is omitted in this excerpt but included here.

The identity of the “servant” or *heved* (can also refer to a slave) is uncertain. It could be an unidentified person who seems to be present in or among those to whom this message is addressed. If so, that would heighten expectations as to his identity. People would be looking at each other for any tell-tale signs of being excepted. Also the *heved* could be the nation of Israel as a whole which needs to be in tune with the divine *hineh* or “behold.” Such beholding is a way of grabbing one’s attention and takes in the situation at once and as a whole as is the case at hand. Attentiveness to this divine invitation is what the Lord is after; then and only then the identity of the *heved* will be resolved for the reader. Any inquiries which are bound to arise reveal a natural curiosity which ultimately are fruitless and reveal more an inquisitive mentality.

The *hineh* automatically leads to awareness of the Lord’s “soul” or *nephesh* which is the inmost part of a person. So when the Lord speaks thus, the communication is very important, for his words here are more important than any other kind of divine communication. After all, this *nephesh* “delights” or *ratsah* in his servant. Naturally those listening to these words are on the lookout for the Lord’s *heved* and may confuse his identity and nature of his mission with their own preconceived ideas.

The Lord has decided to put his own “Spirit” or *Ruach* within his servant. Note that this *Ruach* differs from *nephesh* as being almost another person or someone accompanying the Lord. In a sense it’s reminiscent of Wisdom in Prov 8.22: “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work.” In fact, the rest of that chapter can be read along with these verses from Isaiah. A paradox of sorts pertains to this *Ruach*. While it is chosen to be “upon” (*hal-*) the servant—and a *Ruach* as wind or breath is very light, almost undetectable—it will not cause the servant to speak. Instead, his task of bringing justice will be done in silence, all the more reason for hearkening back to the opening word of this passage, *hineh*, a way sustaining one’s attention. Note that such justice pertains to the “nations” or *goyim*, a term often associated with people not belonging to Israel which essentially includes the rest of the world.

Because the servant upon whom this weightless, invisible *Ruach* rests will be carrying out his mission in silence, there has to be some correspondence between it and those with whom he is related. Perhaps that’s why the “people” or *ham* will recognize him, this term often associated with the nation of Israel compared with the *goyim* of the last paragraph. Already the *ham* has both “breath” from the Lord, *neshamah*, which fundamentally meaning panting and a “spirit” (*ruach*). Thus by their very *constitution—neshamah* and *ruach—they* have the capacity to recognize the servant upon whom the *Ruach* rests.

The last two verses have the Lord speaking directly to “you” (singular) which seems to be the servant (and the *Ruach* as well). He addresses both the “people” (*ham* or Israel as indicated by mention of the covenant) and the “nations” or *goyim*. Vs. 6 is cited in Acts 13.47 which reads differently: “I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.” Perhaps “salvation” or *soteria* is an addition (apparently not in the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament) with regard to Jesus Christ which the early Church could easily read into this servant song of Isaiah.

This quote from Isaiah is not unlike another when Jesus entered a synagogue and cited publically Isaiah 61.1-2, about the Spirit of the Lord being “upon me” and bringing “good news” to the poor, etc. Upon having finished this short quote, “the eyes of all were fixed on him” [Lk 4.20], the verb being *atenizo* which fundamentally means to be without extension (alpha privative and *teino*, to stretch or to extend). Thus one could draw a parallel between this intense gaze...one without extension between Jesus and the viewers...with the same attentiveness intimated in *hineh* or “behold” which introduces this excerpt from Isaiah.

18 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

3. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down within the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. 4. Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 5. and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6. And the Lord called again, "Samuel!" And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. 9. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10. And the Lord came and stood forth, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for thy servant hears."...19. And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. First Samuel 3.3-10 & 19

NB: the following is extracted from “Expansions on the First Book of Samuel” posted in this home page.

Vs. 3: *Ner* is the noun for “lamp” and can refer to a candle in and by itself but more usually to one of the candlesticks in the Shiloh temple. “And you shall make the seven lamps for it; and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light upon the space in front of it” [Ex 25.37]. Apparently the *ner* at hand is allowed to extinguish on its own, perhaps not long after dusk. *Kavah* means “gone out” or to extinguish as in Prov 31.18: “Her lamp does not go out at night.”

As noted in vs. 2, mention of the lamp is significant in view of Eli’s growing blindness, symbolic of how his house is about to fade away in light of Samuel coming on the scene. Apparently Samuel did not have a room but was “laying down” (*shakav*) within the temple itself, this verb referring to Eli doing the same “in his own place.” This exposure of Samuel to the Lord’s presence is significant, a bed off to the side, for it puts in him direct contact with the Lord for the revelation he is about to receive. Chances are Samuel chose to sleep there in the open instead of an adjacent room. There must have been something both creepy and comforting being alone in such a large building.

The verse at hand has the first explicit mention of the “ark” or *aron* in First Samuel. One has to go back to Judg 20.27 for the last mention of this term: “For the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days.” Samuel’s proximity to the ark is significant, for it will feature later in his life.

Vs. 4 is to be read in light of the lamp of God still burning, Samuel near the ark of the Lord and Eli away from the action “in his own place.”

The Hebrew text has “And the Lord called to Samuel.” This is more direct than the English text and intimates that the Lord didn’t have to use force to rouse Samuel who responds at once. “Here I am” or *hineh* noted last in 2.31, more a kind of behold or statement that one is fully present for what is to follow. Then and only then can the lamp extinguish on its own. This calling must have been down softly because Eli didn’t hear it. The same applies to Hophni and Phinehas who wouldn’t recognize the divine voice if it spoke plainly to them like the Lord had done to Moses on Sinai.

Vs. 5: Samuel mistaking the Lord for Eli’s voice suggests that the two in the temple weren’t far away. Because Eli was quite old, any summons he might have made at night was in a low voice, so it was easily to confuse his voice with the Lord’s. Samuel makes his presence known by *hineh* as he had done with the Lord in vs. 4. As for the verb “called,” it is the common *qara’* as used in the previous verse. Keep in mind that throughout this incident which continues into the next few verses “the lamp of God had not yet gone out.” We could say the lamp extinguished itself once Eli knew the Lord had been summoning Samuel.

Nothing is said of Hophni and Phinehas spending nights at the temple. Chances are they preferred spending nights elsewhere and engaging in less than desirable activity.

Vs. 6: Here the Lord addresses Samuel by name only once compared with twice in vs. 4. He already got the boy’s attention, perhaps laying down without falling asleep, so he didn’t have to rouse him. The verb *yasaph* is used for “again” and means to add, to continue. Although there are two distinct calls between vs. 4 and now, certainly that divine *qara’* was echoing in Samuel’s heart and soul, knowing that it would return shortly. With this in mind, *yasaph* is used again in vs. 8.

For the third time in a row Samuel responds to Eli with *hineh*, “Here I am.” It didn’t dawn upon Eli that it was a *qara’* (‘called’) from the Lord, so he brushed off this second interruption of his sleep. As far as he was concerned, Samuel had been dreaming. In the meanwhile, the lamp in the temple continued to burn.

Vs. 7 is inserted between the first two *qara’* of the Lord to Samuel and the third or final one which finally registers on Eli. It serves to prepare the reader for this or more importantly, for Samuel to recognize who was summoning him. The first two *qara’* only involved Samuel’s proper name, not his mission, as in vs. 17+. It would have been too much at first for the boy to know what the Lord intended, so by the third *qara’* he was prepared.

The preposition *terem* or “yet” is used twice which, with the negative, indicates ignorance or a lack of *yadah* by Samuel with regard to the Lord. It stands in stark contrast to Hophni and Phinehas in 2.12: “they had no regard for the Lord” which makes their behavior inexcusable. This *yadah* as to things divine...more a direct, intimate acquaintance with the Lord...was lacking due to Samuel’s youth. However, he had been primed for it during his temple service and indirectly by the negative witness of Hophni and Phinehas. It must have been both startling and disconcerting

for such a young boy to see how the two brothers defrauded people making offerings in the temple all the while under Eli's guidance who was helpless to address the situation.

Davar is the familiar "word" as applied to the Lord which in vs. 1 is noted expressly as being quite rare in Israel at the time. And so Samuel is not singled out by reason of his unfamiliarity but as sharing in this general ignorance. No small wonder that he couldn't identify twice the divine *qara'*. *Davar* is used with the verb *galah* ('revealed') which fundamentally means to make naked, to uncover as it applies to an existing reality. *Galah* is noted last in 2.27 as by the anonymous prophet speaking about the Lord and Israel in Egypt. Surely that prophet had some *galah*, else he wouldn't have uttered what he did.

Vs. 7 is a preface of sorts to the important verse at hand (8) which does not mention the express *qara'* of the Lord to Samuel as happened twice, all this which must have taken place in a fairly short period of time. As in vs. 6 the verb *yasaph* ('again') is used and can be taken as showing continuity between all three interventions by the Lord.

When Samuel said his last *hineh* ('here I am') to Eli, he knew, even before Eli realized it, that the two previous callings were not human but divine. He required an elder to confirm this which Eli now did. The verb *byn* for "perceived" means to understand. Eli can't be blamed for being slow to *byn* because "the word (*davar*) of the Lord was rare in those days" [vs. 1]. "But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead" [2Sam 12.19].

In the verse at hand, this third and final *qara'* is used with the preposition *l-* (to) prefaced to "boy" rendering it literally as "was calling to the boy" which is equivalent to *yasaph* in the first sentence of this verse.

Vs. 9: Now Eli realized the Lord was communicating with young Samuel and told him to go back to sleep (virtually impossible for both) and wait for a third and final *qara'*. Eli knew that as long as the lamp remained alive the Lord would speak.

Eli bids Samuel to say to the Lord "speak" or *davar* (same spelling at the noun). Though *davar* is found frequently in many common circumstances, it has special meaning here in light of the "*davar* of the Lord" in vs. 7. At the time Samuel was a *nahar* or boy, this term being associated sometimes with a "servant," and the term here is *heved* which is used in the next verse.

