

## Liturgical Reflections 2014

Entries for the liturgical year of 2014 begin with the first Sunday of Advent in the year 2013. This way the Church marks events in her life is done in accord with the distinction between the “secular” and “sacred” modes of telling time. The former begins with the first of January whereas the latter usually begins in early November or two months before a new calendar year in January. The two run on very different schedules, if you will, yet flow concurrently. Entries pertaining to this liturgical year will be according to Year A, Week Two. As with earlier **Reflections**, excerpts followed by notations will pertain to the readings of each Sunday. More important feastdays are added, but the chief focus of this document is upon the Sunday readings, that day being one of Sabbath rest and representative of Christ’s resurrection.

The reflections at hand center around the first reading, that is, distinct from the second reading followed by the Gospel. It is hoped by the end of some nine years all three readings from the entire liturgical cycle will have been covered...and the process will begin anew.

At the beginning of the 2013 text is inserted a diagram of the liturgical year. It is included here as well simply to give the reader a general idea of the various times we are about to move through, an exciting prospect to be sure.



### 1 December, First Sunday of Advent

*The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat*

*their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.*  
Isaiah 2.1-5<sup>1</sup>

This new liturgical year begins unceremoniously as they all do, overshadowed by the “secular” new year one month from today. Yet this relative obscurity is necessary to keep out any noise which will hinder our appreciation of this new season. As noted in earlier Reflections, if you pay close attention to the readings of the last few Sundays of the previous liturgical year and compare them with the beginning of Advent, you’d be hard pressed to see the break between the two cycles. Both deal with “last things” and coming of Jesus Christ not so much in the flesh but as depicted in Revelation. A person passes from one cycle to the next and so forth without becoming tired since this circular time, if you will, always spirals upward to new heights instead of advancing in linear fashion which can get boring.

Vs. 1: Word (*davar*): last noted in 1.10, “Hear the word of the Lord.” In the verse at hand, the divine *davar* is seen (*chazah*) in the sense of beholding. Vision (*chazon*) in 1.1 is derived from it and which Isaiah sees whereas in the verse at hand, *davar* is the object of *chazah* or beholding.

Vs. 2: This verse continues into the next one and concludes there.

-“It shall come to pass.” The Hebrew text reads, “It will be.”

-“Latter (*‘acharyth*) days.” “Your latter days will be very great” [Job 8.7].

-“Mountain of the Lord:” this phrase occurs two other times, the next verse and 30.29. In the verse at hand, “house of the Lord” is associated with it.

-Shall be established (*kun*): connotes a sense of directing. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” [Ps 51.10]. The next reference is 9.7, “to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness.”

-“Highest of the mountains.” The Hebrew text reads, “in the head of the mountains.”

-Shall flow (*nahar*): alternately, “to shine:” “They shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord” [Jer 31.12].

-Nations (*goy*): last noted in 1.4, “sinful nation.”

Vs. 3: Let us go up (*halah*): frequent references in Isaiah such as 37.14, “and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord.”

-Jacob: here in conjunction with “house of the God.” Other similar references are: 2.5, 6; 10.20; 14.1 (twice); 29.22; 48.1; 58.1.

-May teach (*yarah*): fundamentally means to cast or shoot anything and as applied to teaching or that which needs to be pointed out. The next reference is 9.15, “The prophet who teaches is the tail.”

-Ways (*derek*, singular): prefixed with the preposition *min* (*m-*) or from. The next reference is 8.12, “not to walk in the way of this people.”

-Paths (*‘orach*, singular): fundamentally as “to wander.” The next reference is 3.12, “confuse the course of your paths.”

-Law (*Torah*): last noted in 1.10 as “teaching.” *Torah* is derived from the verbal root *yarah* as noted in the verse at hand.

-“Word (*davar*) of the Lord:” last noted in 2.1 which Isaiah saw. The preposition *min* (*m-*) or “from” is prefaced

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<sup>1</sup>The Isaiah passages excerpted during the first three Sundays of Advent and Christmas are taken from another document on this home page related to Isaiah. The reason for this is to avoid duplication. The same applies to the Genesis text for the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary.

to *davar*. Compare this sense with the same preposition prefaced to *derek*.

Vs. 4: Judge (*shaphat*): last noted in 1.26 as participle, “judges.”

-“Between.” A similar sentiment with the verb *shaphat* in 5.3, “Judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard.”

-Nations (*goy*, singular): last noted in vs. 2 and used twice more in the verse at hand.

-Shall decide (*yakach*): last noted in 1.18, “let us reason together.” The next use of *yakach* with the meaning in the verse at hand is 11.3, “what his eyes see or decide.”

-Beat (*katat*): connotes breaking as well as hammering. The next use of this verb is 24.12, “the gate is smitten with destruction.”

-Swords (*cherev*, singular): used twice in the verse at hand and as in 1.20 but not noted there, “you shall be devoured by the sword.”

-Plowshares (*'eth*, singular): the same word (particle) as “of” often used before a noun as the object of a verb. “Beat your plowshares into swords” [Jl 3.10]. The verb *katat* is used here as in the verse at hand.

-Spears (*chanyth*, singular): also as in Jl 3.10 just noted.

-Pruning hooks (*mazmerah*, singular): from a verbal root meaning “to pluck, to prune, to sing.” It is also noted in Jl 3.10. The other reference is 18.5, “he will cut off the shoots with pruning hooks.”

-Learn (*lamad*): last noted in 1.17 with respect “to do good.”

Vs. 5: “House of Jacob:” cf. vs. 3, “house of the God of Jacob.”

-Walk (*halak*): the common verb as used in vs. 3, “that we may walk in his paths.”

-Light (*'or*): the next reference of this frequently used noun in Isaiah is 5.20, “who put darkness for light and light for darkness.”

## 8 December, Second Sunday of Advent

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious. Isaiah 11.1-10*

Vs. 1: Shoot (*choter*): the only other use of this term is Prov 14.3, “The talk of a fool is a rod for his back (Hebrew: “a rode of pride”).

-“Stump (*gezah*) of Jesse:” the other reference is 40.24. The only other use of this term in the Bible is Job 14.8, “Though its root grow old in the earth and its stump die in the ground.”

-Branch (*netser*): the next reference is 14.19. “In those times a branch from her roots shall arise in his place”

[Dan 11.7].

-Shall grow (*parah*): the next reference is 17.6, “four or five (berries) on the branches of a fruit tree.” “Be fruitful and multiply” [Gen 8.17].

Vs. 2: “Spirit (*ruach*; mentioned four times in this verse) of the Lord:” this noun first mentioned in 7.19. In the verse at hand, the divine *ruach* “shall rest (*nuach*) upon him (note similar sound of the two words).” The next use of this verse is 14.7. “Him” refers to the “shoot” and “branch” of vs. 1, so this person had a dual nature.

-This divine *ruach* consists of the following, all of which have been noted earlier:

-wisdom (*chakmah*): next reference is 28.29.

-understanding (*bynah*): next reference is 27.11.

-counsel (*hetsah*): next reference is 14.26.

-might (*gevorah*): next reference is 28.6.

-knowledge (*dahath*): next reference is 32.4.

-“Fear (*yire'ath*) of the Lord:” not noted as being immediately connected with the divine *ruach*. This same phrase as mentioned in vs. 3 and 33.6 after that one.

Vs. 3: Delight (*ruach*): a verb which fundamentally means “to smell,” “to blow” from which “spirit” is derived as used in this verse. “And the Lord smelled a sweet savor” [Gen 8.21].

-Decide (*yakach*): first noted in 2.4; also in vs. 4.

Vs. 4: Poor (*dal*): last noted in 10.2.

-Equity (*myshor*): the only use of this term in Isaiah with this meaning. For another use of this term: “The uneven ground shall become level” [40.4].

-“Meek (*hanaw*, singular adjective) of the earth:” the next reference is 29.19. This word also means “poor,” “afflicted.” “He does not forget the cry of the afflicted” [Ps 9.12].

-Smite (*nakah*): first noted in 1.5. The object of this verb is “earth.” Compare with “meek of the earth” in this same verse.

-“Rod (*shevet*) of his mouth:” first noted in .9.4.

-“Breath (*ruach*) of his lips:” the same word for “spirit” as noted in vs. 2.

-Shall slay (*muth*): the other reference with this meaning is 66.8 and the common verb for “to kill.”

Vs. 5: Girdle (*'ezor*, used twice): cf. 5.27 as “waistcloth.”

-Loins (*chalats*): first noted in 5.27 as “waistcloth.” From a verbal root meaning “to be prepared,” to gird oneself.”

Vs. 6: Three pairs of opposites:

1) wolf (*ze'ev*): the other reference is 65.25. This animal associates with lamb (*keves*) first noted in 1.11. Both are to dwell (*gar*) together which fundamentally means “to sojourn” as opposed to a permanent dwelling. “Is this your exultant city whose origin is from days of old, whose feet carried her to settle afar” [23.7]?

2) leopard (*namer*): the only reference in Isaiah. “The mountains of the leopards” [Sg 4.8]. This animal associates with the kid (*gedy*), the only reference in Isaiah. “Go to the flock and fetch me two good kids” [Gen 27.9]. Both are to lie down (*ravats*), a verb which suggests gathering four legs under the animal’s body. It is next found in vs. 7.

3) calf (*hegel*): the other reference is 27.10. This animal associates with both the lion (*kepyr*) first

noted in 5.29; fatling (*mery*), the other reference found in 1.11 as “fed beasts.”

–“Little child (*nahar*):” first noted in 3.4 as “boys.” This term can refer to both newborns and young children.

Vs. 7: Two additional pairs of animals with opposite characteristics:

1) cow (*parah*): the only reference in Isaiah. This animal associates with the bear (*dov*), the other reference being 59.11. Both are to feed (*rahaḥ*), the next reference being 14.30. The alternate meaning of this verb is “to delight in.”

2) lion (*‘aryeh*): the next reference is 15.9. Compare this term with *kepyr* in the previous verse which refers to a young lion. Although not compared with another animal, this lion eats straw “like the ox (*baqar*)” first noted in 7.21 as “young cow.”

Vs. 8: Suckling child (*yoneq*, participle): the verb is found in 60.16 and 66.11 as “to suck.”

–Shall play (*shahaḥ*): alternately as “to delight, to be blinded.” For the latter, cf. 6.10 as “shut” with respect to eyes.

–Asp (*paten*): the only reference in Isaiah. “The cruel venom of asps” [Dt 32.33].

–Weaned child (*gamaḥ*, participle): for another sense, cf. 3.9, “For they have brought evil upon themselves.”

–Adder (*tsephony*): the other reference is 59.5. Another related term is *tsephah* in 14.29.

Vs. 9: “Shall not hurt (*rahaḥ*):” the only use of this term with this meaning in Isaiah. This verb has multiple nuances and is first noted in 8.9 as “broken.”

–Destroy (*shachat*): first noted in 1.4 as “deal corruptly.”

–“Knowledge (*dehah*) of the Lord:” the other reference is 28.9. This noun is a variation of *dahath* last noted in 11.2. It is akin to “water covering (*kasah*) the sea” (first noted in 6.2).

Vs. 10: “Root (*shoresh*) of Jesse:” compare with 11.1, “stump of Jesse.” *Shoresh* is found there as well.

–Ensign (*nes*): cf. 5.26 as “signal.”

–“Him shall the nations seek (*darash*).” The Hebrew text literally reads, “to him...” *Darash* is first noted in 1.17.

–“Dwelling (*menuchah*) will be glorious (*kavod*; first reference being 3.8):” the only reference in Isaiah with this meaning. “This is rest; give rest to the weary” [28.12].

## 9 December, Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary

*But God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 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 you 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." Genesis 3:9-15

"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.

## 15 December, Third Sunday of Advent

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.*  
Isaiah 35.1-6

Vs. 1: -Shall be glad (*sus*): this verb is next found in 61.10 as “rejoice.”

-Wilderness/dry land: *midbar/tsyah*. The former is first noted in 14.17 as “desert” and the latter is next noted in 41.18; from a verbal root meaning to be dry.

-Desert (*haravah*): cf. 33.9, this word connoting a plain.

-Blossom (*parach*): first noted in 17.11 as “make blossom” and is found in the next verse.

-Crocus (*chavatseleth*): the other use of this noun is Sg 2.1, “I am the rose of Sharon.”

Vs. 2: -Rejoice with joy. The verb *gyl* is first noted in 9.3; the noun *gylah* (derived from *gyl*) is found one other time in the Bible, 65.18.