Vs. 9 for the first times says that Samuel had a "place" or *maqom*, the same word as applied to Eli as in vs. 2. Surely that must have been the most unnerving night Samuel had spent, for upon his response rested so much for the Shiloh temple and the nation of Israel.

Vs. 10: On this the third and final time the Lord calls out, that is, first he comes out and then stands forth, the verb for the latter being *yatsav* which means to set oneself or to take a stand. The previous two instances were marked by *qara'* only, nothing else associated with such calling. However, things are different now. To make sure Samuel hears...and by implication, Eli...the Lord comes out of the shadowy atmosphere of the temple, if you will, or out of the ark and takes his position right by Samuel. Samuel couldn't help but hear even though he could trace the previous two occasions of the *qara'* coming from the ark. Now, however, the Lord stepped outside the ark,

yatsav being the verb. It occurs next in 10.23: "And when he (Saul) stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward."

By now the situation had grown so tense that it forced Eli to take up position behind some column in the temple to look in as to what might happen. This third coming by the Lord didn't bode well for him nor for Israel, but Eli had heard dire words from the anonymous prophet, so he had nothing to lose.

Samuel demonstrates his readiness to hear what the Lord is about to say with "speak" or *davar*...communicate to me that *davar* or word which you wish. He calls himself a "servant" or *heved* as in the previous verse, that is, following the instruction of Eli as how to respond. So no longer is Samuel a *nahar* or boy but a *heved*.

A considerable gap of time exists between this verse (19) and the last one when Samuel informed Eli as to the Lord's prophecy which fulfilled the one of the anonymous prophet earlier. We are left to ponder how both responded and how they interacted during those years along with Hophni and Phinehas who presumably kept up their abominable behavior. As Samuel grew, he became more outraged at the behavior of these two brothers yet could do nothing about it. He figured it wasn't worth asking Eli to intervene...too late for that now.

Gadal is the verb for "grew" and found last in 2.26 in pretty much the same context, there after Eli gave a half-hearted rebuke to his two sons. So while Samuel grew...became greater (the fundamental meaning of this verb)...Eli diminished, the two transpiring together under the same roof of the Shiloh temple. This growth of Samuel is reminiscent first of John the Baptist and then Jesus when both were young: "And the child grew and became strong in spirit" [Lk 1.8]. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" [Lk 2.52].

"The Lord was with him" suggests that in addition to *gadal*, Samuel continued to receive the divine *davar* in one form or another. These may not have been as dramatic as the three summons at the Shiloh temple, but still they were real. This emphasis upon speaking is intimated by the fact that the Lord never allowed his "word" or *davar* to fall to the ground or to become worthless. Although we have no account of what these words might have been, certainly they were prophetic. The image of the anonymous prophet must have played an important role for Samuel and on whom he modeled himself to some degree.

25 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." 3. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. 4. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he cried, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" 5. And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them...10. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it. Jonah 3.1-5, 10

The following excerpt is lifted from “Expansions on the Book of Jonah” also posted on this home page.

Vs. 1: An incomplete saying not unlike 1.1 where the word (*devar*) is speaking (*amar*) a second time. The *devar* which had been described above as continuously hounding Jonah finally relented while he was entangled within the “great fish’s” entrails and now is waiting upon the shore to greet him. There’s a sense that despite Jonah’s repentance in Chapter Two he really hasn’t had a change of attitude as Chapter Four reveals. He accomplishes his task of preaching repentance to Nineveh which exceeds all expectations and that’s it. Surely some inhabitants must have picked up on Jonah’s reluctance, even his I’d-rather-be-somewhere-else attitude but were careful to make a distinction between the message and the Messenger.

Vs. 2 mirrors the original purpose of Jonah’s mission in 1.2. This *qum* or “arise” is even more important (and to be taken literally), for Jonah had just been vomited from the “great fish” and for some time was laying prone on the seashore. As with 1.2, the relative pronoun “that” is lacking in the Hebrew.

The English of 1.2 as “cry against it” sounds strong, *qara’* being the verb with the preposition *hal* (‘cry upon’) Nineveh but the verse at hand has the same verb for “proclaim” coupled with the preposition *el* or “to” it. “Message” is derived from *qara’*, that is, *qery’ah* which is the only use of this term in the Bible. One can surmise that such a message is more a calling (from the Lord) which makes a clear distinction from the person of Jonah so anyone listening to him won’t be captivated by his personality, his delivery or anything else...just the divine *qara’* or calling. Note the *qery’ah* is not given to Jonah immediately after having been vomited by the “great fish.” That has to wait until he reaches Nineveh which was a perilous land journey from the Mediterranean coastline. Most likely Jonah didn’t go it alone but joined a caravan or other group of travelers. At least he wouldn’t have something to resemble his ill-fated sea journey. So during all that time Jonah anticipated the *qery’ah* while being guided...not hounded as before...by the divine *devar*.

Vs. 3 counters Jonah’s refusal of the Lord in 1.3, “But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” Both verses contain the verb *qum* (‘arose’): both were done quickly but for two entirely different purposes. In the section above, the perils of a land journey from the Mediterranean coast to inland Nineveh were considerable. Also it was noted that Jonah may have joined a caravan or other travelers for protection, but this verse seems to preclude that. The divine *devar* guided Jonah safely all the way. En route the two became reconciled, if you will, having been at odds earlier. During those several weeks (it must have taken some, at least) Jonah and the *devar* had an opportunity to formulate what that “message” (*qery’ah*) might be.

Elohyim is a noun for the English adjective “exceedingly” and is noted in 1.6 as “god;” also it is applicable to the Lord as God. Thus the verse at hand reads literally, “great city to God.” For the Lord to identify himself with Nineveh, the grandest metropolis of its time, must have impressed Jonah considerably. This shows how much the Lord is willing to concede to his unwilling prophet and will have to do so again in the next and final chapter.

As for the “three days’ journey,” that applies to a straight-forward walk across the breadth of Nineveh without making any detour, stopping to see the sights as well as not speaking with anyone

along the way. Mention of such a breadth possibly comes from Jonah himself who wanted to check out Nineveh before proclaiming that “message” or *qery’ah*. In this way he would know better what he was up against. There was no problem of being perceived as an outsider. Nineveh was full of people from the known world, even some from Tarshish.

Vs. 4: *Chalal* is the verb for “began” which also means to perforate, to loose, to lay open. We could say by this that Jonah had to enter Nineveh by loosening its gates not so much by force—to the local population he was just another foreigner—but by actually starting to preach then and there. At this juncture the “message” of 3.2 was not clear to him, so perhaps he decided to recount his adventure of being almost shipwrecked, his offer to be sacrificed and being swallowed up by the “great fish.” If he had no success at the city’s entrance, he would not succeed at all within its gates. “Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah” [2Chron 3.1]. Also in the verse at hand *chalal* gives added force to the conjunctive *v-* prefaced to it.

Once inside, Jonah goes one day’s journey of the three days it takes to cross the entirety of Nineveh (cf. 3.3). He needed this time to access the situation, meet people and discern that “message” the Lord wished to communicate to the inhabitants. Given that Nineveh was so cosmopolitan, quite a few foreigners were present either as residents, visitors or traders. Thus Jonah’s audience comprised a widely assorted group of people who worshiped an equally assorted amount of deities. This was no surprise to Jonah, for everyone knew about the city, even the sailors on board the ship from which he had been thrown. In a sense, Nineveh was a microcosm of the ancient world, a much wider audience for Jonah he encountered than working under King Jeroboam II.

And so after one day’s journey within the gates of Nineveh that “message” became clear: the city “shall be overthrown,” the verb being *haphak* which means to turn as well as to change, and here is a participle. Up until this one day’s presence within Nineveh Jonah kept preaching about his recent adventure until the Lord changed that “message” into one of destruction, *haphak*. Jonah had no clear idea what this *haphak* consisted of, even when he completed his preaching mission and left Nineveh where he sat at a safe distance to “see what would become of the city” [4.5]. Being a prophet, Jonah was well acquainted with Israelite history, so the first image that must have come to mind was the Lord’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: “And he overthrew (*haphak*) those cities” [Gn 19.25]. But before this Jonah thought to himself, “So this is what those two cities must have looked like prior to their fall.” It was as though history were repeating itself. The text gives no account of the sins of Nineveh, just that each inhabitant (native and foreign) “turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands” [3.8]. As for the *haphak* the Lord had in mind, surely it would be as disastrous as for those two cities. Furthermore, failure to warn Nineveh and its subsequent destruction would benefit Jonah just as much as its conversion. He would end up as a Second Abraham and his memory for future generations would be assured.

The message Jonah delivers is one he does by crying, *qara’*, that verb found towards the beginning of this book (‘and cry against it’) again in 3.2 (‘and proclaim to it the message that I tell you’). As for the “forty days,” it is not unlike a *kairos* event, and implies not so much a length of time but suggests that which is done within time and here it is believing in God as the next verse says. “Forty days” can be a few hours, weeks or even months but doesn’t seem to extend beyond that into and up to a full year.

Vs. 5: The noun *'anshey* is used for “people” which means men and women individually and thus fits the eclectic population of Nineveh compared with *ham* or people collected together and having an identity such as a nation. Despite their disparate backgrounds, the *'anshey* “believed God,” the verb being the common *'aman* which also means to support, to trust and to stand firm. Note that this *'aman* is directed “in (*b-*) God” compared to the multitude of deities within the city. Thus we have a two-fold conversion, as it were: accepting the fact that Nineveh will be overthrown and believing in God, not in a multitude of gods. Just the fact that all the inhabitants believed in God within a short span of time is a miracle. In fact, when these good people approached Jonah, he hadn't a clue as how to handle them. He must have fleshed out the message of Nineveh's impending destruction though it is left to the reader to fill in the blanks. Perhaps the readiness to convert was guided more by economic ends than religious ones. The non-residents were just as eager to repent, for if they lost Nineveh, they and their own countries would suffer from the loss of trade. That may be why even the king himself got involved.