-Singing (*ranan*, infinitive): first noted in 12.6 as “sing for joy.”

-Glory/majesty: *kavod/hadar*. Both nouns are used twice in the verse at hand. The latter is first noted in 2.10. Carmel/Sharon. The other references in Isaiah to both proper nouns are found in 33.9.

Vs. 3: Strengthen (*chazaq*): first noted in 27.5 as “lay hold of.”

-“Weak (*raphah*) hands:” the verbal root is noted in 13.7, “will be feeble.”

-“Feeble (*kashal*, participle) knees:” first noted in 3.8 as “has stumbled.”

-Make firm (*amats*): the next reference for this verb is 41.10, “I will strengthen you.”

Vs. 4: “Fearful (*mahar*) heart:” first noted in 5.18 as “make haste” which is the fundamental meaning of this verb.

-Be strong (*chazaq*): cf. vs. 3 above.

-With vengeance (*naqam*): verb first noted in 1.24, “avenge myself.”

-“Recompense (*gemul*) of God:” first found in 3.11 as “shall be done” (noun).

-Save (*yashah*): first noted in 25.9.

Vs. 5: Shall be opened (*paqad*): this multi-faceted verb is first noted in 10.12 as “will punish.”

-Blind (*hiuer*): first noted in 29.18.

-Deaf (*cheresh*): first noted in 29.18.

-Unstopped (*patach*): first noted in 14.17 with the alternate meaning, “go home.”

Vs. 6: Lame man (*piseach*): first noted in 33.23.

-Leap (*dalag*): the only use of this verb in Isaiah. “Leaping upon the mountains” [Sg 2.8].

-Hart (*ayal*): the only use of this noun in Isaiah. “My beloved...is like a young stag” [Sg 2.9].

-“Tongue of the dumb (*ilem*): the other use of this adjective is 56.10. “Open your mouth for the dumb” [Prov 31.8].

-Sing for joy (*ranan*): last noted in vs. 2.

-Shall break forth (*baqah*): first noted in 7.6 with the alternate meaning, “conquer.”

-Wilderness/desert: *midbar/haravah*. Cf. vs. 1 for these two terms.

-Streams (*nachal*, singular): first noted in 7.19 with the alternate meaning, “ravines.”

**22 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent**



*Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanu-el. Isaiah 7.10-14*

"Again" in Hebrew is a verb (*yasaph*) which fundamentally means to increase, implying something that is ongoing or continuous and is used with two verbs which concern the Lord speaking. These verbs are *davar* and *'amar*; the former pertains to the actual content of what is being communicated and the latter more to the presentation. Since both are *yasaph*...ongoing...we can surmise that the Lord had spoken not just to King Ahaz in this instance but had done in the past to other persons and will continue to do so in the future. Apparently Ahaz hadn't been receptive, the same being true in the current instance. As for the double form of communication (i.e., *davar* and *'amar*), it originates with Isaiah in vs. 3 when the Lord bids him to meet Ahaz.

Ahaz is to ask (*sha'al*) for a sign or *'oth*, this verb being reflexive ('ask to you') followed by (literally) "from the Lord." It's a bold move on Isaiah's part to do this, especially since Rezin, king of Syria, had Jerusalem surrounded. Isaiah doesn't make the request out of desperation but with confidence although it depends upon the *sha'al* of Ahaz to effect it. This confidence is reflected in the sign ("This shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you," Ex 3.12) to be asked, deep and high or *hamaq* and *gavah*. That is to say, on the vertical plane it reaches from one extreme to the other, down to Sheol and up to heaven, and that implies everything in between. If Rezin, being outside Jerusalem, could only witness this request, he would find it to be an impenetrable wall. Perhaps he did get an intimation of this which is why there appears no resolution to the siege.

King Ahaz balks at Isaiah's request, considering it something akin to a trap or test, *nasah* being the only use of this verse in Isaiah. Instead of taking Ahaz's response as a refusal, Isaiah sees it as an opportunity to speak of a sign (*'oth*) which transcends the height of heaven and the depth of Sheol. But before rebuking the king he bids him to hear...not just he as an individual person...but as the house of David. And that house consists of the lineage to which Ahaz belongs and the people under his rule. So when Isaiah says "hear," everyone pays attention, even going back to King David himself as well as those who had constituted the land of Israel. Such an extended hearing is in line with the verb *yasaph* (continuous or increasing action) already discussed. The actual rebuke centers around the verb *la'ah*, to weary in the sense of trying one's patience. Apparently Ahaz had wearied his people before, a far from flattering image: "too little for you to weary men." In other words, the king had become a bore, a dullard of sorts, to the Lord who only put up with him for the sake of Israel.

Finally the Lord speaking in the person of Isaiah will give the *'oth* or sign King Ahaz had refused. You'd think that in the midst of a dreadful siege it would pertain to immediate deliverance but as noted above, we don't hear about that issue being resolved and is almost secondary. In fact, the *'oth* turns out to be quite surprising, something Ahaz never could have dreamt up, a woman (*halmah*, a young woman or virgin and the only reference in Isaiah) who will bear a son. That means the king and people have to wait a full nine months for this child's birth during which time Rezin could breach the city walls. Surely the birth of a child nine months away isn't the solution to ending the siege, but at least Ahaz knows it will continue for that duration and that Jerusalem will endure it, something not uncommon for sieges. Yet this child would have to grown to manhood in order to achieve anything, practically speaking. Thus the birth of this child as a deliver from Rezin's army appears out of the question. Nevertheless his birth is a sign requiring some type of interpretation.

Such were the thoughts...and rightly so...of King Ahaz in his desperate situation. This child's name will be Immanu-el, literally God with us. It must have confused him as well as everyone else, for how could God be

born in human form? So if this young woman is currently alive, Ahaz must seek her out without delay. She knows something nobody else knows, privy to the greatest boon mankind is destined to witness, Immanu-el.

## 25 December, Christmas

The text here is taken from the Night Mass.

*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 you 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*

Vs. 1: This is chapter 8.23 in the Hebrew text.

-Gloom (*mahuph*): noted in 8.22.

-Anguish (*mutsaq*): only two other uses of this noun, Job 36.16 and 37.10: "He also allured you out of distress" and "the waters are frozen fast."

-Brought into contempt (*qalal*): last noted in 8.21 as "to curse."

-Will make glorious (*kavad*): the verbal root for "glory;" the only use of this verb with this meaning in Isaiah.

-“Way (*derek*) of the sea:" first noted in 2.3. The reference most likely pertains to the Exodus through the Red Sea.

-“Galilee of the nations (*goy*, singular):" first noted in 1.4.

Vs. 2: Darkness (*choshkek*): the next reference is 29.18. "Darkness was upon the face of the deep" [Gen 1.2].

-“Land of deep darkness (*tsalmoth*):" the only use of this noun in Isaiah. It connotes a shadow as by *tsal* as well as death by moth. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (or "valley of deep darkness")" [Ps 23.4].

-Dwelt (*yashav*): first noted in 3.26 as "to sit." This verb, along with land (*erets*), suggests one's native dwelling place.

-Has shined (*nagah*): the other reference is 13.10. "Yes, you light my lamp" [Ps 18.28].

Vs. 3: Multiplied (*ravah*): the other reference is 57.9 and can apply to the nation (*goy*) becoming great. "He who oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth...will only come to want" [Prov 22.16].

-Increased (*gadal*): first noted in 1.2 as "to rear." In the verse at hand, this verb applies to the nation's joy (*simchah*; the verb *samach* is used twice in this verse, "rejoice"). The next reference is 16.10.

-Harvest (*qatsyr*): the next reference is 16.9. For another use of this term, cf. Ps 80.11, "It sent out its branches to the sea."

-Rejoice (*gyl*): the next reference is 25.9. The verb connotes dancing as in a circle. "He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf" [Ps 29.6].

Vs. 4: The Lord has broken (*chatah*: used twice; cf. 7.8, “broken to pieces”) the following:

-“yoke of his burden (*sovel*):” next reference is 10.27. From a verbal root meaning “to bear, to carry:” “and to gray hairs I will carry you” [46.4].

-“staff (*mateh*) of his shoulder:” next reference is 10.5. “The Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ He said, “a rod” [Ex 4.2].

-“rod (*shevet*) of his oppressor:” next reference is 10.5. “I will chasten him with the rod of men” [2 Sam 7.14].

-“Day of Midian.” “Arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand” [Jud 7.15].

Vs. 5: Boot (*se'on*): the only use of this term in the Bible.

-Trampling warrior (*sa'an*, participle): the only use of this term in the Bible and the verbal root from which *se'on* is derived.

-Battle tumult (*rahash*): the other reference is 29.6 with a different meaning, “with thunder, with an earthquake.”

-Garment (*simplah*): first noted in 3.6 as “mantle.”

-“Fuel (*ma'akolet*) for the fire:” the other reference is 9.19 and comes from the verbal root meaning “to eat,” “to devour.”

Vs. 6: Child/is born: *yeled/yalad*.

-Son/is given: *ben/natan*. Not the verbal root for “son” but similar in sound.

-Government (*misrah*): the only other reference in the Bible is in vs. 7.

-“His name will be called:”

-“Wonderful (*pele*) Counselor:” the next reference is 25.1. From a verbal root meaning “to distinguish.” “I will remember your wonders of old” [Ps 77.12].

-“Mighty (*gibor*) God:” the next reference is 10.21. “The mighty and terrible God” [Dt 10.17].

-Everlasting Father (*avyhar*): the only use of this term in the Bible.

-“Prince of Peace (*shalom*):” the first use of this term in Isaiah; next reference is vs. 7.

## 29 December, Holy Family

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

Right away you can see that this passage has in mind the Ten Commandments: “Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you” [Ex 20.12]. The Hebrew verb for “honor” is *kavad* which fundamentally means to be heavy, as though honor consisted of a weight not just to bear but to impose on other people, that is, in a positive sense. Such *kavad* is twofold:

- 1) That the person doing the honoring (i.e., children) will live long “in the land” or *adamah* as earth or

ground. This noun contrasts with *'erets* or land in the sense as that which is most essential to a nation, and as yet, the Israelites had not taken possession of the land promised by the Lord. They were still in the wilderness of Sinai.

2) That this *'adamah* is given by the Lord, not taken by human means, but its possession lay in the indefinite future. When the Lord speaks of one's days being long, he has in mind not the Sinai wilderness but Israel itself, though the two may be combined.

The Greek equivalent to *kavad* for this most important duty of honoring one's parents is *timao*, also connoting reverence, and here in Sirach pertains to the father as head of the household. As for the mother, she has a "right" or *krisis* which can apply to judging. The quality of each parent is reflected in their children. That is to say, the son returns honor or *doxazo* which connotes giving credit or glory for the father's *timao*. Also it applies to the mother. A few verses later the children honoring their mother are singled out as being refreshed by the Lord, *anapauo* (alternately it means to stop, desist, hinder). A condition is put on this, namely, that the child "obey's the Lord, *eisakouo*. This verb has the preposition *eis* or "into" prefaced to the verbal root meaning literally a listening-into which is applicable to an intent, continuous paying of attention.

Such respect towards one's parents translates into the laying up of treasure which is in the form of the children eventually having their own. Thus a line of succession is established between all family member which extends into the indefinite future. Certainly while in the Sinai wilderness when the Ten Commandments were given this was especially vital...not just to continue their journey but to establish themselves in the land that had been promised by the Lord.

The remaining two verses from Sirach (12 through 14) deal with the father and consist of the following elements: help, do not grieve, forbearance and do not despise. The Greek words are as follows: *antilambano* or literally to receive in turn or to gain, *lupeo* or to cause distress, *suggnome* or acknowledgment and pardon and finally, *atimazo*. This last word is the verb *timao* which is equivalent to *kavad* but with alpha privative, thereby negating any honor to the father.

"Kindness" or *elemosune* connotes mercy, especially in light of the father's failing health in old age. When Sirach says it will not be forgotten, the passive is used meaning it has several applications: to the Lord, the children directly involved, other siblings, relatives and the community at large. The same passive voice is used with the verb "credited," *prosanoidomeo*. It consists of the verbal root *demo* (to build), the noun *oikos* (house) and two prepositions, *pros* and *ana* (towards, indicative of direction towards-which and *ana*, up or upon). Thus the sense of this very full verb applies to sins, that they will not dwell (i.e., make or demo their *oikos* or house) with the son so giving honor to his father).