The verb *qara'* again is used with a different nuance, as “proclaimed,” and has the same sense of urgency as originally discussed in 1.2 ('cry against it'). Despite the enormity of Nineveh, word about its impending doom and the remedy to ward it off spread very quickly.

Vs. 10: Whether or not the deeds of repentance by the Ninevehites are satisfactory is contingent upon the divine *ra'ah*, the common verb for seeing, and we can take the *ra'ah* at hand to be done by God on site, if you will. As he had done with regard to the land of Shinar, the Lord “came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” [Gn 10.6]. As with Jonah, God did not have to take three days to traverse Nineveh but could do so in an instant, a fact which Jonah perceived and made his resentful. Surely during his visit the Lord had penetrated every corner of Nineveh and was especially moved by the sackcloth put over the larger animals. That meant they were serious.

Here we have a second use of the verb *nacham*, “repented” which meant that Nineveh was spared. Still, that message had to be conveyed to the king, his nobles and everyone else, foreigners included. They didn't know it outright but had to rely upon Jonah. As the next chapter reveals, he is less than happy with the outcome but was careful not to reveal this to the king and his court. That would spoil anything for the future, including any prophetic work he might take up with his protector, King Jeroboam II. Compare this spiteful and rather petty attitude with Abraham in his intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah: “Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked” [Gn 18.23]?

1 February, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the Lord said to me, 'They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who

presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' Deuteronomy 18.15-20

The context of this passage is the worship of God with regard to the Levitical priests. Moses is addressing the people, attempting to console them that the Lord “will raise up” or *qum* a prophet like him, this verb suggestive of organic growth from within (*qerev*, ‘among you’) rather than from without, *qerev* meaning the very center of something. Moses specifies this *qum* and *qerev* even further, if you will: “from your brethren” and not from any external source. If the latter happened, the people would flounder in the Sinai desert. This notion of succession is important though it doesn't seem to be pressing at the moment. Only after wandering some years in the desert after Moses proved himself did the people start to look for someone worthy to take over.

As for the idea of a prophet, the Book of Exodus doesn't call Moses by that title. Instead, it belongs to his brother, Aaron. “See, I make you as God to pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet” [Ex 7.1]. i.e., Moses is intimated as being on a higher level than even this exalted office.

Moses is quick to add a request made earlier by the same people he's addressed, namely, immediately after the Lord gave him the Ten Commandments and when Mount Sinai was ablaze with fire and smoke. “You (Moses) speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us lest we die” [Ex 20.19]. The Lord concurred with this and decides to raise up a prophet after the example of Moses from among them (*qerev* again). Just as the Lord spoke...not inscribed...the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex 20.1), so will the Lord with regard to Moses' successor. Nothing is said of this person's identity though Moses thought it could be (correctly) his assistant Joshua.

Regardless of who it is, the Lord “will put my words (*davar*) in his mouth.” Actually this noun and verbal root (same spelling) occur frequently in the passage at hand demonstrating the importance of speech as communication which is along the lines of the Greek concept of *logos*, which easily applies to the *Logos* of God. By now the people were familiar with how the Lord has spoken with...*davar*...Moses both on Sinai and directly with them as now. That means they knew how this putting of *davar* in a person's mouth operates, if you will. It's almost a physical act like the giving of the Ten Commandments, each of which may be considered as a *davar*.

Should anyone fail to listen to Moses' successor *davar*, the Lord himself will “require” it, will “require” a *davar* from him, the verb being *darash*. This word means to beat or tread, so the Lord will really extract consent from such a person who did not listen to the prophetic successor. Anyone else who pretends to *davar* on the Lord's behalf in imitation of Moses or this successor will die. Nothing is said how this will happen, whether it will come from the Lord or the people.

The remaining two verses in Chapter Eighteen are not given in today' reading but round out an understanding of it. The people want to know whether a prophet speaks the *davar* of the Lord or not, for there must be a way of determining the truth. The proof is simple. If what the false prophet *davar* does not come to pass, they he's speaking falsely.

8 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Has not man a hard service upon earth, and are not his days like the days of a hireling? Like a slave who longs for the shadow and like a hireling who looks for his wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, "When shall I arise?" But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn. My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to their end without hope. Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good. Job 7.1-4, 6-7 (vs. 5 included)

The opening words of this excerpt are reminiscent of Lord's words to the first man (Adam) shortly after having been tempted: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life" [Gn 3.17]. *Tsava'* is the noun for "hard service" which usually applies to an army as in the familiar biblical title "Lord of hosts." In sum, *tsava'* is hard and disciplined as customary for military service. Indeed, it can be traced all the way back to the Genesis incident just before the man had been expelled from the garden. Immediately after that comes the story of Cain slaying his brother Abel, the first murder.

Prior to his temptation, the first man was placed "in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it" [2.15]. The two verbs *havad* and *shamar* are used here, the former suggestive of doing something in general the latter, of keeping guard or observing (often associated with the Torah as in Psalm 119). For the man, both *havad* and *shamar* were effortless. Now after the "eyes of both were opened" [3.7], the same *havad* and *shamar* are transformed into a *tsava'*, "a hard service upon earth." Not only that, the first man lost his lordship over the garden and became like both a hireling and a slave in the passage at hand. *Heved* is the noun for "slave," derived from *havad* just mentioned.

The restlessness behind the question "When shall I arise?" is part of the first man's heritage outside the Garden of Eden. Behind it lies memory of the cherubim with a "flaming sword flashing back and forth" [3.24] to prevent entry into the garden where, incidentally, nothing is said of the first woman's banishment.

The transition from the banishment from Eden to the birth of Cain and Abel continued to snowball tragically on to the flood of Noah and is presented in rather tight or concise fashion despite mention of descendants or generations. Interestingly when Noah is born the derivation of his name (it pertains to comfort) is significant. "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed" [5.29]. Such had been the experience of the human race until now which points more to the collective memory of that banishment from Eden and the Lord's words to the first man. The land has been cursed since Cain slew his brother meaning that every person who had walked upon it since then until the birth of Noah heard in one way or another the words echoing Abel's blood which "cries out to me (the Lord) from the ground" [4.10].

The cry just described had been silenced with the flood but unfortunately echo of it survived in Noah's descendants until the time, if you will, when the passage at hand had been written down. Cain's blood only stopped its crying from the earth with the blood of Jesus on the cross which was shed *above* the earth. That is, his blood flowed down into the earth to counter the upward crying out coming from below. And so two bloods met, as it were: the one of Cain and the other of Jesus

Christ. From that point onward the earth did not have to groan with the long, pathetic sounds that had plagued mankind until then.

15 February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests...he is a leprous man, he is unclean; the priest must pronounce him unclean; his disease is on his head. "The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean; he shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp. Leviticus 13:1-2 & 44-46

Today is the last Sunday of Ordinary Time until 14 June, almost exactly four months away. That is to say, the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost cycle will kick in this week with Ash Wednesday. Being on the threshold of such a major seasonal change gives occasion to reflect on how we absorb the Church's presentation of time through different seasons. As for this word "season," we may associate it with "seasoning" which flavors food. And so this idea of a season...seasoning...flavors the entire atmosphere of the Church and passes it on to us.

After the 14th of June we return to Ordinary Time which lasts through towards the end of November until Advent (the longest stretch of any specific season). As for the term "ordinary" used liturgically, it derives from the Latin *ordo* meaning order or methodical arrangement. Thus *ordo* applies to how the Church arranges her presentation of the mystery of Christ and how we are to order...to *ordo*, if you will...ourselves to it. During the few days between this Sunday and Tuesday, we can ponder what it's like living on a threshold between two different modes...seasons...of time. Then on Wednesday morning we step over into a new one which lasts four months. Just thinking of Lent (and the other two seasons right afterward) is sufficient material to ponder throughout the forty days of that important season. What's special about Lent is that the Church "seasons" our lives with a selection of the best scriptural passages on the entire year.

Today's reading can be taken as an introduction to the Lenten theme of repentance and cleansing from sin which will dominate...be the "seasoning" to flavor our lives...for forty days. Obviously the image of physical leprosy can apply to the spirit. The frightening aspect about this disease was the way it ate away one's body in slow motion, if you will. Just as frightening was its highly contagious nature. To counter this twofold threat not just to those nearby but to the entire congregation, the Lord through Moses prescribes taking the afflicted person to a priest who here is Aaron. His two sons are included but later turn out to be unfaithful...even worse than being leprous as those persons with the physical disease.

The passage at hand only has the first two verses of Chapter Thirteen. The intervening section up to vs. 44 has procedures for the priests to follow, pretty much like doctors. At heart of these verses, of course, is that theme of contagion which at all costs is to be avoided. This threat gives us an indirect view of Israel's corporate nature.

"The disease is on his head" [vs. 44], *negeh* being the word for the former, an apt description because it derives from the verbal root to touch and thus connotes a blow, of being afflicted. Next there follows a dramatic way the leprous person...the one who has been struck...must comport himself. To top it off, he must cry out publicly "unclean" or *tame'* which also means to be polluted which means this person is not

only struck but permeated with a filth that unfortunately can have spiritual and moral ramifications. The text next deals with isolating lepers, having them live alone yet close by. Apparently the injunction to cry out “unclean” relates to their coming not so much into the camp from their isolation but to the camp's gates to get supplies and even participate in worship from afar.

Next the passage at hand concludes with this unfortunate being assigned a “habitation” or *moshav* (literally, a sitting) which is outside the camp. The verb “dwell” or *yashav* is the verbal root for *moshav*. So despite the dire threat of contagion, the Lord through the mediation of Moses and therefore to Aaron and the priests are to care for a leper; not banish him outright nor slay him. The word “camp” or *machaneh* clearly indicates a temporary structure compared to one which is fixed such as a town. So when the people got up and moved, so did the lepers, trailing behind as it were yet not cut off from the community.