### **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

Judging by today's readings you would have no clue that it's the beginning of a new calendar year. As noted in the brief introductory notes, this method of telling time, so familiar to us, is secondary to the higher time of the liturgical cycle begun one month ago with the First Sunday of Advent. Both are not contradictory but complementary.

This is one of the most well known passages from the Bible, very general in tone, and therefore can be considered as safe to use for any and all occasions, even secular ones. However, the blessing takes place just after details about a Nazarite or person who dedicates himself entirely to the Lord, far from being bland and monotonous. As for the blessing, it's an example of Aaron as spokesman for Moses and therefore of God. In other words, Aaron is a second step removed from the Lord, Moses being the first step. Moses bids not just Aaron to offer the blessing but his four sons, Eleazar, Ithamar, Nadab and Abihu. The first two went on to be prominent among the people whereas the second two turned out to be less than desirable and later were consumed by fire from the Lord (cf. Lev 10.2). However, that would come later. In the meanwhile the Lord was more concerned about getting his priesthood established to serve the Israelites not just now in the Sinai wilderness but later in the land of promise. So after Moses communicated to Aaron and his four sons the Lord's words of blessing, he stood back and assumed the role of one looking on. Perhaps he was in the tent of meeting all alone speaking with God. Anyway, he must have felt a certain abandonment at taking a secondary role with regard to the people.

Aaron's blessing has six elements outlined briefly as follows:

-“bless” or *barak* which fundamentally means to kneel or give obeisance.

-“keep” or *shamar*, a term often used in lengthy Ps 119 with regard to the Torah. Thus the priestly blessing is for the Lord to *shamar* people as they would this Torah.

-“shine” or *ya'ar* as applied to becoming or making light.

-“be gracious” or *chanan* or to be favorably inclined.

-“lift countenance” which implies that beforehand the Lord kept his face hidden. Earlier Moses and the Israelites were forbidden to see it. Perhaps the Lord realized that was a little too strong, despite being necessary at the time, so he relented and allowed not so much people to see him face to face but to allow light from his face to emanate outwards.

-“give peace” or the verb *sum* (cf. just below as ‘put’) with *shalom*.

Note use of the plural “they” with regard to putting the Lord's name on the people which refers to Aaron and his sons. As for the words “put” and “name,” both are similar in sound (*samu* and *shemy*) which indicates the close connection between the priests and the Lord with the people being in between as beneficiary of both. While two of the sons of Aaron fail to live up to their divine calling, not unlike the two sons of Eli and Samuel, their priestly ministry transcended personal issues so as not to affect those who came after them. This issue between a holy parent and wayward offspring is not uncommon throughout the Bible and can be seen as forming part of the background to this excerpt.

## 5 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<sup>2</sup>*

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2Included as a supplement are remarks from notations on Isaiah, part of a document on this lectio home page:

Vs. 1: Has risen (*zarach*): first found in 58.10 and next in vs. 2. ‘Light rises in the darkness for the upright’ [Ps 112.4].

Vs. 2: Darkness/thick darkness: *choshek/haraphel*. The former is last noted in 49.9 and the latter is the only use of this

The command to “arise” (*qum*) and to “shine” (*’or*) are so closely bound together than they can’t be separated in the sense of one coming before the other. Both are directed to the city of Jerusalem in response to an announcement (the source of which isn’t specified; let’s say it’s by an angel) that “your light has come.” Note the personal possession, “your” light (same root as the one at hand). That means Jerusalem already has had *’or* within it, that it belongs to the very nature of the city. Closely allied with *’or* is the Lord’s “glory” or *kavod* (connotes heaviness). In contrast to the upward arising suggested by *qum*, we have here the verb *zarach* which applies to the scattering of rays by the sun. So while *qum* belongs to Jerusalem by nature, *zarach* belongs to the Lord by nature.

In contrast to this imagery of light, those not belonging to Jerusalem will be covered by “darkness” and “thick darkness,” *choshek* and *haraphel*. The former is more general and connotes misery whereas the latter is associated with clouds. The two may be contrasted in the book of Exodus: “Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness...a darkness to be felt” [10.21]. “And the people stood afar off while Moses drew near to the darkness where God was” [20.21]. In the verse at hand, both *choshek* and *haraphel* are in the future, almost contingent upon Jerusalem being illumined from within and from without (i.e., the Lord).

The verb *zarach* is used a second time, “the Lord will arise upon you.” That is to say, he will scatter his light upon Jerusalem along with his *kavod* being seen. The passive of this seeing can apply to both Jerusalem and the peoples. It has special application to the “nations,” *goyim* a more technical term suggestive of Israelites vs. other peoples. Kings of the *goyim* are singled out meaning that their leaders will come to Jerusalem drawn by its light which is reminiscent of the three magi being drawn to that city by the light of a star. Perhaps they had this passage from Isaiah as they made their way.

While the non-Israelites are streaming towards Jerusalem, the unidentified herald (let’s say that angel) bids the city’s inhabitants to raise their eyes. This is suggestive of everyone crowding the city walls and gazing out toward the multitude which is drawing near. The vision will make Jerusalem “radiant” or *nahar*, a verb that fundamentally means to flow or stream together. This *nahar* will reach out towards the foreigners approaching Jerusalem and welcoming them. The single heart of Jerusalem then will “thrill” and “rejoice,” *pachad* and *rachav*. The former means a trembling either with fear or joy and the latter means to be broad or wide open.

So once everyone from afar off arrives, they will bring offerings; nothing is said of animals for sacrifice but gifts reminiscent of the three magi already noted, gold and frankincense. Once assembled, they will “proclaim” the word in Isaiah. ‘And darkness was under his feet’ [Ps 18.9].

Vs. 3: Brightness/rising: *nogah/zerach*. The former is last noted in 50.10 and the latter is the only use of this noun in the Bible; derived from *zarach* in the previous verse.

Vs. 4: Gather together (*qavats*): last noted in 56.8.  
-Shall be carried (*aman*): last noted in 55.3 as ‘sure’ (verb).

Vs. 5: Be radiant (*nahar*): the other use of this verb in Isaiah is in 2.2 as ‘flow.’ From it is derived ‘river.’  
-Thrill/rejoice: *pachad/rachav*. The former is last noted in 33.14 as ‘are afraid’ and the latter in 52.2 as ‘enlarge.’  
-‘Abundance (*hamon*) of the sea:’ last noted in 33.3 as ‘tumult.’  
-‘Wealth (*cheyl*) of the nations:’ last noted in 36.2 as ‘army.’

Vs. 6: ‘Multitude (*shiphah*) of camels:’ the only use of this noun in Isaiah. ‘I see a company’ [2Kg 9.17].  
-Shall cover (*kasah*): last noted in 51.16 as ‘hide.’  
-Midian/Ephah/Sheba: the first is noted in 9.4 whereas the verse at hand contains the only references for the other two.  
-Shall bring (*nasa*): last noted in 52.13 as ‘lifted up.’  
-Frankincense (*lebonah*): last noted in 43.23.  
-Shall proclaim (*basar*): last noted in 52.7 as ‘brings good tidings.’  
-‘Praise (*tehilah*) of the Lord:’ last noted in 48.9.

Lord's "praise." The verb is *basar* whose primary meaning is related to beauty and joy. Interestingly, the noun for "flesh" (same spelling) is derived from it. Pushing this connection a bit, we could say that such proclaiming with joy translates into a kind of incarnation, of taking on human flesh or embodiment.

## 12 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 coast lands wait for his law...I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.*" Isaiah 42.1-4, 6-7<sup>3</sup>

We could say that when Jesus approached John to be baptized he had read this passage from Isaiah, having been prompted by the Holy Spirit not just to do so beforehand but a bit later during his forty days and forty nights in the desert. In Matthew's Gospel one of the first acts of Jesus was to choose his disciples which echoes the commission presented here in Isaiah. Perhaps he even explained their calling in light of this passage to the twelve so they could get a better grasp of his mission. As for John who baptized Jesus, it wouldn't be surprising if he were familiar with the same Isaiah passage and saw the connection between it, Jesus and his own role of being the agent, that is, the baptizer.

"Behold" (*hen*) is a way of getting one's attention which could be taken as Israel as a whole. The people were focused elsewhere, presumably attentive to things the Lord did not want. Hence he comes on the scene more or less immediately and shifts their attention to his servant who lacks a name. We don't know when or how he did this; it could have been at a major liturgical event at the Jerusalem temple. We don't have any clues as to this servant which makes him quite mysterious. Note that his relationship with the Lord has the following three qualities: 1) is upheld or *tamak* which implies being taken hold of, 2) "chosen" or (*bachyr*, a person who

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<sup>3</sup>Included as a supplement are notations taken from *Notes on Isaiah*, also on this home page:

- Vs. 1: Uphold (*tamak*): first noted in 41.10. The Hebrew text literally reads, 'my servant I will uphold in (*b-*) him.'  
-My chosen (*bechyr*): from the common verbal root *bachar* (first noted in 7.15). The next use of this noun is 43.20. 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one' [Ps 89.3].  
-Delights (*ratsah*): first noted in 40.2 with the alternate meaning, 'ended.'  
-Have put (*natah*): the common verb 'to give,' the object here being *ruach* or 'spirit.'  
Vs. 2: Will (not) cry (*tsahaq*): first noted in 19.20.  
-'Will not lift up his voice.' The Hebrew does not have 'voice' after this verb but after the next verb, 'make it heard.'  
-'In the street (*chuts*): first found in 5.25 and can alternately mean 'without.' 'Pitch it in and without' [Gen 6.14].  
Vs. 3: 'Bruised (*ratsats*) reed': first found in 36.6, 'broken (reed).' The noun (*qaneh*) is first noted in 19.6.  
-Will (not) break (*shavar*): last noted in 38.13.  
-'Dimly burning (*kahah*) wick': the other use of this adjective is 61.3, 'faint (spirit).' 'His eyes began to wax dim' [1Sam 3.2]. The noun (*pishtah*) has one other reference in Isaiah, 43.17. The other biblical reference is Ex 9.31, 'flax.'  
-Will (not) quench (*kavah*): first noted in 1.31.  
-Faithfully (*emeth*): prefaced with the preposition *l*, 'to,' 'towards.'  
Vs. 4: Will (not) fail: the verb *kahah* is used, last noted in vs. 3.  
-Be discouraged: the verb *ratsats* is used, last noted in vs. 1.  
-Has established (*sum*): last noted in 41.20 as 'may consider.'  
-Coast lands (*y*, singular): last noted in 41.1.  
-Law (*torah*): last noted in 30.9 as 'instruction.'  
Vs. 6: Have taken (*chazaq*): last noted in 41.13 as 'hold.'  
-Kept (*natsar*): first noted in 1.8 as 'besieged.'  
-Covenant (*beryth*): first noted in 24.5.  
Vs. 7: blind (*hiuer*): first noted in 29.17.  
-Prisoners/dungeon: *sagar/masger*: cf. 24.22.  
-Prison (*beyth kele*): literally, 'house of restraint.' The other reference in Isaiah is vs. 22. 'Put this fellow in the prison' [1Kg 22.27].  
-Darkness (*choshek*): first noted in 9.2.

has been tried and found worthy and 3) as one in whom his “soul” (*nephesh*) “delights” (*ratsah*), the verb usually in reference to having an association.

Already the Lord had placed his “Spirit” or *Ruach* upon him, that is as a governing, directing force for a purpose larger than dealing with his native Israel. That is to say, he will bring “justice” (*mishpat* connotes judgment) to the “nation” or *goyim*, a word applicable more to those people...and this includes the rest of the world, really...who are not Israelites. This unknown person is a herald but one who paradoxically remains silent or pretty close to it which mean that he will give witness by personal example. His primary mission is to establish “justice” or that *mishpat* just mentioned which he will bring forth first and then establish in the “earth.” The noun here is *‘erets* which more properly refers to the territory belonging to a given nation.

The Hebrew has for “will not fail” and “be discouraged” the verbs *kahah* and *ratsats*. The former implies being feeble or timid as well as applicable to a lamp going out. The latter connotes being crushed or treated with violence. So while the earth is associated with *mishpat* as the last paragraph notes, the coast lands wait for the “law” which is the *Torah*. Perhaps these outer limits by the sea represent a point of disembarkment for the *Torah* to extend westward throughout the Mediterranean world. The coast lands have not yet received the *Torah* but are waiting for it, *yachal* being suggestive of hope.

After the Lord has spoken with the anonymous servant present before him as he was about to begin his mission, he develops it further. He makes it clear that he is the Lord which is not a boast or display of superiority but a reminder for the servant in front of him. The Lord calls the servant “in righteousness” or *tsedeq* which is not unlike *mishpat* or justice (‘for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness,’ Mt 3.15). Unknown to the servant, already the Lord had an intimate relationship with him, taking him by the hand and keeping him.

Now the Lord gets more specific as to his servant’s role: both a “covenant and “light” or *beryth* and ‘or not to Israel but to the *goyim* or those not belonging to Israel which practically speaking, is the rest of mankind. Unknown to them, the *goyim* were in a kind of prison due to their ignorance of what the God of Israel had revealed. As soon as *goyim* heard the word *beryth* there came to mind the original one established with Abraham and later ratified with Moses. Since the making of a covenant implied the elimination of *goyim* as recorded in Israel’s history to date, extending this to non-Israelites was a much larger gesture than at first glance. In other words, the *goyim* need not fear destruction but will enjoy the same rights and privileges as Israel.

## 19 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

*And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified"...And now the Lord says who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Isaiah 49.3, 5-6<sup>4</sup>*

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4As with last Sunday, included here are excerpts from Notes on Isaiah:

Vs. 3: Will be glorified (*pa'ar*): first noted in 10.15 as ‘vaunt yourself.’

Vs. 5: Bring back (*shuv*): last noted in 47.10 with the alternate meaning of ‘led astray.’

-Be gathered (*‘asaph*): first noted in 10.14.

-Am honored (*kavad*): last noted in 47.6 as ‘made heavy.’

-‘My strength (*hoz*):’ last noted in 45.24.



Today marks the first Sunday the church returns to Ordinary Time since the second half of November, approximately two months. Always there's a bit of awkwardness in resuming a given liturgical time which had been interrupted, if you will, by another with still another one up ahead, namely, Lent-Easter-Pentecost. The current stretch will continue until Lent, going through the Christmas season (different from others in that it isn't officially marked off as such) which terminates with the Presentation on 2 February. Even with our return today to Ordinary Time there is in the air, if you will, however faintly, an anticipation of a new season in the church's life. A feel for this can be picked up in today's reading with the call of Israel and its broader mission. We can hear John the Baptist still echoing as his voice becomes weaker and taken up with the approach of the call to repentance proper to Ash Wednesday.

Today's excerpt is the second so-called servant song of Isaiah whose identity here is given as belonging to Israel as a nation. "Me" signifies that the entire people is attentive to the Lord, the exact nature of how this is effected not being spelled out. Practically speaking, this might be through a prophet addressing people in the temple or in synagogues where the divine communication had been passed around quickly by word of mouth. Often the swiftness by which news traveled in the ancient world is underestimated: mouth by mouth, village by village, all quite rapidly. *Heved* as "servant" generally means slave; thus popularly speaking it is often a less than desirable name. So for the Lord to be "glorified" in such a lowly individual...nation...is unprecedented, the verb being *pa'ar* which connotes being made beautiful in the sense of being ornamented or adored. The nature of this *pa'ar* lies in the future and as yet is unknown to the nation of Israel. Thus they will have to wait patiently for this to happen and be aware of signs pointing towards it.

Earlier Jacob has received the name Israel, the history of which is intimated here but with the intent of returning Jacob to the Lord. That means Israel had strayed and willingly should accept the role of a *heved*, nothing objectively to be proud of except as associated with the Lord. So if Israel had strayed—that's implied by being gathered to him—any glorification will be done in that context, one of return.

After the Lord summons "me" or Israel as a whole or as a *heved*, quickly switches gears to the prospect of a larger mission. This relatively insignificant people will be a "light" (*'or*) to the "nations" or the *goyim*, this term being applied to all those who are not Israelites and has a somewhat derogatory connotation about it. In sum, *goyim* suggests a lack compared to Israel's favor with the Lord. However, before this can be achieved (and that's equivalent to saving the whole world), Israel must put its own house in order, restoring her own "preserved" or *natsyr* which derived from the verbal root *natsar* meaning to watch or to keep pretty much as a watchman or guard. Thus this group needs to recover its original mission as protectors of the people, thereby most likely involving religious leaders. Without them any mission to the *goyim* would be impossible.

The Lord lays out his ultimate goal: "salvation" for the entire earth, *yeshuah*, which is the essence of the proper name (and mission) of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew does not have the verb "reach," simple the verb to be. This suggested identity of Israel's mission as a nation with a person yet to be born and still unknown fits in well with Jesus' commission to preach the Gospel throughout the world.

## 26 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

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- Vs. 6: Light thing (*qalal*, participle): last noted in 23.9 as 'dishonor.'
  - Tribes (*shevet*): last noted in 30.31 with the alternate meaning of 'rod.'
  - To restore (*shuv*): cf. previous verse.
  - 'Preserved (*natsar*, participle) of Israel: first noted in 1.8 with the alternate meaning of 'besieged.'
  - Salvation (*yeshuah*): last noted in 33.2.
  - May reach. The Hebrew text has the verb 'to be.'
  - 'Ends (*qatsah*, singular) of the earth: first noted in 41.9.

*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 you as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.*  
Isaiah 8.23-9.3<sup>5</sup>

This excerpt is reminiscent of both the Advent and Christmas seasons we just came through. With mention of light and darkness, it can be taken as a preparation for the Presentation of Christ in the temple, 2 February. Although Christmas lacks an explicit season, we are in a period awaiting its completion with the Presentation. From then on we await Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent.

The female personage isn't identified outright despite mention of two lesser known tribes of Israel, Zebulun and Naphtali. Despite having been in "gloom" or *muhaph* being a verbal participle of *huph* which fundamentally means to fly away as well as to cover in darkness. The noun *mutsaq* ('anguish') is similar in sound to *muhaph* and part of it, that is, a kind of narrowness or being put in a confined space.

*Heth* or "time" is mentioned once (it's not unlike the familiar Greek *kairos* for a specific event, usually divine intervention) though associated with *ha'acharon* ('the latter'). Both come together, if you will, to form a beginning and an end, "glorious" being the outcome of "contempt," *keyvd* (from *kavod*, glory).

"People" (*ham*) most likely represent non-Israelites though the familiar *goyim* (nations) isn't used here. The darkness in which they have walked is not unlike that of the ninth plague which afflicted the Egyptians: "Stretch out your (i.e., Moses) hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt" [Ex 10.21]. Here as well as in Isaiah the common term *choshek* is used but intensified greatly by the verb *mush*, to feel or to touch. The Israelites, however, enjoyed light (cf. vs. 23) which means the darkness weighing down upon the rest of Egypt must have been like an impenetrable wall, rather frightening. The Isaiah excerpt uses the phrase "land of deep darkness" which can apply to this situation, *tsalmaveth* which is suggestive of a shadow, and a shadow means an object or person casting it thereby adding

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5Again as with passages above from Isaiah, excerpts from the text containing notations. NB: this is chapter 8.23 in the Hebrew text.

Vs 1: Gloom (*mahuph*): noted in 8.22.

-Anguish (*mutsaq*): only two other uses of this noun, Job 36.16 and 37.10: 'He also allured you out of distress' and 'the waters are frozen fast.'

-Brought into contempt (*qalal*): last noted in 8.21 as 'to curse.'

-Will make glorious (*kavad*): the verbal root for 'glory'; the only use of this verb with this meaning in Isaiah.

-'Way (*derek*) of the sea:' first noted in 2.3. The reference most likely pertains to the Exodus through the Red Sea.

-'Galilee of the nations (*goy*, singular):' first noted in 1.4.

Vs. 2: Darkness (*choshek*): the next reference is 29.18. 'Darkness was upon the face of the deep' [Gen 1.2].

-'Land of deep darkness (*tsalmoth*):' the only use of this noun in Isaiah. It connotes a shadow as by *tsal* as well as death by moth. 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (or 'valley of deep darkness')' [Ps 23.4].

-Dwelt (*yashav*): first noted in 3.26 as 'to sit.' This verb, along with land (*'erets*), suggests one's native dwelling place.

-Has shined (*nagah*): the other reference is 13.10. 'Yes, you light my lamp' [Ps 18.28].

Vs. 3: Multiplied (*ravah*): the other reference is 57.9 and can apply to the nation (*goy*) becoming great. 'He who oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth...will only come to want' [Prov 22.16].

-Increased (*gadal*): first noted in 1.2 as 'to rear.' In the verse at hand, this verb applies to the nation's joy (*simchah*; the verb *samach* is used twice in this verse, 'rejoice'). The next reference is 16.10.

-Harvest (*qatsyr*): the next reference is 16.9. For another use of this term, cf. Ps 80.11, 'It sent out its branches to the sea.'

-Rejoice (*gyt*): the next reference is 25.9. The verb connotes dancing as in a circle. 'He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf' [Ps 29.6].

a certain ominous flavor. The light which shines here isn't specified though most certainly an image for the Lord himself.

*Goy* or "nation" is used (singular) instead of *ham*, clearly indicative that non-Israelites are involved here. The time of harvest is mentioned, meaning that successfully they have planted and reached the time for bringing in and storing up food for the coming winter. Also the specific type of joy after a battle means that the victors are both relieved they have won and survived as well as have before them a promise of wealth free for the taking. The joy proper to the harvest is *samach* and that of spoilers is *gyl*. The former suggests leaping for joy and the latter, the same expression in a spontaneous dance.

## 2 February, Presentation of the Lord

*"Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. Malachi 3:1-4*

This year the Presentation falls on a Sunday.

*Hinney* or "behold," a way of getting attention to what the Lord is about to say which pertains to sending a "messenger" or *mal'ak*. Often this word is taken as an angel whose very being is to communicate between the Lord and people. He has a more specific identity here, messenger of the "covenant" or *beryth*. This *beryth* hearkens all the way back to Gn 6:18 as promised to Noah just before he entered the ark and afterwards was ratified by a rainbow. It came into fruition, if you will, with Abraham and remained in this basic form throughout ensuing generations. In the passage at hand, people "delight in the covenant, *chaphats*, a verb which connotes a bending or inclining as to pay attention.

As for the *mal'ak*, he is to "prepare" the way before the Lord, *panah* (it means to turn) and is used with regard to *derek* ('way'), a common term. So the notion here is that this messenger...angel...is to straighten out a highway already in existence but had become twisted and rundown over time. So we can imagine the people of Jerusalem on the walls gazing out and watching such an amazing transformation. This is reminiscent of John the Baptist's cry from Isaiah, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" [Mt 3:3]. Here John addresses the people to do the preparing whereas Malachi has the messenger doing it.

So once the messenger has made straight and sound the way, the Lord will come to his temple, presumably the one at Jerusalem. *Pit'om* is the adverb for "suddenly," and that seems to take place as soon as the messenger/angel finishes his work. Prior to this coming the people had been seeking (*baqash* connotes a touching or grasping) the Lord but were doing it on a way that previously had been messed up. The suddenness of his coming can mean that already he was outside Jerusalem (presumably or more specifically, the temple) just waiting to burst in. Although the people had been engaged in worship (i.e., they delighted in the covenant as above), it wasn't sufficient and had to be completed.

So after the initial joy at the *derek* having been made straight for the Lord's sudden entrance, the text turns somber. The Lord himself asks rhetorically "who can endure?" The verb is *kul* which suggests sustaining or taking in and applies to the "day" (*yom*) as a whole. That is not unlike a *kairos* event or the entire twenty-four hour cycle or perhaps some of both. As for standing up to this coming, it seems no one can bear it. That way which had been so twisted is now straight as an arrow, allowing the Lord to enter at once, almost before the

people knew what was transpiring. In fact, nothing is said of his actual entrance, of people greeting him at the gate.

Now with the Lord present within the city of Jerusalem, he will sit...take up a permanent position...and engage in purification both by fire and by washing with soap. Special mention is made of the Levites or those who minister in the temple. They the Lord will “purify” or *tahar*, a verb which implies making bright or shiny. Prior to this the Levites were dull and dirty, not unlike the image of that twisted *derek* which the messenger had straightened out. “Pleasing” is the verb *harav* which means to become a surety or pledge and refers to the offerings to be made. The standard will be that set in the past or according to tradition, “of old and in former years” which can apply to that lengthy history of the *beryth* noted earlier. So it seems the Lord will remain in Jerusalem until this is effected. The form of his presence there is not specified nor the means of his departure. We can conclude by saying that is left to the imagination of each reader of this excerpt.