18 February, Ash Wednesday

This part of Church's liturgical year had evolved over the centuries from today, the beginning of Lent, through Easter, through Pentecost and the Sundays that more or less trickle down from Pentecost. The very last day is the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary which is 115 days from now. That comprises a good third of the calendar year. Often the Sunday Gospel (as it is this year) is from Mt 6.1-6, part of which runs as follows: “But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 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. 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.”

Note the three times the phrase “in secret” occurs, an apt counsel to begin this season of prayer and fasting. Now jump ahead 115 days to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Sometimes the Gospel is lifted from the Presentation of Jesus in the temple: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also) that the thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed” [Lk 2.34-5]. Here emphasis is upon revealing what lays hidden or within the human heart. With these two Gospels situated at the very beginning and very end of one grand liturgical time frame in mind, perhaps we could switch them. In other words, take Luke's Gospel for Ash Wednesday and take Matthew's Gospel for the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The two are exchanged to show the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end as expressed through the language of secret-ness and being revealed. The intervening 115 may be seen as an interplay between the two: one one hand containing secret-ness and on the other, being revealed.

22 February, First Sunday of Lent

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. Genesis 9.8-15

The following is lifted from *Expansions on the Book of Genesis*, also on this homepage.

After a strict injunction about murder in order to prevent a re-occurrence of a tragedy akin to Abel's blood crying out from the earth, God says "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you." *Beryth* is the word for "covenant" used for the very first time in 6.18 and implies something cut. In both instances, the verb *qum* (to arise) is found in conjunction with the noun. In the first example the verb is the future tense whereas with the verse at hand, it's the present tense or time for fulfilment of what God had said prior to the flood. Between that time shortly before Noah and his family entered the ark and now, there must have been plenty of suspense and curiosity as to when and where the *beryth* would take place. They expected it would be while they were floating aimlessly upon the flood waters, but failure for God to intervene increased their anxiety, even privately entertaining thoughts that God had forsaken them. Then at the beginning of the earth's re-colonization, Noah had constructed an altar and offered sacrifice, the first ever. However, this was not the *beryth* God had promised prior to the flood. Noah built it on his own, an act which later generations would formalize. Thus making sacrifice is proper for the post (as opposed to pre-) flood world. Perhaps Noah got so anxious about the promised *beryth* that he anticipated it the best way he knew how. If he returned some of the clean animals to God, that could force God's hand and make him reveal himself.

At last in vs. 9 we have God speaking in the present tense introduced by the dramatic *hineh*: "Behold, "I establish." No question this got the attention of Noah and his family because the tension begun in 6.18 with the promise of a covenant would be resolved shortly. However, details about this covenant remained hidden which only increased the tension. Surely they must have thought the *beryth* would be similar to Noah's recent sacrifice. This second time around God added a bit more drama by mentioning not just those present but "your descendants after you." That means the *beryth* would last in perpetuity compared with the occasional offering of a sacrifice and in the minds of Noah's family, their private hope that never again would they experience a flood. Not just Noah and his family were involved but thrown in for good measure (vs. 10) are the birds, cattle, every beast of the earth..."as many as came out of the ark." NB: the Hebrew of the last part of vs. 10 repeats "every beast of the earth" compared with the RSV "as many as came out of the ark."

Vs. 11 repeats God's intention soon to be implemented as to the *qum* (to rise) or establishment of the covenant. Here that verb assumes significance insofar as the *beryth* will continue to "arise" throughout future generations and therefore act like leaven. It's a consolation for Noah and his family, that God wouldn't destroy the earth by flood, words to that effect being uttered in the same verse: "never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood...to destroy the earth." Two verbs pertinent to destruction by flood are mentioned: first *karath* (to cut, cut off) and *shachath* (to destroy; connotes wickedness). As for the former, it is the verbal root for *beryth*, as that which has been cut between God and man. And that cutting is viewed in terms of an animal sacrifice. As for the latter, its sense is captured in 6.11, "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight." The flood or *mabul* related to both verbs comes in two forms: from below the earth (fountains) and from above (rain). Regardless of whether water comes from below or from above, *mabul* represents the letting loose of the primal flood waters upon which the earth rested...floated...not unlike the ark itself. This promise, however, doesn't preclude a *karath* and *shachath* by God in the future by a means other than water. No small wonder that Noah and his family had a fear of large bodies of water such as the ocean and lakes, all too vivid reminders of what had happened. Such a fear remained instilled within people for thousands of years.

As noted earlier, a covenant or *beryth* is that which is cut. However, vs. 12 modifies this a bit by saying "This is the sign of the covenant." The word for "sign" is *oth*, often taken as a portent for something that

will occur in the not too distant future. It occurs first in 1.14, "Let them (lights) be for signs and for seasons and for days and years." As for the verse at hand, *’oth* enhances the visual nature of the *beryth* as opposed to action associated with it, i.e., the actual "cutting" of a sacrificial victim. That ties in nicely with the *beryth* made "between me and you and every living creature that is with you." Note mention of a creature (*nephesh* or soul as in vs. 2) "with you." That is to say, those "souls" or animals which decided to remain with Noah in contrast to those which ran off from the ark as soon as they could. As for the *beryth*, it's in the form of a "bow in the cloud" or *qesheth*, one of the most advanced weapons of the day. Noah had no need to bring a *qesheth* into the ark; after all, the earth was about to be flooded and the animals on board were penned in securely enough. Actually, the *qesheth* at hand applies to a rainbow which is shaped in the general form of this military weapon. It reaches toward the heaven with both ends parallel to the earth thus implying that the arrow is shot from the ground into the heavens. And so the *qesheth* was a clearly visible sign (*’oth*) in man's favor instead of God's. It wasn't visible all the time, only after rain as well as those occasions when the sun shone through the rain at a certain angle. Such is the association of *qesheth* with a cloud, the principle means of refracting the sunlight. That implies that rain, associated with the flood waters, is advantageous for mankind and the earth, not ready to let loose at it had done with the flood. If this *qesheth* were present all the time, people would tire of looking at it and hence lose sight of their connection with God. They knew that a *qesheth* might appear right after a rainstorm, so they had to be on the look-out for this dramatic, fleeting sight... the *’oth*...of the covenant between God and mankind.

Although vs. 11 reads "I establish my covenant with you," vs. 13 has "it (the bow) shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." That is to say, the former is between God and man and the latter, between God and the earth (*’erets*). Both are crucial though mention of *’erets* is important here, the same *’erets* that had been covered totally by flood waters but now is revealed and ready for re-colonization. Never would Noah trust God fully unless the covenant be with the earth.

"I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature" [vs. 15]. Here God stresses the importance of memory, the verb *zakar* having been discussed in 8.1 with reference to God and those in the ark. When the bow appears (and it is a fleeting one at that) in the clouds due to the presence of sunlight, its presence triggers God to remember his covenant. God has to be just as watchful for the rainbow's appearance as people on earth; since the rainbow is so fleeting yet attractive, only a short time exists for both God and people to recall its significance. God takes this rainbow covenant seriously because he it is a sign that he won't cause a flood. In fact, God continues to speak of this sign until vs. 17 after which the text speaks of Noah's descendants. Surely there are times when the rainbow doesn't occur. That can cause anxiety among Noah and his more recent descendants, that the gathering clouds would give forth torrential rain followed by the opening of the springs below the earth. As for these springs, nothing is said about a covenant being made with them; they were just as destructive in causing the worldwide flood if not more so. However, the rainbow in the sky is a visible sign or *’oth* than anything that God could inscribe upon the fountains.

"And from these (Shem, Ham and Japheth) the whole earth was peopled" [vs. 19]. Though Noah continues to play a role in the time immediately after the flood, mention of his three sons (nothing ever is said about Noah's wife except that he had one) reveals that the action has shifted definitively from the pre- to the post flood world or from the world peopled directly by Adam's descendants to the re-colonization of this same world by Noah's descendants. *Naphats* is the verb for "peopled" which more accurately applies to a dispersing or scattering and connotes something wild and uncontrollable. Also it suggests violence as in Ps 137.9: "Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" Thus *naphats* suggests a rapid, even explosive, dispersal of Shem, Ham and Japheth from the immediate vicinity of the ark and is a premonition of what happened after construction of the tower of

Babel: "The Lord scattered (*puts*) them abroad from there." So reading in between the lines, as it were, we can detect a tinge of regret on God's part insofar as he had allowed the earth to be re-colonized. As for the three sons, right after such a devastating flood it was natural that they remain close to the ark just in case the waters returned and they needed to board again. Impact of that event was so overwhelming that fear of water became synonymous with one with regard to chaos and disorder. Once the covenant between God and Noah was established, they felt more at ease in their new-yet-old world and confident of leaving the ark's immediate safety. Besides, the ark was a reminder of the old world from which they had come. It was dark in color due to the pitch (cf. 6.14) and cast a foreboding shadow over everyone, more so as it sat on the ground battered up than when new before the flood. The sooner Noah's sons could get away from it, the better.

"Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard" [vs. 20]. This verse consisting of two short sentences as rendered by the RSV stands in stark contrast to the *naphats* or almost explosive getaway of Shem, Ham and Japheth in the previous verse. It sounds familiar, even makes us a bit uneasy, because it reminds us of Cain, "a tiller of the soil" (cf. 4.2). The latter has for "tiller" *hoved*, from the verbal root *havad*, to do or to make, to be engaged within a task. On the other hand, Noah is someone who (as it reads literally) "began (*chala*) the earth and planted a vineyard." If Noah had imitated Cain by simply planting a vineyard, he would be in the same position as his murderous forebear. So while Noah "began" his work with respect to the earth ('*adamah*), he was mindful of the first man ('*adam*) who similarly cultivated the garden (cf. 2.15). An interesting contrast here: Noah stays put whereas his three sons scatter...run wild...upon the newly uncovered earth. He's more interested in the '*adamah*, that soil from which Adam had been fashioned, and wished to appease it so no more blood might be spilled upon it as had been the case with Abel. Thus Noah "began" (*chala*) his cultivation of '*adamah* right away with a disappointment tinged with regret as his sons scattered in three directions away from him.