## 9 February, Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am. "If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. Isaiah 58.7-10<sup>6</sup>*

This excerpt has strong echoes of Mt 25.31-46, the vividly detailed account of the great judgment “when the Son of man comes in his glory...and he will separate them from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” Similarly, Chapter 58 of Isaiah begins with “declare to my people their transgression.” In

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6 As in other entries involving the book of the prophet Isaiah, excerpts from the Notations text are included as a footnote.

Vs. 7: To share (*paras*): the only use of this verb in Isaiah. ‘Among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these’ [Lev 11.4].

-Homeless poor. The first word (*marod*) is a noun with two references in the Bible, Lam 1.7, 3.19. The second is *hany* (singular) as noted in 32.7.

-Naked (*harom*): is found three times in Chapter 20, vss. 2, 3 and 4.

-Cover/hide: *kasah/halam*. The former is first noted in 51.5 and the latter has one other reference in Isaiah, 1.15.

Vs. 8: Shall break forth (*baqah*): last noted in 48.21 with the alternate meaning of ‘cleft.’

-Healing (*rapha*): last noted in 57.18.

-Shall spring up (*tsamach*): last noted in 45.8.

-‘Glory (*kevod*) of the Lord:’ last noted 21.16.

-Shall be (your) rear guard (*asaph*): last noted in 52.12.

Vs. 9: Shall cry (*shavah*): last noted in 32.5 with the alternate meaning ‘honorable.’

-Yoke (*motah*): last noted in vs. 6.

-‘Pointing (*shalach*) of the finger:’ the common verb ‘to send’ last noted in vs. 6.

-‘Speaking wickedness (*awen*):’ last noted in 55.7 as ‘unrighteous.’

Vs. 10: Pour out yourself (*puq*): the only use of this verb in Isaiah but cf. 28.7 for a verb with the same spelling. In the verse at hand, *nephesh* (soul) is used. *Nephesh* is also used as ‘desire’ as in the next verse. ‘Do not further his evil plot’ [Ps 140.8]!

-Afflicted (*hanah*): last noted in 58.3 as ‘humbled ourselves.’

-Gloom (*aphelah*): first noted in 8.22.

other words, what we have here is a judgment set within the context of a fast ('Is not this the fast that I choose?').

With regard to the opening remarks, hiding "from your own flesh" seems the most poignant. The verb is *halam* which intimates covering over by words or using them as garments to conceal one's disobedience. This fits in well, of course, with the response of those at Jesus' left hand...the goats, if you will...who are bold enough to throw back to his face questions about seeing him under the various guises of human suffering. The "sheep" do the same which means both had been unaware of their actions while they had been performing them. So it makes you wonder what had motivated the "sheep" to behave thus when they had no real knowledge that they had been tending to Jesus himself. It's understandable, of course, with regard to the "goats" but less so concerning the "sheep." We expect the questioning of the latter to Jesus to be more vigorous in their defense, but the text presents them as the same. While this incident is quite severe and clear-cut with justice meted out to the good and the evil, Isaiah is softer, if we can put it that way. Chances are that Jesus had this clearly in mind while speaking as he had done though by necessity had to adopt harsher language.

The verb *baqah* for "break forth" with respect to "your light" (*'or*; most likely the person acting in accord with the Torah's teaching) is quite dramatic. It suggests a cleaving asunder (valley being a derivative and an obvious example) pretty much as using a meat cleaver. This *baqah* prepares the way, if you will, for a "healing" or *'arukah* which derives from a verbal root meaning to become long, to defer one's anger. And so the *'arukah* at hand appears to be present within a person waiting to break forth, *baqah*. The verb associated with such healing as eruptive as *baqah* though not as suggestive of violence is *tsmach*, and applies to anything that sprouts forth as a plant coming from beneath the soil.

"Righteousness" or *tsedeq* also seems to come forth from with a person along with light and healing. While these three go before, divine "glory" (*kevod*) will be that same person's "rear guard." This is a verb (*yasaph*) which means to gather, to assemble, to increase. And so this part of the verse can read more literally as "shall gather them up."

So with this *yasaph* behind a person advancing as described above, he will be able to be at the service of others, especially as it pertains to doing them justice. The last verse again mentions "light" (*'or*) rising not just in the darkness but "your gloom." *'Aphelah* is the noun here and connotes a darkness which is thick as in Ex 10.22 and described vividly as "a darkness to be felt." To the person responding positively to the Lord as this passage describes mention of *'aphelah* may come as a surprise...*your* gloom...but intimates that easily he can be as a goat in Matthew's depiction of the great judgment. Interestingly, the essence of this gloom does not change, only its manifestations, for it will be "as the noonday." The same notion is found in Isaiah's earlier example (1.18) of sins with the color scarlet being turned as white as snow. So the lesson in all this is despite the hard-and-fast distinction between good and evil in a person's life, it's easy to switch sides, if you will, and hence one must be on guard of falling away.

## 16 February, Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything; his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin.* Sirach 15.15-20

The opening words "if you will" intimate a choice set before a person which is mentioned at the end of this

first sentence, *diaboulion*, which also means counsel or deliberation. The preposition *dia* (through) suggests a thinking-through or thorough examination before an actual choice is made. Such a choice is with regard to the keeping of the divine commandments, *suntereo* being the verb which alternately means to watch one's opportunity and literally as to keep guard-with (*sun-*). As for the English adverb "faithfully," that is *eudokia* or satisfaction, approval.

Fire and water are equated with life and death, the choice being set before a person. It seems to be a given in life. The choice has been there before the person has come into existence, waiting for him to make a choice, not unlike an angel and devil debating with each other whom shall prevail in the coming contest. In the last paragraph mention of *eudokia* ('faithfully') was made. Here the verbal form is used, *eudokeo* (to be well pleased) and rendered as "whatever he chooses" or more accurately, whatever seems best.

As for divine "wisdom" (*sophia*), it is "great" or more accurately, *polus* or much, indicative of abundance. The Lord is "mighty in power" or in *dunasteia* which connotes Lordship or sovereignty. Such rule, if you will, is exercised through the power of vision ('he sees everything'). This seeing-upon (*epi*) is translated into the Lord knowing all that a person does, the verb here being *epigignosko* which also has the preposition *epi* prefaced to it, a knowing-upon.

Despite this passage opening with "if you will," it concludes with the Lord putting forth his intent. That is to say, he hasn't "commanded any one to be ungodly." *Asebeo* is the verb for "to be ungodly" or to be impious. The noun *asebeia* derived from it (as well as the verb) is broader in meaning. It applies to worship of God as well as respect and devotion to one's family and country, not unlike the Latium *pious*. To sin (*hamartano*) in this context is therefore more inclusive in that to do so would be the equivalent of betrayal of all that is dear to a person and worthy of severe condemnation.

### 23 February, Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

*And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy..." "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. Leviticus 19:1-2 & 17-18*

*Hadah* means "congregation" and also applies to the giving of a testimony which suggests that a group of people so assembled is testifying to their relationship with the Lord.

What is to be communicated through Moses is that Israel is to be "holy" or *qadash* which fundamentally means to set apart for a certain function or in today's language, to make holy as opposed to being vain or secular. Israel is to be such because the Lord is this way. In a sense, this will put the *hadah* of Israel on the same plane as the Lord. Never could such words be communicated in Israel, even if that were an ideal situation. It must be done alone and in secret, hence the scene being the Sinai wilderness; already Israel's presence there had set her apart from Egypt. From this point onward or until Israel entered Canaan (Promised Land), they must have reflected long and hard on these words. They would serve to bind together each of the tribes during the coming stressful wars of occupation and settling the land.

Hatred of one's brother is an inverse *qadash* because it separates him from you and everyone else. The same applies to the taking of vengeance and bearing grudges.

*'Ahav* is the verb for "love" and suggests a longing for. Here it applies to one's neighbor as well as oneself. This section is concluded by the Lord saying "I am the Lord" which means that he alone is *qadash* and makes

Israel such.

Mk 12:31 not only echoes the *'ahav* of Leviticus but fulfils it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." As expected, the verb here is *agapao* which is the root for *agape*.

## 2 March, Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Isaiah 49:14-15*

Two short verses from the prophet Isaiah which offer a fitting conclusion to the last Sunday of Ordinary Time before Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. Ordinary Time resumes on 6 July, a full four months from now. The grand cycle we're about to enter forms a substantial part of the calendar year which we can feel clearly looming up ahead as it is about to engage us. You could feel this need for a renewal for a few weeks now with an instinctive need to renew the liturgical cycle. It may be worth considering now how this four month period will affect us upon returning to Ordinary Time at a later date. No matter how many times we've gone through a given liturgical year, the perception is different each time. Never would you get this with plain old linear time.

The previous verses of chapter 49 are full of consolation which at first makes you think that Zion would be delighted at so much attention coming from the Lord. Thus the claim of being forsaken and forgotten comes as a surprise, even as an insult. The two verbs here are *hazav* and *shakach*. The former suggests the loosening of bands as well as deserting and the latter, a putting out of mind permanently. To this outpouring of divine favor the most natural response would be to show profound and lasting gratitude, not indignance. However, the Lord persists in consoling Zion by appealing to the most basic human bond, one between a mother and child. He capitalizes upon the second complaint of forgetting with regard to a "sucking child," one straight out of the womb and at the most vulnerable stage of life. *Hul* is the word used here as later in 65:20: "No more shall there be in it (Jerusalem) an infant that lives but a few days...for the child shall die a hundred years old."

The verb *racham* means "compassion" with the connotation of being soft and cherishing, a word difficult to translate adequately and not unlike *chesed* used for (divine) mercy.

In the second verse the Lord refers to "these" whereas the first verse has the singular "woman." Perhaps he has in mind that she, along with the new-born baby have the capacity for abandoning Zion, the verb again being *shakach* used three times in this very short excerpt.

This showing of divine compassion coupled with a rebuke in light of Zion's complaint continues for the rest of chapter 49. Zion does not say anything in this regard, having been gently but firmly put in its place.

## 5 March, Ash Wednesday

Some remarks on this liturgical season which extends through Easter and then on to Pentecost. As the liturgical year expanded over time, the grand cycle begun today comes to a full completion with the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, this year being 28 June. So between now or early March right on through the end of June we have a large part of the calendar year set aside as a complete unit. It's broken down into

several obvious parts: Lent, Easter (preceded by the Triduum, of course), Sundays after Easter and then Pentecost. In various stages of history other feasts were added, culminating in the Sacred Heart or more accurately, the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

With this in mind, it's interesting to take the Gospel for Ash Wednesday which usually is from the beginning of St. Matthew's Gospel. There Christ speaks about fasting which is to be done in secret or keeping one's actions hidden which at the same time are known only by the Father. This is appropriate, of course, for the beginning of Lent as leading up to the Triduum and Easter Sunday. Then the very tail end of this liturgical time (Immaculate Heart) culminates with the Gospel pertaining to the Presentation or when Jesus' parents brought him to the temple. This year the Gospel itself is Lk 2.41-51, the Holy Family's return from the Passover in Jerusalem. However, it is preceded by Simeon's prophecy about Jesus Christ. Here there are several references to Christ as light, revelation and the piercing of Mary's heart with a sword "that thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Both Gospels are fittingly set at the beginning and end of these months which, as just noted, form one whole unit.

With this in mind, an experiment may be made. You can take the Gospel for the Immaculate Heart and read it today, the beginning of Lent, with its emphasis upon light and revelation. Then on the Immaculate Heart you can take Ash Wednesday's Gospel and insert it there with its emphasis upon hiddenness. The latter Gospel passage would then come at the actual resumption, if you will, of Ordinary Time when things "get back to normal" or as we move from the cycle beginning with Ash Wednesday and terminating with the Immaculate Heart and advance through the remaining calendar year until the beginning of Advent.

So when you have these two Gospels inverted, you can look at the beginning of this special time of year from the vantage point of its end. And when you reach the Immaculate Heart on 28 June, you can read the Ash Wednesday Gospel with its emphasis upon hiddenness and look back through its lense to Ash Wednesday. Having this in the back of your mind can shed new light and appreciation of all the mysteries celebrated in between.

A simple outline or diagram to sum up:

*The normal outline*

Ash Wednesday to Immaculate Heart  
in secret ----> revelation

*The inverse outline*

Immaculate Heart to Ash Wednesday  
revelation----> in secret

**9 March, First Sunday of Lent**

*Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the*



*tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. Genesis 2.7-9; 3.1-7<sup>7</sup>*

Vs. 7: then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

The completion and fulfillment of the lengthy sentence begun in vs. 4.