Not only did Noah till this '*adamah* which had been under water until recently, the vineyard he planted was reminiscent of the one belonging to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. However, this, the first mention of a vineyard (*kerem*), differs from a garden, and is a place where grapes grow for producing wine, intimating that the world before the flood lacked it. We don't hear of God walking with Noah as he had done in 6.9 and presumably when building the ark. Though God blessed the earth with the covenant and gave a rainbow as a pledge of this covenant, no longer did he set foot upon it. Overjoyed with his new discovery of grapes from the vineyard, Noah crushed them into grapes for wine. Since he had no experience of intoxication, Noah drank the wine with abandon, so much that "he lay uncovered in his tent" [vs. 21]. This is the first human dwelling, albeit temporary, a technique originating with Jabal who "was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle" [4.20]. As for the form of this tent, perhaps it was not unlike the ark in shape, basket-like, only inverted.

1 March, Second Sunday of Lent

After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you"...When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood...Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the

name of that place "The Lord will provide;" as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." Genesis 22.1-2, 9 & 10-18

The following is excerpted from "Expansions on the Book of Genesis," also on this home page. Often when a reading such as today occurs within the context of another document, relevant parts of that document will be posted.

Relative to vss. 1-2:

"After these things God tested Abraham." In many ways this testing (*nasah*) of a one hundred year old man and his wife who left everything to sojourn in a foreign land is outlandish...completely unfair...given all that both had undergone thus far. So many instances as these makes you wonder why Abraham hadn't tossed God aside and adopt the native deities of Canaan. As for the verb *nasah*, another reference is Eccl 7.23: "All this I have tested by wisdom." Here the testing consists in God calling Abraham by his proper name for the first time in order to see his response. The calling is done interiorly, not through Abraham's physical ears, given his advanced age. Immediately came the response, "Here am I" with *hineh*, more or less as "behold," the last occasion being 18.2. God must have been taken aback at such a quick response from a man who could die any day. Once the initial shock of surprise wore off, God proceeds with his *nasah* or testing, all the while not missing a beat: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering." He adds the phrase "only son" along with "whom you love" almost as a two-fold jab at Abraham as well as Sarah, Isaac having been born in their late old age. Isaac is to be the victim of a burnt offering or *holah*, the last occurrence of that word was with Noah: "Noah built an altar to the Lord...and offered burnt offerings on the altar" [8.20]. Surely Abraham must have recalled that incident of long ago when the Lord promised never to destroy the world by a flood. If that *holah* prevented such a catastrophe, perhaps the offering of the young Isaac might be worth it.

Though we don't hear from Sarah throughout this drama, she must have been devastated. Abraham didn't come right out and express the purpose of his trip to Moriah, but intuitively Sarah realized something ominous was brewing. Though each may not have communicated their feelings to each other, both must have wondered about how God treats his favorites when they're advanced in age and living in a land not their own. The place of offering will be in the land of Moriah whose exact place is uncertain, but in 2 Chron 3.1 is identified with Jerusalem: "Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where the Lord had appeared to David his father." Solomon must have been mindful of Jerusalem/Moriah and its associated with the proposed sacrifice of his predecessor, Abraham. If it weren't for Abraham's obedience, Solomon would not be king, simple as that. Note that God says "upon one of the mountains of Moriah" indicating that Moriah consists of hilly territory. As for its distance from Abraham's current location, nothing is said. One other clue as to Moriah as possibly Jerusalem...it was Melchizedek of Salem who had met Abram back in 14.18-20. With that in mind, Abraham would have been familiar with the way to Salem.

"So Abraham rose early in the morning," *shakam* (it had been used earlier on a number of occasions) being the verb here in vs. 3 which means to put a load upon a beast of burden. The noun *shekem* derived from it bears this out as meaning shoulder. Abraham didn't set out alone with Isaac but brought along

“two of his young men” or members of his household. Being young (*nahar*) means that they could have been born into Abraham’s household since his arrival in Canaan and were natives of that land or were descendants of the original settlers who departed Haran with the then-named Abram. Because Isaac was relatively immature, Abraham didn’t tell him the purpose of this journey but may have informed the two young men, having vowed them to absolute secrecy. As part of Abraham’s household, they witnessed enough unusual events in their young lives so as to mature them quickly. The second half of vs. 3 says that Abraham “cut the wood for the burnt offering” meaning he had done it before setting out. Either the wood from that place was special or the place of offering lacked it. Once this had been done, the party set off “to the place of which God had told him,” *maqom* being the noun and signifying as noted above as a spot different from all others.

Relative to vss. 9 & 10-18:

3“When they came to the place (*maqom*) of which God had told him” [vs. 9]. This corresponds to vs. 2, “upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” At first Abraham was confronted with a number of mountains; it was only when he reached the area that God pointed out the specific *maqom*. So here is Abraham at the time of telling, if you will, which isn’t spelled out but intimated. Right away Abraham sets about to construct an altar (*mizbeach*), the last one being at the oaks of Mamre at Hebron (cf. 13.18) after he had walked throughout “the length and the breadth of the land” [vs. 17]. Surely Abraham had in mind that experience some years back, but the earlier altar was the occasion of joy at having seen the land promised him. Now he builds an altar to sacrifice his only-begotten son (Ishmael born to Hagar is a kind of half-son) who had been promised what seemed to him a countless number of times. He goes about constructing this altar in a matter-of-fact way with no regrets, the same attitude he demonstrated many times ever since his departure from his native Haran.

In what seems a matter-of-fact way reflecting his submission to God’s pleasure, Abraham “bound his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood” [vs. 10]. The verb for “bound” is *haqad*, the only use in the Bible from which is derived the adjective *haqod* (speckled): “all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted” [31.35], apparently because the marks resembled strings or ropes around the she-goats. Of course, Abraham first had to take the wood from Isaac’s shoulders after which he put him upon it. Isaac says nothing, pretty much imitating that matter-of-fact attitude as his father despite having been bound. The words of the next verse, “Then Abraham put forth (*shalach*) his hand” are quite dramatic and occur seconds before he is to slay his son, the verb *shachat* (rhyming with *shalach*) which isn’t to be confused with a verb of similar spelling as noted in conjunction with 13.10 and 19.13. *Shachat* as used in the verse at hand applies more specifically to slaying animals for offerings to the Lord. “Two tables on which the burnt offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering were to be slaughtered” [Ezk 40.39]. The fast tempo of this narrative is conveyed by each sentence beginning with the word *w-* (‘and’ or ‘then’) prefaced to the beginning of these sentences. Although this has been the case with virtually every sentence thus far in Genesis, it assumes greater importance as in these tense situations.

“But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven” [vs. 11]. As noted in the last paragraph regarding *w-*, it translates also here as “but.” The Lord doesn’t do the calling (*qara*) but his messenger or *mal’ak*, the same word applied to those three mysterious visitors to Abraham shortly before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Chances are that indeed it was one of these messenger who had watched Abraham since they met under the oaks of Mamre in 18.1, watching the drama unfold until the very last minute. The Lord himself may have consented to Abraham actually slaying his son Isaac, but the unnamed *mal’ak* did not, having been the recipient of Abraham’s hospitality along with his two companions. He is not unlike the true mother of that child King Solomon was about to divide in half with a sword, having stepped forward spontaneously and without what anyone else was thinking. The *mal’ak*

addressed Abraham twice by name from heaven or from above the scene on top of Mount Moriah. Upon hearing his name called out from above him, Abraham says “Here I am” [vs. 11], *hineh* being used as “behold” just like he had done a few minutes earlier in vs. 7 to his son.

“I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” [vs. 12]. The verb for “fear” is *yare’* which connotes having reverence, of holding God before one’s eyes. God must have been thinking of Abraham’s earlier observation in 20.11 with regard to Abimelech, “There is no fear of God at all in this place.” Abraham knew what this *yare’* consisted of, that he was able to discern its lack, which implies that he had it in the back of his mind all along. The angel uses *yare’* in that Abraham had no hesitation to offer his “only son” or *yachyd*, this noun being related to the adjective meaning “one.” “Turn to me and be gracious to me; for I am lonely and afflicted” [Ps 25.16]. Here “lonely” uses *yachyd* as literally “only one.” Though attention is focused upon the dialogue between Abraham and God, Isaac must have heard these words and obviously was greatly relieved. As soon as the order not to slay Isaac was given, “Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram” [vs. 13]. This is the second time Abraham had lifted up his eyes, the last being when he saw “the place afar off” [vs. 4]. In both instances Abraham’s attention was elsewhere and had to be directed to the situation at hand. He was so astonished at the close call at almost having slain his *yachyd* that he missed the ram caught in the thicket. The ram was caught before Abraham bound Isaac and placed him on the altar, and despite it making commotion, he was completely unaware of its presence.

“So Abraham called the name of that place the Lord will provide” [vs. 14]. Here’s another instance of *maqom* (place) in reference to a specific spot, in effect, renaming Mount Moriah. The Hebrew for “will provide” reads “he will see,” *ra’ah* being the verb as noted in vs. 8: “God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” Thus Mount Moriah was transformed in something like Mount the Lord Will See. Since the future tense is used, that implies future generations will come to the same mount—the same *maqom*—and will come under this divine gaze but under the condition that one must be prepared to sacrifice that which is most dear.

Vs. 15 has the angel or messenger (*mal’ak*) of the Lord calling Abraham a second time though without mentioning him by name. Between the first calling (by proper name) and now Abraham had offered the ram. The *mal’ak* speaks as God’s mouthpiece, as God himself, without the two being identified as one person: “By myself I have sworn, because you have done this” [vs. 16]. The verb for “sworn” is *shavah* which is used in 21.24 when Abraham swears to Abimelech about giving him loyalty. For the Lord to *shavah* is a momentous occasion, and the angel speaking as the Lord acts as a witness to this oath made to Abraham. Also it is a surety for Abraham that no more will he be subject to trials. There follows the *shavah*, words quite familiar to Abraham but in a wholly different context, without fear of being disappointed at so many delays: “I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore” [vs. 17]. “Indeed” is a way of expressing certainly which in Hebrew is done by a doubling of the verb. In the case at hand it reads, albeit awkwardly in English, “blessing I will bless you,” *barak* being the verb. To repeat a verb like this indicates the impartation of a guarantee or promise that cannot be broken. The multiplication of descendants stems from those children yet to be born of Isaac. Not only will their number increase dramatically, but they “shall possess the gates of their enemies” as vs. 17 concludes. Though “enemies” applies to future threats, Abraham couldn’t help but recall Abimelech, a native king of Canaan, and the difficulties he experienced with him.

This blessing by the Lord in the person of his *mal’ak* or messenger concludes all the divine communications with Abraham which he instinctively realized not as being cut off but as a fulfilment of all he had suffered since his departure from Haran. The added bonus: “by your descendants shall all the

nations (*goy*) of earth (*‘erets*) bless themselves because you have obeyed my voice” [vs. 18]. The verb for “obeyed” is *shamah*, the common one for hearing, certainly true of Abraham since he departed Haran. Not only was he obedient but as pointed out several times earlier, quite matter-of-fact about it, showing no hesitation nor anguished doubt. So when nations bless themselves in Abraham’s name, they are doing this in him as father of nations which is the meaning of his name.

8 March, Third Sunday of Lent

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you. You shall not kill. "You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's." Exodus 20.1-7

The following is an excerpt from “Expansions on the Book of Exodus” also on this home page.

4“*And God spoke all these words saying.*” So begins a new chapter whose basic theme is the Ten Commandments. As for this speaking (the often used *davar*), it lasts through vs. 17 which means the Lord spoke quite a lot and will continue to do so later on, that is, through Moses to the Israelites. The actual location of this speaking appears to be at the foot of Mount Sinai (“So Moses went down to the people and told them,” 10.25) but presupposes some notification for the people to assemble to hear Moses. Since they numbered over six hundred thousand men, not including woman and children, the elders and newly appointed judges relayed Moses’ words as he spoke, for most people were out of the range of one man’s voice. These leaders learned how to relay almost instantaneously what Moses uttered from his brother, Aaron, who earlier was his spokesman. “He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you” [4.16]. And so Aaron taught the elders and judges how to act likewise for the benefit of the people.

“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” [vs. 2]. Such is the first and foremost commandment; the number isn’t given to the people, but they intuited the commandments wouldn’t be many, ideal for comporting themselves in a desert environment, more a code from which particulars might be drawn later on. Once they left it, they could expand upon these commandments or even better, expect the Lord to impart more detailed ones which, in fact, he does on Mount Sinai. At first you’d think this statement about the Lord being Israel’s God who brought that people from Egypt would be obvious. However, it was not for the people; they were newly liberated or as some would argue, pushed out into the desert to wander around aimlessly away from the comforts of Egypt despite the “bondage” (*havadyim*) mentioned in the verse at hand. Egypt, too, was home to a multitude of gods and goddesses. At the summit (at least on earth) was Pharaoh himself. And so this

emphasis upon the oneness of the divinity is tantamount to Israel's identity which must be protected at all costs.

You shall have no other gods before me" [vs. 3] is the second commandment, a logical follow-up to the first. *Elohyim* is the word at hand, the same often applied to God himself. The verse can suggest that such *elohym* already exist, are not idols *per se*, and are not to be placed "before" the Lord, the preposition being *hal-panay* or literally "upon my face." This expression infers that the people have a tendency to acknowledge the one true God yet at the same time lean to putting another god in his place, blocking him, if you will, from their view.

"You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth" [vs. 4]. Two things are forbidden to be "made" (*hasah* clearly signifies human origin), the first being *pesel* ('graven image') which is derived from a verbal root meaning to cut or to carve and dovetails with the verb *hasah*. "All worshipers of images are put to shame who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him" [Ps 97.7]. The second thing not to be *hasah* is a likeness or *temunah* which means a form or appearance; eight other biblical references exist, five of which are in Deuteronomy. "Beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure" [Dt 4.16]. Such *temunah* represent three parts of creation: heaven, beneath the earth and the water thus referring to birds, animals on earth and interestingly, water...not mere water but that which lays under the earth which intimates the pre-existing waters over which the *ruach* or spirit of God had hovered at creation. As for this water "under the earth," see Gen 1.9: "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear" over the waters. To make a *temunah* of anything which calls these primeval waters home is far worse than any other, for this is equivalent to capturing something from the original, semi-divine waters and worshiping them. Their existence was as old as God himself and hence poised a special danger, far more than any Egyptian deity, even a threat to the Lord.

The first part of vs. 5 runs as follows: "You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God." *Shachah* is the verb for "bow down" and was first noted in 4.31: "they bowed their heads and worshiped." This subservient gesture leads naturally to a willingness to be obedience to what a person is reverencing, that is, *havad* or serving it, this verb, as noted several times earlier, implies slavery. *Shachah* has the preposition *l-* (to, toward) prefaced to "them" which is indicative of submission whereas *havad* does not. Both these gestures of bondage stand in contrast to divine jealousy or *qana'* which is an adjective and suggestive of envy. Instead of using an undesirable human trait projected upon the divinity, *qana'*, as opposed to *shachah* and *havad*, is indicative of the Lord's intense desire for Israel to be free. "For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God" [Dt 4.24]. The verb *qana'* is akin in sound though not in verbal root to the verb *qanah* meaning to acquire. So when hearing one, the other can be substituted and *visa versa* without out damage to the meaning at hand.

The second part of vs. 5 follows through with this jealousy: "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me." Given the much shorter life span of ancient times, a generation (perhaps around thirty years of age) was less severe, here totaling some one hundred and twenty years (fourth generation). *Paqad* is the verb for "visiting" first noted in 3.16 ('I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt'), is widely used and has multiple means but in general connotes a one-on-one encounter or putting into action. So this personal dealing of guilt (*hawon*) carries over several generations not unlike the results of the "fall" of Adam and Eve with their more immediate offspring. God's jealousy is in response not so much to those who may be guilty but to those who "hate" him, the verb *sane'* being used as a noun in 1.10: "If war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." The nature of this *sane'* isn't spelled out in vs. 5, just stated,

with emphasis upon transmission. That means *sane'* is almost biological, a living virus present within a host, but one destined not to last forever. However, if a second generation and those after it submits to idol worship, you end up with a whole interlacing of guilt that becomes contagious and never dies out. Yet this tendency not to worship the Lord is understandable in the harsh desert climate marked by sense deprivation and is a kind of longing after multiplicity, if you will, of desiring to be relieved of what can devolve into monotony. The Lord must have put this injunction lasting several generations to prevent backsliding into worship of Egyptian deities even though this isn't explicit throughout Exodus.

Vs. 6 is not a separate sentence from vs. 5, continuing with "but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." The Hebrew doesn't use a verb pertaining to vision but has *hasah*, the common verb to make, and making something in accord with *chesed*, that indefinable term for divine love last noted in 15.13: "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed." Such *chesed* doesn't extend to future generations but to "thousands" meaning that its manifestation is much more common than jealousy. Then again, perhaps only a few persons are worthy of *chesed* who, in turn, become its transmitters to those around them. *Chesed* is dependent upon *ahav* (the common verb to love) and the keeping (*shamar*) of divine commandments (*mitsvah*). As for the last term, it is mentioned in 16.28: "How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?" The promise of divine *paqad* or visiting iniquity up to the fourth generation is thus countered by the equal promise of divine *chesed* to "thousands." And these thousands co-exist with that interlacing of various generations guilty of *paqad* and serve to blunt its damaging effects.

The fourth of the Ten Commandments is in vs. 7: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." *Nasa'* is the verb for "take" which fundamentally means to raise, lift up, and the verse at hand is the same as in Dt 5.11. Such *nasa'* can apply to the raising of one's voice in anger or in a curse. And "name," while not mentioned, refers to the one revealed to Moses from the burning bush: "I am who am" [3.14]. In fact, that name which had been abbreviated to YHWH, was forbidden to be spoken. "In vain" (minus the *-l* prefaced to the noun) is *shawe'* which also means falsehood, nothingness or iniquity and in sum implies a curse. *Shawe'* is also found in Dt 5.11; another reference is Ps 12.3: "Everyone utters lies to his neighbor." Should a person slip and use the divine name as a curse, the Lord will not hold him guiltless or *naqah*, this verb referring to being pure or free from punishment. "I know that you will not hold me innocent" [Job 9.28]. Implied in vs. 7 is that the Lord will keep close watch over his people as to using his name though the punishment, if any, is not spelled out.

The fifth commandment is in vs. 8: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Those to whom this commandment is addressed recently have witnessed the first Sabbath or the seventh day after the Israelites had gathered manna and presumably are still gathering it: "Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord" [16.23]. In other words, the Sabbath is already in place and is to be kept holy or *qadash* (verb), this concept having been introduced for the first time in 13.1 ('consecrate') with regard to all the first-born. And so this injunction to *qadash* the seventh day after having gathered manna (gathering the quails isn't mentioned) is done in remembrance of having been sustained for what eventually will amount to forty years of eating manna in the desert. Though the manna ceased upon entry into Canaan when the Israelites could get more substantial food, remembrance of all those days of gathering it would be crucial for their religious observances. After all, six hundred thousand men, excluding women and children, were fed on a daily basis, that meaning a huge amount of manna (and quails) and without a doubt, the Lord's greatest miracle.

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work" [vs. 9]. This is a refinement of the previous verse built upon the gathering of manna and is followed by "but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God."