Formed (*yatsar*): compare with the earlier verbs "to create," "to make." *Yatsar* has the sense of making a vessel of earthenware: "You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" [Ps 2.9]. This verb also connotes destiny: "I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me" [Is 44.21].

The object of divine *yatsar* is man or 'adam, that is, from dust (*haphar*) of the ground ('*adamah*). Compare with Prov 8.26: "Before he had made the earth with its fields or the first of the dust of the world." This verse speaks of Wisdom, the first of God's creation, who "was beside him like a master workman" [vs. 30]. The dryness of this dust may be situated in the context of the watering of earth in the previous verse.

Breathed (*yaphach*): intimates a sighing or panting: "For false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence" [Ps 27.12]. The purpose of this verb is to animate man; God effects this through his nostrils, that is, he exhales or sighs into them.

Breath (*neshamah*): from a verbal root meaning "to pant" and akin to *yaphach*. "At your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils" [Ps 18.15]. In the verse at hand, this breath is associated with life resulting in 'adam becoming a living being (*lenephesh chayah*). The use of this noun (*nephesh* or being) was encountered in 1.21: "So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves." Note the preposition *l* prefixed to this noun, as though God's breath were imparted towards 'adam as this "living being."

Compare this second account of creation in Genesis with Ps 104.29: "When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust." Here the word is *ruach* (alternately, spirit). Note the use of dust or *haphar* in the verse under discussion.

Vs. 8: And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Creation of this garden in Eden is the first mention in Genesis of a particular place as opposed to general terms such as sea, earth and so forth. The text presupposes that Eden had already existed, almost that it was in existence before physical creation.

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<sup>7</sup>These notes are lifted from "Notes on the Book of Genesis," also on this homepage.

Planted (*natah*): in the sense of setting something firm or fixed. For an alternate use, cf. Is 51.16: “stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’”

A garden (*gan*) intimates cultivation, of divine or human intervention with respect to the “uncultivated” elements of creation mentioned thus far. “A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed” [Sg 4.12]. The Song verse speaks of what is typically associated with a garden, an area enclosed by walls to set it apart from that which lies outside. However, the garden in Genesis does not require such protection for nothing hostile to it exists. Perhaps the author has in mind that *tohu* and *bohu* of 1.2 which is the furthest reality from a garden.

Note the three-fold description: garden, Eden (*Heden*) and east (*qedem*), the last two terms having a similar sound but have different verbal roots. The former suggests delight or pleasure: “You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering” [Ezk 28.13]. An alternate use of the latter is a preposition (before), perhaps suggesting being before the sunrise.

God’s placing man in the three-fold location of garden-Eden-east suggests that this man was in another place, so to speak, after having been fashioned “from the ground” [vs. 7]. Such a transferal from a non-spacial/temporal realm to a concrete place is, in a sense, reminiscent of the transferal of some Old Testament prophets as well as John the Evangelist: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” [Rev 1.10]. In this instance as with some others, there is a movement from a specified location to one transcending it.

Vs. 9: And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Ground (*‘adamah*): the source of the first man or *‘adam*; that is, both he, trees providing nourishment as well as the tree containing knowledge with respect to good and evil, have one and the same source.

Grow (*tsamach*): another instance of *hiphil* as in vs. 6 (“caused to rain”). This verb pertains to anything which sprouts: “Let the earth open that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also” [Is 45.8].

The first tree is both pleasant (*chamad*) to the eyes and good (*tov*) for eating. The first adjective pertains to anything which is coveted. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house” [Ex 20.17]. Although the text does not explicitly state it, these trees seem to be located in the very midst (*betok*) of the garden, an axis, so to speak, around which the rest of this garden revolves.

The second tree occupies the same *betok* or central position and is the one of life (*chayyim*). Note that in vs. 7 God breathes into the man’s nostrils the breath of life. Association of life with a tree is rich in Jewish and Christian symbolism, the latter seeing it an image of Christ’s cross. “Through the middle (i.e., *betok*) of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month” [Rev 22.2].

This tree of life which apparently occupies the same location as the others differs from them in that it is singular (as opposed to the plurality of the others). Another way of viewing this is that the tree of life is central whereas the others cluster around it. The singular tree contains knowledge or *dahath* which connotes an intimate relationship both of good (*tov*) and of evil (*rah*). “She (the personification of wisdom) is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy” [Prov 3.18].

3.1-7

Vs. 1: Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'"

Serpent (*nachash*): the first mention in Genesis. Since a serpent falls under the category of a reptile, it may be one of the "creeping things" of 1.26. This noun derives from the verbal root which means "to hiss, whisper" as well as "to augur, divine." As enchantment, cf. Num 23.23: "For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divinization against Israel." Another derivative from the same verbal root is brass (*nachsheth*): "So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit an man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live" [Num 21.9]. In this verse is a play on the words, "serpent" and "brass." For the New Testament context: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" [Mt 10.16].

Subtle (*harum*): in the sense of being crafty, cunning; from the verbal root *haram*, to make (as opposed to being) naked as well as to be heaped up. For a positive use, cf. Prov 15.5: "A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who heeds admonition is prudent." Cf. 1 Sam 23.22 which has a parallel with the verse at hand: "For it told me that he (David) is very cunning."

"Wild (*sadeh*) creature:" the noun for "field" is used, that is, "of the field." Despite the untamed nature of the serpent, it is nevertheless made by God.

The text has this *nachash* addressing the woman... "enchanting" her...not the man, perhaps making a not so delicate allusion between it and the female. The serpent reminds her of God's prohibition about the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The woman correctly responds in 3.2-3 that the prohibition pertained to the that "tree which is in the midst of the garden." She also adds the ban about touching (*nagah*) it which the Genesis text omits. This verb more specifically pertains to approaching something or someone; in the verse at hand, it would result in death. The serpent acknowledges awareness of death and reassures the woman that she will not die. Thus far there is no mention of death, so presumably the woman did not have a clear idea about its reality.

Vs. 5: For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Here the serpent presumes divine thoughts and intents with respect to the woman and man. The common verb *yadah* (to know; also pertains to intimate knowledge) is used here with a certain foreknowledge in mind, almost in anticipation that the woman and man will eat the fruit.

Opened (*paqach*): with respect to eyes, of vision, the opposite of which is blindness but here we have a kind of beneficial blindness. *Paqach* is used mostly concerning the eyes: "Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O Lord, I pray you, open his eyes that he may see'" [2 Kg 6.17]. Perhaps the use in Genesis parallels not so much physical blindness but perception as in Gen 21.19: "Then God opened her (Hagar) eyes, and she saw a well of water." In the verse at hand *paqah* is in the niphal: the eyes are opened passively or indirectly, as it were, suggesting that another agent may be at work.

The immediate consequence of *paqach* (from the serpent's perspective) is that "you" or the woman (as opposed to the man) "will be like (*ke-*) God" in the sense of being "as" him, another meaning of *ke-* prefixed to a noun.

Knowing (*yadah*): the second use of this verb in the same verse, the first one with respect to God and this one with respect to the woman or more specifically, concerning good and evil. This “knowing” did occur as 3.22 recounts.

Vs. 6: So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

This lengthy verse is divided into five sections:

1) The tree had an attractive appearance, that is, for eating: the “tree was good for (*l-* or to, in the sense of direction-towards-which) food.” This phrasing makes the tree all the more attractive, that it had a compelling reason to attract the woman.

2) The tree was a delight (*ta’awah*): used in a positive sense but with a negative outcome. “And they ate and were well filled, for he gave them what they craved” [Ps 78.29]. Here the Hebrew text reads literally, “and desire came to them.” This verse bears parallel with that of the Genesis one; it is almost as though desire were something alive with independent existence which “came” to those who lusted after food.

3) The tree was to be desired (*chamad*): a different word from the noun *ta’awah*; the former often connotes both a positive and negative sense whereas the latter contains a broader sense as pertaining to anything delightful. “With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” [Sg 2.3]. In the verse at hand, *chamad* is related to being wise (*saka*), a verb suggesting prudence. “David, a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely” [Jer 23.5]. For another sense, cf. Neh 8.13: “The heads of fathers’ houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the law.”

4) The woman takes the tree’s fruit and eats it.

5) The woman then gave some of this fruit to her husband who ate it. Note the play on words: woman (*’ishah*) and husband (*’ysh*).

Vs. 7: Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

The previous has the woman seeing the tree as good, whereas vs. 7 says that her eyes, as well as her husband’s, were opened. Presumably this earlier seeing was a type of blindness with regard to the distinction between good and evil.

Opened (*paqach*): noted in vs. 5 when the serpent knows that God foresees this event. The previous verse says that the woman had eaten the tree’s fruit; perhaps her eyes were not yet opened which resulted from giving the fruit to her husband.

Naked (*harum*): from the same verbal root as “subtle” which describes the serpent in 3.1.

At first glance, being naked seems the opposite of subtle which implies hiding or adorning clothes. Here such nakedness is a realization, a knowing or *yadah*, which signifies self-awareness and alienation from God.

Sewed (*taphar*): the only other two references: 1) “A time to rend, and a time to sew” [Eccl 3.7]. 2) “Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists” [Ezk 13.18]! The object of *taphar* in vs. 7: “fig leaves” or *te’enah* which are large as Zech 3.10 implies: “In that day, says the Lord of hosts, everyone of you will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.” Note that vs. 8 calls God’s servant the “Branch” which may be taken as belonging to a fig tree. For a reference to leaf: “For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers and like a garden without water” [Is 1.30].

Aprons (*chagorah*): the only other reference being 2 Sam 18:11: "1 (Joab) would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a girdle." A closely related word is *chagor*: "And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him and gave it to David...and his bow and his girdle" [1 Sam 18:4]. These two verses have a military connotation. Positively taken, refer to Lk 12:35: "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning."

## 16 March, Second Sunday of Lent

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Genesis 12:1-4<sup>8</sup>*

Vs. 1: Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

The call of Abram occurs after the extended genealogy of Shem begun in 11:10, the third genealogy after the flood as well as the dispersion after the confusion of tongues at Babel. God's address to Abram continues through vs. 3.

Said-go (*lek-leka*): note the play on words, literally, "go to you," indicating a specific form of departure.

This verse may be viewed in light of 11:31: "Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan." The command of God to Abram involves a three-fold departure which starts from a general area to a more specific household:

1) from Abram's country or *'erets*.

2) from Abram's kindred or *moledeth*: from the verbal root *yadah* (to give birth) and signifies origin as in Est 2:10: "Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had charged her not to make it known."

3) from the house of Abram's father who is Terah (cf. 11:27).

The place of migration is an *'erets* which God will show to Abram, *ra'ah*, the common verb "to see." Two pertinent verses concerning the one at hand: 1) "Wisdom also...recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God" [Wisd 10:5]. 2) "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go" [Heb 11:8].

Thus vs. 1 may be outlined as: said->go->show. Abram can get a handle on the first two but the third...of seeing...remains to be demonstrated.

Vs. 2: And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

This verse contains three future promises by God with a result; contrast with the forced exile of the man from the Garden of Eden ("He drove out the man," 3:24). Vs. 2 may be outlined as follows:

1) "great nation (*goy*):" the common term for any grouping of people; often *goy* is contrasted with the nation of Israel: "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" [Is 42:6]: words echoed in Lk 2:32: "A light for revelation to the Gentiles (i.e., the *goy*) and for glory to your people Israel."

2) bless (*barak*): "So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith" [Gal 3:9].

3) name (*shem*): as inferred by Heb 11:12: "Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were

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<sup>8</sup>Excerpts are from Notations on the Book of Genesis" also posted on this homepage.

born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

The result of all future divine promises is directed for the purpose of making Abram a blessing or *berakah*. “May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham” [28.4]!

Vs. 3: I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.”

Bless (*barak*) and curse (*qalal*): two opposite states which show the close identification between God and Abram. Cf. 8.21 for use of the latter: “I will never again curse the ground because of man.” Compare *qalal* in both cases with the verb *’arar* (which connotes the casting of a spell) as used in 3.14: “Cursed (the serpent) are you above all cattle and above all wild animals.”

The close connection between bless and curse applies to Abram and “him who curses you.” Note that the second half of vs. 3 mentions families or *mishpachah* as in 10.5: “each with his own language, by their families, in their nations.” This term can mean “tribe” and pertains to a smaller grouping of people (family in the extended sense) as opposed to a nation. Here the fate of being cursed does not seem to apply.

*Barak* as related to families reads in the Hebrew text, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” which mirrors of God’s (active) blessing of Abram. Note the connection between “families” and earth or *’adamah*, i.e., not *’erets*

Vs. 4: So Abram went as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

After God’s address in vss. 1-3, Abram follows up on the words “Go from your country->kindred->father’s house.” I.e., here we have two verses in harmony: 1) between the *halak* of vs. 1 and the *halak* of the verse at hand. 2) between that “the Lord said (*’amar*)” and the told (*davar*) of the present one. The former involves “saying” and the latter, “speaking” which is more direct. Thus Abram perceives a unity between going and speaking or *halak/davar*.

Lot is first mentioned in 11.27: “Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot.” Lot is thus singled out along with Abram and remains secondary to the divine call. “And if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked” [2 Pt 2.7].

The advanced age of seventy-five—although considerably less than the post-flood generations—highlights the obedience of Abram to leave his country, kindred and father’s house (cf. vs. 1). His point of departure is Haran, the same name applied to Abram’s father as mentioned in the last paragraph.

The departure of Abram described in vs. 5 may be paralleled with Noah’s preparation for his departure or entrance into the ark (“you, your sons, your wife and your sons’ wives with you,” 6.18). It is outlined as follows:

-Abram took Sarai his wife as well as Lot. Note that vs. 5 says he took Lot; vs. 4 says that “Lot went with him.”

-possessions (*rekush*, vs. 5): in the sense of “substance,” “wealth.” “Passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls; these were from the king’s possessions” [2 Chron 35.7].

-gathered (*rachash*): the verbal root for *rekush*, possessions. The only other biblical references are 31.18, 36.6 and 46.6. Also people obtained in Haran, most likely slaves, are the object of this verb.

-Canaan: the destination of Abram, Lot and Sarai along with people from Haran, keeping in mind obedience to the divine summons of vs. 1. Canaan is first mentioned as a person in 8.18 (“Ham was the father of Canaan”); 12.5 first states this word as a place in 11.31 (“and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan”). Although Abram complied with God’s summons, these earlier references to Canaan show that the collective journey was not to an unfamiliar place but one rooted in the

wanderings of Abram's family. Thus "the land that I will show you" of vs. 1 is one that had already been shown to Abram, if it may be put this way.

### 23 March, Third Sunday of Lent

*But the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" So Moses cried to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand the rod with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the faultfinding of the children of Israel, and because they put the Lord to the proof by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Exodus 17.3-7<sup>9</sup>*

Now comes a familiar refrain: "Therefore the people found fault with Moses and said 'Give us water to drink'" [vs. 2]. *Ryv* is the verb for "found fault" which more specifically means to contend, to strive as well as to plead a cause. It signifies a more serious rift than previously experienced at Marah or Sin between Israel and Moses, so to engage in *ryv* was as close to open conflict if ever there was one. "The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen" [Gen 26.20]. Moses responded that it is not with him that they are engaging in *ryv* but "Why do you put the Lord to the proof?" That is to say, why are you instigating this *nasah* (-h or the letter *ayin* compared with the letter *hei* as in *nasah* of vs. 1)? "There (Masah) he proved them" [15.25]. Both here at Rephidim and Masah the people murmured (the familiar *lun*) against Moses, not the Lord, due to a lack of water. In short, the people did not pay attention to Moses' question. Such murmuring must have been more palpable in the wilderness with countless tents spread out all over, each tent seething with anger. From a vantage place on a ledge one could hear this murmuring begin like a low-grade buzzing sound that grew into a rumble until it engulfed the entire campsite. That's why vs. 4 has Moses crying out (*tsahaq*), "They are almost ready to stone me." For another reference to this verb, see 15.25: "And he cried to the Lord," the instance being at Marah.

"Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel." Thus begins vs. 5 with a direct response from the Lord who heard the *tsahaq* from Moses. Chances are that when Moses complied to *havar* (pass on), he did so either early in the morning or in the evening when they were out gathering manna or quails, not during the midday heat when they were inside their tents...and murmuring. Note that Moses did not *havar* alone but with "some of the elders" or those skilled or proven men mentioned in the last paragraph, pretty much for protection. *Havar* also intimates that both moved along rather quickly so as to avoid being accosted or even stoned but slow enough to make their presence known, a way to show who was in charge. Vs. 5 continues with "take in your hand the rod with which you struck the Nile, and go." *Mateh* is this "rod" last noted in 14.16 ('and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it'), the same one which was involved, for example, in being changed into serpent before Pharaoh (cf. 7.10). Once Moses took in hand his *mateh* (he must have kept it safely stored away after the Red Sea crossing for such an emergency as this), he went...to where is not stated immediately but hastened his passing-on or *havar* with the elders.

"Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb" [vs. 6]. This is the first mention of Horeb since 3.1, "the west side of the wilderness" where Moses had been keeping watch over the flock of Jethro, priest of Midian. As for Jethro, he is mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Eighteen, so Moses was in familiar territory. Apparently Rephidim, where the people complained about a lack of water for the second time, was close to Horeb. Perhaps some of the older Israelites recalled his self-imposed exile there and therefore felt more confident in his leadership. Was he going to settle the people in this area? Chances were slim because the desert could not support such a multitude. As for the form of this standing (*hamad*) by the Lord on the rock, we have no details. It could be either as a burning bush much earlier at Horeb or as a pillar of cloud and

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<sup>9</sup>This excerpt is taken from "Expansions on the Book of Exodus," also on this homepage.

fire at the Red Sea. This rock could have been a boulder or promontory though *tsur* is a fairly general term. Compared to Moses' earlier encounter at Horeb, he isn't commanded to remove the sandals from his feet; apparently this place was not "holy ground" [3.5]. In the verse at hand, Moses is bidden to strike (*nakah*) the rock just as he had struck the Nile, turning it into blood (cf. 7.20). That means Moses had to approach the *tsur* on which the Lord was standing and with his staff hit the *tsur* which he did "in the sight of the elders of Israel" ('sight' here literally reads as 'in the eyes of'). These were the same elders (the number isn't given) mentioned in vs. 5 who would report back to the people to verify the incident). En route to this *tsur* on which the Lord stood—we can presume the elders were unaware of the Lord, just Moses—they must have discussed with him his earlier experiences at Horeb, of how the Lord had appeared in a burning bush and thus set in motion the whole enterprise of leaving Egypt. As far as the elders not seeing the Lord, that was no problem, really. They were more interested in preventing the people from dying of thirst. Once Moses had struck this rock, the Lord vanished from his sight.

"And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah because of the fault-finding of the children of Israel and because they put the Lord to the proof by saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not'" [vs. 7]? The proper name Massah is the noun for temptation or trial. "When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent" [Job 9.23]. As for Meribah, it means contention or strife, derived from the verbal root *ryv* as in 17.2: "Therefore the people found fault with Moses." As for the verbal root *ryv*, it is mentioned in 17.2: "Why do you (i.e., Moses speaking to the Israelites) find fault with me?" And so the two place names are commemorations of a sort with regard to the Israelites contending with the Lord and Moses. The issue for the people was whether or not the Lord was "among" them (*qerev*) which in Hebrew is a noun indicative of closeness, of being in between the people, as it were. "That you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth" [8.22]. Such *qerev* had been manifested from the Passover, through the Red Sea and afterwards. Despite these clear manifestations, thirst in the desert was so overpowering that it blotted out all concerns for things spiritual.

### 30 March, Fourth Sunday of Lent

*The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."...When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him."...And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here." And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." First Samuel 16.1 & 6-7 & 10-13<sup>10</sup>*

Vs. 1: The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."

This chapter begins on both a note of humor and irritation: humor in that the Lord confronts Samuel with his sullen attitude insofar as he's saying to the prophet "Get on with your life." However, the Lord has something in mind for Samuel of which he had an intimation, albeit dimly.

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<sup>10</sup>This excerpt is taken from "Expansions on First Samuel," also on this home page.



*Aval* is the verb for “grieve” found last in 15.35, the point for which the Lord is rebuking Samuel. How this takes place isn’t spelled out but left to our imagination. *Aval* is used with the preposition *‘el-* prefaced to “Saul” rendering it literally as “to Saul.” Despite hostility towards Saul, Samuel retained a soft spot for the king but never...never...would admit it.

*Ma’as* or “rejected” is found last in 15.26. Samuel must have been delighted to receive a divine confirmation of Saul’s rejection as well as straight-forward admittance that the Lord caved into the people’s demand for a king. Nevertheless, the Lord did not belabor the issue but respected the people’s decision.

Apparently Samuel had a “horn” (*qeren* noted last in 2.10 as ‘power’) at the ready, standing by for emergencies, if you will, for various purposes. He may have used the horn for other kinds of anointing when active as a judge. Although Samuel had an inkling of a new candidate for king (‘a neighbor of yours,’ 15.28), he knows only in part, that he belongs to the family of Jesse. In the meanwhile Samuel couldn’t help but get out of his mind who this mystery man was since as judge he had passed through Bethlehem many a time. So when the Lord said “go,” Samuel rushed to Bethlehem as quickly as possible. All this going from one place to another throughout First Samuel was mostly on foot. While making such arduous treks, the people as well as individuals like Saul and Samuel involved had plenty of time to reflect on what they were about to do and how they were to do it. Furthermore, seldom or even did people set out alone on a journey, so always they had company.

The verb for “provided” is *ra’ah* or to see (cf. 15.35) which here Samuel does not yet participate in.

Vs. 6: When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before him.”

As mentioned earlier, Samuel must have known Jesse but not so much his eleven sons because during his days as circuit judge they were either too young or some weren’t even born. Although Eliab is mentioned two more times in First Samuel, he fades off the scene. Yet there must have been something special that got Samuel’s attention because Eliab is the first son mentioned. It could have been not unlike Saul who was “a handsome man” [9.2]. Yet Samuel must have kept that experience fresh in his mind during this critical choice. He didn’t want to repeat the choice of another Saul.

Vs. 7: But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

So when Samuel was assessing Eliab the Lord speaks to him...not in the literal sense but as pointed out in vs. 3. *Navat* is the verb for “look” which implies beholding or having respect (cf. 2.32), here with respect to Eliab’s “appearance” or *mar’eh* which derives from the verb *ra’ah* (to see). “For he was but a youth, ruddy and comely in appearance” [17.42]. Just in case Samuel had forgotten his experience with Saul’s first dramatic impression, the Lord reminds him not to judge by appearances. “I have rejected him,” the verb being *ma’as* (cf. vs. 1). Again, with the possibility of self-deception in mind, the Lord pretty much shouts out to Samuel that he sees (*ra’ah*, cf. vs. 1) not as man sees.”

The Lord makes a clear distinction between “outward appearance” and “heart.” The first reads literally as “sees (*ra’ah*) to the eyes” and the latter has *lev* (cf. 14.32), “sees (*ra’ah*) to the heart.”

Vs. 10: And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these."

The rest of Jesse's sons aren't mentioned as though the author of First Samuel wanted to get this choice over with, having begun by mentioning three sons by name, a sign one of them would be chosen. Perhaps in desperation Jesse made these remaining sons to pass by Samuel one right after the other to get it over with.

Vs. 11: And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here."

Samuel was fully aware that Jesse had one more son but was curious as to why he didn't bring him along with the others. He had a feeling that this son, considered unimportant, was the right man. While Samuel was asking this more or less rhetorical question, the brothers who had passed before Samuel and had experienced rejection were more curious than ever as to resolving this unusual test. While Jesse had each present himself, it isn't clear whether Samuel told them the reason for his action. Chances are they had a high opinion of Saul for having defended Israel and were not privy to Samuel's insight. If they had known this, no doubt they would run as far away as possible from assuming the mantle of kingship.

Note that in response to Samuel's question Jesse begins with "behold" (*hineh*, cf. 15.22) which here belies some surprise and even embarrassment that this son had been left out of the picture. Samuel bids Jesse to get this son as quickly as possible without revealing why. However, Jesse and the rejected sons pretty much knew the result beforehand. The time between getting the youngest son and bringing him back must have dragged on for all involved. In the meanwhile, the sons were grumbling among each other as to why this, their youngest brother, might be the chosen man. They were on the verge of becoming like Joseph's brothers who had sold him into slavery, but to their credit we have no record as to any betray on their part that occurred under David's kingship.

Vs. 12: And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

The name of the person whom Jesse sends to fetch David isn't given, most likely a servant, because Jesse didn't trust his other sons. Samuel had rejected them, the reason not being made known as they passed before him. At the same time, given Samuel's reputation as judge, they had an inkling that something big was about to happen, and they were left out of it in favor of their youngest brother who wasn't present.