Note the distinction between “labor” and work,” the verb *havad* and the noun *mela’kah*. *Havad* has been discussed as pertaining to forced labor as under the Egyptians and involves any type of physical work. *Mela’kah* refers to service prescribed to anyone such as an artisan. “In cutting stones for setting and in carving wood, for work in every craft” 31.5]. As noted earlier with regard to counting the seven days which are based on the first chapters of Genesis, “seventh day” reads more accurately as “day seven” which places emphasis upon “day” followed by the respective number it happens to be...only up to seven and not beyond this sacred number. *Shevah* (seven) has as its verbal root *shavah* which means to swear an oath and indicates a solemn agreement. So to violate day seven would not be unlike the fourth commandment of taking the Lord’s name in vain. Not just Israelite men are forbidden to cease from their labors, but vs. 10 extends it to one’s son, daughter, man-servant, maid-servant, cattle and finally “the sojourner who is within your gates.” Such is the hierarchy, if you will, that had been established early on, for apparently non-Israelites attached themselves to the people either before departing Egypt or joined them later in the desert. *Ger* (‘sojourner’) is mentioned in 12.19 as among those who celebrated as the Passover and who most likely were Egyptians as well as other foreigners, even some Canaanites, dwelling in Egypt. “Within your gates” doesn’t apply to the people in the desert, for that refers to a settlement but can be used figuratively as “within your camp.”

Vs. 11 provides the reason for keeping the Sabbath day, why it should be kept holy (cf. vs. 8): “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.” In other words, those to whom this injunction is committed need to have an appreciation of what came into being on each of the six days (‘day one,’ ‘day two,’ etc.). Once this is kept firmly in mind, only then can “day seven” be realized fully, for the six days of work echo those of creation when the Israelites had gathered the manna and quails after they rested, for “Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest” [16.23]. *Nuach* is the verb for “rested” (noted in 10.14 as ‘settled’ with regard to the locusts in Egypt) and often applies to cessation from labor. “That your man servant and your maid servant may rest as well as you” [Dt 5.14]. Although the Lord is speaking in the verse at hand concerning *nuach*, Gen 1.2 has the verb *shavath* as Moses had described it: “And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.” Thus *shavath* has to do with the cessation of work compared with the resting from work as *nuach* implies.

As a side note, nothing is said about days beyond the seventh meaning that the cycle of six days of work and one of rest resumes as a means of marking time centered around the Sabbath. So without this *shavath/nuach*, time would remain circular and never ending without assuming a linear (historical) direction. Not only did the Lord rest on “day seven,” he blessed and hallowed that day, the two verbs being *barak* and *qadash*. The latter had been noted above in vs. 8 and the former being introduced for the first time though it was mentioned in conjunction with Pharaoh and Jethro (cf. 12.32 & 18.10), the Lord. “The Lord your God has blessed you” [Dt 2.7].

The sixth commandment is found in vs. 12: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.” *Kavad* is the verb for “honor” and is mentioned frequently above as in conjunction with the hardening...the becoming heavy (*kavad*’s fundamental meaning) of Pharaoh’s heart. Judging by the commandment, the Israelites would think their arrival in the land about to be given them was immanent. Strictly speaking this *kavad* of one’s parents takes place in the desert whereas the long span of life is not to be there but in Canaan.

“You shall not kill” is the seventh commandment of a general variety occurring in vs. 13 with *ratsach* being the verb which means to dash into pieces. If anyone kills a person, the murder shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses” [Num 35.30; reference is to ‘shall be put to death’].

“You shall not commit adultery” [vs. 14] or *na’aph* which is applicable to both men and women. “Because harlotry was so light to her, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree” [Jer 3.9].

The eighth commandment is “You shall not steal” [vs. 15], the verb being *ganav* which intimates deception. “Do not men despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry” [Prov 6.30]?

The ninth commandment runs as “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” [vs. 16]. *Hanah* is the verb for “bear” and was noted in 10.3 as “humble.” Also noted under that verse are the many meanings belonging to this verb. *Sheqer* or “false” is a noun in the Hebrew and like *ganav*, intimates deception. “Put false ways far from me; and graciously teach me your law” [Ps 119.29]. As for this *sheqer*, it is directed not so much as to one’s family but to one’s neighbor and therefore deals with extra-familial relationships.

The tenth and final commandment is the longest: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his man servant or his maid servant or his ox or his ass or anything that is your neighbor’s” [vs. 17]. The verb *chamad* (‘covet’) occurs twice and fundamentally means to desire, take delight in. Thus it necessarily doesn’t have a negative connotation. “He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him” [Is 53.2]. Furthermore, *chamad* applies here to that which belongs to one’s neighbor, not unlike the ninth commandment. As for all ten commandments, the Israelites (the same applies to Moses) didn’t know how many the Lord would impart but must have intimated the general tone as just presented and that these ten would expand to include more practical applications to human behavior and divine worship. The following of these details would serve well for future generations in Canaan whereas the ten commandments were a quick rule of thumb for moving about within a desert environment, easy to remember without referring to a written text.

“Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off” [vs. 18]. This experience mirrors that of 19.16: “thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.” In other words, a dramatic display of divine power occurs before and after the impartation of the ten commandments. In the verse at hand, the common verb to see (*ra’ah*) is used for “perceived.” *Nuah* is the verb for “trembled” which implies a shaking or staggering and differs from *charad* in 19.6 which more explicitly applies to fear. “The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut” [Is 24.20]. Such a response made the people stand “afar off” or well away from the founts set about the mountain in 19.23.

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15 March, Fourth Sunday of Lent

All the leading priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, till there was no remedy...And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the

days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up.'" Second Chronicles 36.14-16 & 19-23

This lengthy passage deals with the last king in Jerusalem, Zedekiah (cf. vs. 11), who "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." Unfortunately the harsh condemnation which resulted from having "stiffened his neck and hardened his heart" [vs. 13] spilled over to the priests and people. In sum, the entire nation had become so hardened that a drastic solution was called for. Nevertheless, the Lord was familiar with such a collective hardening, that is, going back to Israel's wandering in the desert of Sinai. "Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness" [Ps 96.8 referring to Ex 17.1-7]. So in the passage at hand, everyone had become "exceedingly unfaithful" rendered such by the verb *mahal* which connotes treachery along with the noun (same spelling) derived from it. Also the verb *ravah* (to become great or to increase) is used for further emphasis. Apparently the "abominations" or *tohevah* belonging to the *goyim* or "nations" were in the form of unclean sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple. *Goyim* can be a derogatory term as here compared with Israel though Israel had proven no better than these *goyim*, if not worse. The idea of polluting and hallowing are mutually excluding, *tame'* and *qadash* (that is, to be holy or to make holy).

The word "persistently" stands out among the account of such continuous abuse and is rendered by the verb *shakam* which means to rise early. The idea is that the Lord was tireless in rising before sunrise each day in order to send messengers or prophets to the people. He did this out of compassion or *chamal* which connotes sparing from wrath. First comes the people and then the Lord's "dwelling place" or *mahon* which has a familiarity about it compared with a temple though the two are the same.

Despite the Lord's persistent concern through his messengers, the people abused them. The words used here are quite strong: mock, despise and scoff or *lahav*, *boz* and *tahah*. The first also means to jest, the second implies condemnation and the third stammering. All three are directed to the prophets who are the same as his messengers, this term being a more precise function of their mission.

The passage at hand now skips a few verses (17 & 18) which speak of the king of the Chaldeans (Nebuchadnezzar) who not only slew Israel's young men but did so within the "house of their sanctuary" or the place which was *qadash*, holy. Nebuchadnezzar had no compassion, *chamal* being used which contrasts with the divine *chamal* noted above. Nevertheless, he brought to Babylon exiles or survivors who served him until King Cyrus came along. We don't know how many survived, let alone lived after what must have been a forced march from Jerusalem to Babylon, but the number must have been few. Their exile in Babylon lasted some seventy years or pretty close to two generations, given the shorter life span of the time.

Although this part of Second Chronicles recounts the wickedness of the rulers who had misled the people, the ultimate disgrace is the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. That wiped out their identity in a thorough manner with no apparent recovery. To the survivors exile seemed almost an afterthought compared to that horror. They're not singled out as special as in beginning of the Book of Daniel but simply those who managed to escape the slaughter which most likely meant they had gone into hiding.

Once Persia took power from the Chaldeans and Cyrus became king, the Lord intervened through the prophet Jeremiah, that is, referring to Jer 25.11-2 which recounts the downfall of the king of Babylon. Then the text at hand has the interesting though delightful words, “until the land had enjoy its sabbaths.” Apparently this refers to Israel or those who had been left there as a remnant and kept alive the tradition of the sabbath rest. So while those who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and were led away for service in Babylon until the rise of King Cyrus, for seventy years or so the sabbath rest was being observed by way preparation for the Israelites to return. This, of course, was minus the temple but the people adjusted to its loss. It is these people, most likely few in number, who held together the identity of the nation until the exiles could return, if at all. Thus we have two groups of Israelites: those who managed to remain at home under difficult conditions and those who went into exile. How the two interacted upon being reunited can only be imagined. It must have had mixed feelings: those who remained faithful to keeping the sabbath and those who most likely had forgotten it while in Babylon.

Jeremiah steps in a second time with regard to the “word (*davar*) of the Lord” coming to King Cyrus. We have no precise information how that came about, presumably by way of conversation between the two men, but the Lord “stirred up” the king, *hur* meaning to awake as well as to enliven. It is used with respect to the “spirit” or *ruach* of Cyrus, this noun also meaning breath or wind. The effect of this *hur* upon Cyrus’ *ruach* is evident in two ways: he made a proclamation and put in writing his desire to build or rebuild the Jerusalem temple. To prepare for this the king both had heralds go throughout his kingdom to announce publicly this decree as well as to have it posted everywhere for those who could read. Now it was simply a matter for any Israelite to leave Persia and return home. However, for some Israel was known only second hand by stories from their parents. Perhaps not all wished to leave the comfort of their established lives for a place that had been ravaged. The Book of Ezra which follows Second Chronicles goes into the details of this return.

22 March, Fifth Sunday of Lent

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31.31-34

This excerpt starts off with the familiar *hineh* or “behold,” a term which is used often to get one’s attention for something important about to happen or be said. The more specific context of *hineh* concerns days which are coming, the time and nature of which are not specified. Despite this, the word suggests a consummation if not in full, then in part or in mystery. Note that the Lord speaks not of a day (singular) but of days (plural). The passage of time is secondary; while being so absorbed in the giving of a new covenant, the people will not be conscious of its passage or duration. Even its anticipation foretells this suspension of time and therefore of space. People didn’t think of it in this rather abstract way but could somehow feel it to be true.

During this undetermined period of time the Lord will make a “new covenant,” the verb *karath* (‘make’) more literally meaning “cut.” It has 32.40 in mind: “I will make with them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts that they may not turn from me.”

Note the difference between the two “cuttings” or *karath*: the covenant with Israel's fathers or most likely those who experienced the Exodus and wandering in the Sinai desert vs. the one which is new and still in the future ('I will make'). The former has the two endearing images:

1) Taking Israel by the hand, that is, across the Red Sea which reflects the song of praise in Ex 15.1-18. The verb here is *chazaq* which is a rather forceful and sudden grabbing by the hand. However, the people broke this covenant...un-cut it, if it you will...when Aaron fashioned a golden calf (cf. 32.1-6). This required making a second covenant. In both the first and second covenant Mount Sinai plays a central role as the place the Lord had communed with Moses and gave him the Law or Torah.

2) The Lord as “husband” to Israel or *bahal*, a verb which also can mean a lord or master.

Surely Israel never had forgotten the dramatic departure from Egypt and all that ensued, the reason why it is recorded in the Book of Exodus. The excerpt at hand reveals a sensitivity on the Lord's part in that he doesn't bring to mind the rebellious attitude of Israel before entering Canaan. The people were painfully aware of it, of course, and each generation since the Exodus took care that next one would never forget the past. In light of this, the people must have been especially relieved to hear the words “after those days” which stands in contrast to “the days are coming” which opened this excerpt. The former includes not just the more specific time of rejecting the first covenant and the real possibility of doing the same with the second; rather, “the days are coming” can represent forgetfulness of the past when the Lord “will remember their sin no more.”

So while the Law or Torah had been given on Sinai to Moses, in the excerpt at hand the Lord will take a twofold action concerning this same Torah:

1) He will “put” or *natan* (the common verb for to give) it “within” his people or *qerev* which suggests putting the Torah within their bowels.

2) He will “write” or *katav* the same Torah upon their “hearts” (*lev*). Note that the first action or *qerev* has the preposition *b-* or literally “in their midst” whereas the second action has the preposition *hal-* or literally “upon their hearts.” In other words, first “in” followed by “upon.”

The result of this twofold operation: the Lord “will be their God” which will preclude teaching about him, the verb being *lamad* which implies both training and chastising as had been the case with the first covenant...cutting...in the Sinai wilderness. Now each Israelite will “know” or *yadah* the Lord, this verb implying intimate knowledge. Part and parcel of this *yadah* is the Lord both forgiving (*salach*) and not remembering (*zakar*) the people's sin. The text speaks of a singular sin or *chata'th* concerning the people, not multiple ones, which is more damning of their past depravity stemming from rejection of the Torah. *Salach* connotes a lifting up or a removal. *Zakar* is the verbal root for “male” which suggests that the children born of a father are the embodiment of his memory, and that is to be carried into the future indefinitely.

29 March, Palm Sunday

And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it. If any one says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it. And those who stood there said to them, "What are you

doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!" And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Mark 11.1-10

According to the liturgical calendar, this Gospel reading takes place first by reason of today's feast, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Vs. 11 is added to complete the text.

Note that eight verses begins with the conjunctive *kai* or "and" which serves to move the action along at a brisk pace, quite common in the Hebrew Bible, as well as to show that everything is connected. Mark is known for use of "immediately" or *euthus* which ties in nicely with the frequency of the conjunctive *kai*. It seems he wishes to rush through the life of Jesus almost getting the facts out there about him and focus upon his passion which takes up a large section of his short Gospel. Not that he wishes to blow by what Jesus had said and done but considers that secondary or leading up to his passion and death.

The opening verse has the preposition *eis* or "into Jerusalem" along with "into Bethphage and Bethany." From there Jesus, his disciples and other accompanying them swiftly made their way to the two villages and then "into" Jerusalem, barely pausing on the way. The preposition *eis* is also found as "into the village" as well as prefaced to the verb *eisporuomai*, "enter."

The words "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" are lifted from Ps 118.25-26 and run as follows: "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord." As vs. 27 indicates, these joyous words precede the sacrificial offering being brought into the temple: "Bind the festal procession with branches up to the horns of the altar!" Looking back upon this incident, Mark and the disciples rummaged through the scriptures to see any hints prefiguring what and how Jesus had done. Because the Psalms are central to Jewish worship, that is the first place they would look, a very natural thing to do.

With regard to Hosanna, the Hebrew '*ana*' is a form of exclamation such as "ah" or "would that" followed by the sacred name for the Lord (*YHWH*), after which comes the verb *yashah* or to save, set free or give aid. Obviously it's the verbal root for the proper name Jesus. That allusion must have triggered something within the disciples as they scoured the Psalter which might tie in with Jesus as the one who saves Israel. Actually the verb *yashah* and its derivatives are found 134 times and is listed under the document "Psalter Verses Containing the Hebrew Verbal Root Yashah" under the category Old Testament on this homepage. Anyone with sensitivity to Jesus couldn't help but note the associations in the Psalter and the man. '*Ana*' is used a second time in the same verse, again with the proper name *YHWH* in between it and the verb "give success" or *tsalach* which connotes prosperity.

Immediately after this cry for joy as well as help comes recognition that someone divinely appointed has come on the scene though we have no clue as to his identity. The mysteriousness of his presence in the psalm makes it easier for the disciples to associate him with Jesus. The people have gathered in the Lord's house, another way of saying his temple in Jerusalem, from which they bless him. The text of Mark adds to this excerpt from Ps 118 that David's kingdom...not specifically his king...is coming. And so Jesus, following the lead of the psalm, first entered Jerusalem and then the temple. The verb here is *eiserchomai* followed by two uses of the preposition *eis* or into Jerusalem and the temple.

We have no information what Jesus did next except having looked at everyone around him. These words are significant in light of what is to happen shortly and are left for the reader's imagination as to what Jesus was thinking, for he uttered no words. Then almost at once he left for Bethany (cf. vs. 11) which is mentioned at the beginning of this excerpt. Thus Mark's account ends with the swift return of Jesus after his triumphal journey which is keeping in line with the swiftness of his account as noted above. From there Jesus returns to the temple and clears it of those who were "buying and selling there" [vs. 15]. On this second trip to the temple nothing is said as to how Jesus was received, possibly traveling incognito so as not to be recognized until he got to the temple itself.

5 April, Easter Sunday

NB: Vss. 35 & 36 included though not in the official excerpt of this passage.

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

The scene of this address is Caesarea where Cornelius had been bidden by a "man in shining clothes" [vs. 30] to have Peter speak with a gathering of "kinsmen and close friends" [vs. 24]. In other words, it is a gathering of sincere, welcoming people which should make Peter feel comfortable. The passage at hand begins with the conjunctive *kai* ('and') which, as noted in the Palm Sunday entry, reveals swiftness and connectedness of action. It is as though the mysterious man appeared to Cornelius after which immediately Peter came on the scene. Perhaps Cornelius thought Peter was that man but never let on his thoughts about it. Peter himself didn't know about the existence of this mysterious man but wasn't surprised to hear about him. He had no interest inquiring about his identity or any such information. All that mattered was to get the message of the Gospel proclaimed to as many people as possible.

"And Peter opened his mouth." Similar words are found in Mt 5.2 where Jesus begins to speak about the beatitudes. Everyone was assembled around the apostle ready to listen to what he was about to say, knowing full well that he had been associated with Jesus Christ. Therefore he had pertinent information about a rumor that Jesus had risen from the dead. Some may have known how Peter betrayed Jesus which made the opening of his mouth all the more dramatic, filling his listeners with great suspense. Perhaps they were expecting him to explain his actions in a human sort of way, but no. The tone of Peter's speech is far from it. Objectively speaking it sounds impersonal but is not the case. Certainly he isn't preachy. Behind his matter-of-fact, confident approach is the primacy of a message and transformation by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which his audience must have heard about. This is borne out after Peter speaks, for "the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message" [vs. 44].

Peter's transformation is revealed in his first word, "perceive" or *katalambano* which literally means a taking (*lambano*) or better, a seizing in accord with (*kata-*) something such as an idea or plan. At Pentecost the Spirit descended upon the disciples, and people from various lands heard them speaking in their own tongues. It had made such an impression upon the disciples that no small wonder Peter blurts out "God has no partiality" or *prosopolemptes*. This noun means literally "acceptor or faces" or persons and contains the just mentioned verbal root *lambano*.

Peter continues by recognizing the familiarity which his audience has with the new Christian movement, "You know the word," which here is *logos* and can be tied in with Jesus Christ as the *Logos*. Such *logos* about the *Logos* originated in Galilee after John baptized Jesus and then grew in voice or loudness, if you will, by Jesus' healing activity. Peter continues with a brief summary of Jesus' central mission which culminates in his resurrection. He is careful to include himself as a witness to this event not out of boastfulness nor for having a special prerogative but in order to make sure his listeners would know the manner by which the resurrection would be preached. That would be through the agency of the church. Surely once Peter had finished some asked him personal questions about the resurrection and how the other disciples reacted to it. That may have taken place but is secondary to the intent of the passage at hand. Peter simply brushed off these questions which were irrelevant to the urgency of getting the Gospel proclaimed.

After having enjoyed his visit at Cornelius' house and once his listeners received the Holy Spirit after the pattern of Pentecost, Peter has them baptized. While that is less dramatic than this mini-Pentecost, it is more important and lasting. Chapter Ten concludes with "Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days." Most likely Peter sensed his hosts wanted details about Jesus' resurrection to satisfy curiosity. Instead, he must have focused upon the significance of their recent baptism, of how it tied in with John the Baptist's prefigurement, and that it was the most essential component of what it meant to be a Christian. Once that was established, the people in the house could form the nucleus of a new community or church at Caesarea. From this church would flow "forgiveness of sins through his name."