'*Adam* is the verb for "ruddy" and implies being dyed red, for this verb occurs four times in Exodus with respect to the dying of rams' skins. "Tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood" [Ex 25.5]. From this verb derives the proper name Adam, the first man, because he was taken from the red-colored earth ('*adamah*'). In sum, David made a stunning physical appearance, especially to Samuel, who perhaps hadn't seen him before because he was an infant during his earlier passages through Bethlehem as a judge.

"Arise" or *qum* (cf. 15.13) can be taken as a way of getting the attention of Jesse and his sons who were sitting around waiting from the arrival of David. It too is a way of saying to them something like snap out of it and pay attention. Immediately Samuel orders "anoint (*mashach*, cf. vs. 3) him" as though he bade someone else to do it whereas he was the only qualified person to perform the ceremony. It was a collective way of saying that everyone has to arise now and get down to business.

As soon as the brother heard the word *mashach* they realized David was set apart for something big, even king. This may have caused some consternation because Saul remains the legitimate ruler. Was Samuel setting up a rival in an attempt to divide Israel and therefore proclaim himself king? Although it isn't recorded, Samuel must have spent considerable time explaining to Jesse and his brothers about the rejection of Saul. Perhaps some didn't buy his interpretation, seeing that it was Samuel, not the Lord, who had a grudge against their king.

Vs. 13: Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Samuel had a store of oil for such purposes used last when he had anointed Saul as king. We don't have any details as to its kind, most likely olive, nor if Samuel used this oil for ceremonial purposes when he had been judge. Note that Samuel anoints Saul "in the midst of" his brothers, *qerev* (cf. 4.3 as 'among') meaning that which is interior to anything. Samuel wanted to make sure these men were solemn witnesses, to insure that they would support their youngest brother and not thwart him later on. In other words, with David *qerev* his brothers, they were sworn to obedience even if they murmured among themselves. By no means were they to follow the example of Joseph's brothers. As with Saul's anointing, there doesn't seem to be any words as part of this ceremony, just the act of pouring oil upon the person's head.

*Tsalach* is the verb for "came mightily" just as it had done with Saul (cf. 10.6). The major difference is that in David's case the divine *ruach* (also cf. 10.6) was with him "from that day forward."

Once this brief but poignant ceremony had been accomplished, Samuel departs immediately which is fairly typical in such instances. He doesn't linger around to give advice or encouragement to David nor to his brothers. The anointing had been done, and that was that. Yet David and everyone present were left wondering what to do next, how to interpret Samuel's gesture. If the anointing made David king, he had to deal with Saul who was the legitimate ruler over Israel. In other words, a strange situation that could border upon treason.

## 6 April, Fifth Sunday of Lent

*Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, says the Lord."* Ezekiel 37.12-14

The prophet Ezekiel is led by the "Spirit of the Lord" [vs. 1], *Ruach* being the proper name here which also means breath. Once out in a vast plain, he is asked to "prophesy," the verb being *nava'* which implies a spontaneous bubbling up where the person doing this is more or less passive to divine influence. So here's Ezekiel in the middle of nowhere after having been deposited there by the *Ruach*. Now this leading changes into a bubbling forth which begins with the command for the dry bones scattered on the plain to hear the "word" of the Lord, *davar* being the term which is not unlike *logos*, word as expression. Such hearing implies that the dry bones, a symbol of extreme desperation or distance from God, can still respond to his *davar*. Note that this incident occurs earlier in Chapter 37 whereas the one at hand takes place afterwards, that is, after the dry bones come to life and have formed "an exceedingly great host" [vs. 10].

The bubbling up, if you will, that Ezekiel does here is with respect to an assembled host or army. These people have been brought back to life, yet the context is “your graves” or those belonging to Israel. So we have this army at the ready and looking on to see if the Israelites will respond as they had done. Surely the Israelites felt uncomfortable in this strange situation, that they had to act and act quickly. Actually, the Israelites who are physically alive are worst off than the army when it was a whole slew of bones on the desert plain. This being-dead-while-alive, a kind of zombie-like existence, which applies to “my people,” needs to come from their graves, after which the Lord will bring them home to their “land” or *‘adamah*. This noun refers to the earth or ground itself. At first you’d think the more proper *‘erets* would be used, land as applicable to a specific spot for a given nation. Given the fact that the Israelites had been dry bones like the host just raised to life, it is more proper for them to know, like their common father Adam (*‘Adam*), that they come from *‘adamah* or the earth itself.

Like the army which Ezekiel had just raised through the intervention of the divine *Ruach*, so the Israelites require this same *Ruach* to be put within them. For a second time the Lord says that the Israelites will be put in their own *‘adamah* compared to the “land of Israel.” Once this has been accomplished, they will “know” or *yadah* (a verb which connotes intimate knowledge) that #1 the Lord has spoken (*davar*) and that #2 he has done this wonder. In other words, first comes the *davar* and then the effect. Both are accomplished at once with no time gap in between, for *davar* implies an effect. This emphasis upon knowing is important, for quickly the memory of both the vast host being raised to life followed by the Israelites and then their return home can be lost. The Lord realizes this no matter how great a wonder he has wrought. And so *davar* is a kind of permanent echo which penetrates the Israelites from the time of its issue until the present as well as beyond.

### 13 April, Palm Sunday

*"Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. Isaiah 54.4-7*

These words apply to Israel more generally and to Jerusalem more specifically. While obviously written in a context different from the current liturgical feast, that is, Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, a reader can’t but keep in mind that city’s total destruction some seventy years later by the Romans. By that time the consoling words of Isaiah, including those of all the prophets, will become a faint echo, a fact Jesus must have been conscious of now one week before his death. They all come to nothing in light of this earth-shattering calamity, and soon Jesus himself will be reduced to nothing. So like the Jews after 70AD readers are forced out of what had been a rather narrow mode of interpretation and must recast the meaning of these particular words, of how they apply to us. An obvious application for Christians is the Church as the New Jerusalem.

In the first sentence “shame” is mentioned three times, indicative of guilt incurred from past actions which are not specified but implied. Two words (the first and the third) are from the verbal root *bosh* which connotes being disturbed as well as confused. The second word is the verb *chaphar* which also means to blush. Thrown in among these verbs is another, *kalam* (‘confounded’), which means to wound. Finally we have “reproach” or *cherpah* which implies contempt and pertains to widowhood. So if Jerusalem is a widow or is about to be such...in the context of today, Palm Sunday...these words fortify her to endure the coming week of Jesus’ passion and death followed by his resurrection.

The Lord himself says that he will be husband to Jerusalem and calls himself three other names found throughout the Bible: Lord of hosts, Holy One of Israel and redeemer. The disciples who accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem had only a vague idea of what was going on. As noted many times in the Gospels, they had clearer insight after Pentecost which means they could reflect upon these incidents and see their wider implications. Chances are the passage at hand is one which had impacted these disciples in light of their experience at Pentecost.

The separation of Jerusalem and hence Israel as a nation from the Lord is likened to a woman who had been forsaken by her husband for marital infidelity. In the context at hand, the Lord calls her as such though her response isn't given but presumably accepted.

The "moment" or *regah* of Israel's abandonment didn't seem such to her, more like an eternity. It took her marital restoration to the Lord to appreciate this. The noun also means a wink of the eye which here is "brief" or *qaton*, an adjective also indicative of smallness. What makes this an actuality is the "compassion" or *rachamym*, literally bowels or something which comes from the very heart of a person. It is manifested most clearly when the Lord "will gather" Israel, *qavats*, which basically means to take by the hand.

## 20 April, Easter Sunday

*And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality...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*

With the advent of Easter, the Church's most important feast, we move into a whole new mind set, if you will, represented by the liturgical readings. Many are taken from the Acts of the Apostles, that time from the Ascension of Jesus through Pentecost and the beginnings of the early church. This stands in contrast to the season of Lent we just left behind which often has large segments from the Book of Exodus, Isaiah and other prophets and reaches its culmination in the Triduum,. Despite the importance of New Testament writings, it seems the Church puts her best foot forward with the Old Testament texts. So when we move from Lent to Easter there's a certain let-down we regard to the readings, something you appreciate better after having gone through a number of liturgical cycles. In sum, we miss the richness of the earlier season so recently left behind and exchange it for the relative blandness of Acts of the Apostles. Even St. Paul's epistles, taken in fairly uninterrupted doses, don't measure up. Be that as it may, always we can find deeper riches in the texts, knowing that they occur within the Easter season and hence with an eye on the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

"Peter opened his mouth and said" are words commonly used in scripture which may sound a bit forced or strange to us moderns. However, a closer look reveals they are suggestive of reflection or of being careful of what one is about to speak and to coordinate this speech with one's mind or intent. In the context of Pentecost, this idea has special significance, for just recently Peter and other were empowered by the Holy

Spirit to speak not just now but in the future.

The verb for “perceive” is *katalambano*, literally as to grasp (*lambano*) according to (*kata-*). Thus Peter lays hold of an insight into divine providence which he never had before. As noted a bit later in this paragraph, *lambano* also forms the root for *prosopoleptes*. Use of “no partiality” is quite radical because the special relationship God had with his chosen people, Israel. It’s also radical because not long ago Peter ceased being a fisherman and was raised a Jew, not educated, and hence (presumably) incapable of a larger insight which he expresses here. *Prosopoleptes* is the noun for “partiality” which consists of two words, *prosopon* and *lambano*, face and to receive. So the idea seems to be a reception by what one sees in a person’s face, his demeanor, which reveals the state of his soul. *Prosopoleptes*, when used with the negative, is reminiscent of Jesus’ words “so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” [Mt 5.45].

After skipping a few verses, today’s excerpt continues with mention of the “word” or *rhema* which spread after John the Baptist had preached repentance. Two verses earlier (36) Peter mentioned another term for “word,” the more familiar *logos*: “You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ.” *Rhema* pertains to that which has been uttered or any sound which has a precise meaning whereas *logos* is broader or more inclusive: discourse, the act of speaking or faculty of speech. In the excerpt at hand, the latter is “sent” (*apostello*) to Israel which seems more in line with Jn 1.1: “In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God.” The former, however, is “proclaimed” (*kerusso*). Thus *apostello* applies more to the Father being responsible for sending Jesus Christ or the divine *Logos* whereas *kerusso* represents both the privilege and burden of making this fact known. The preaching notably begins with John the Baptist or more specifically, with the descent of the Holy Spirit immediately after Jesus’ baptism (cf. Mt 3.16-17).

Peter claims that “we are witnesses,” we being the disciples who are *martus* or who have beheld Jesus preaching and performing great deeds over an extended period of time. Being a *martus* falls in line with that *kerusso* relative to the word-as-*rhema* as opposed to Word-as-*Logos*. Actually the apostolic preaching is a *rhema* about the *Logos*, never the other way around. Then Peter specifies the role of disciple as *martus*, using it a second time more specifically to when Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter is careful to mention eating and drinking with Jesus so as not to give the impression his *rhema* as expressed in this very passage is false, about a ghost of some sort.

The importance of *martus* is borne out by use of two verbs from which it is derived. First we have *diamarturomai* or “to testify” with respect to Jesus as ordained by God where the preposition *dia* (through) makes this verb read literally as testify-through or to give a thorough account from first hand experience. As for “testify,” the verb is *horizo* which means to set a bound, and this bound, if you will, is Jesus as *Logos* (not *rhema*) who had been sent (*apostello*). Second we have *marturomai* as pertaining to the prophets about Jesus Christ or those holy persons who knew about Jesus albeit not fully. As for this witness, Peter gives no specific examples, perhaps presuming his audience, being familiar with the scriptures, could use this familiarity with respect to Jesus Christ. It would be up to these people who form the church to bridge the gap between them both or what later generations would call the Old and New Testaments.

## 27 April, Second Sunday of Easter

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in*

*their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2.42-7*

The Easter season continues to develop, this year in accord with readings from the Acts of the Apostles. Important as this document is, for doing *lectio divina* it's a rather matter-of-fact account of the time after Jesus' ascension into heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. While providing valuable insights into the earliest days of the church, readings from Acts are rather bland compared to the season of poetry we left behind recently with so many rich texts beginning with the early days of Lent and moving towards the Triduum which brought them to a culmination.

The "they" who open this excerpt are the three thousand who just recently had been baptized, a considerable number at this early stage of the church's development. These new converts...and everyone apart from the original twelve disciples may be considered as such...“devoted” themselves to four tasks at hand. Such attention is summed up by the verb *proskarteo* which consists of the root *krateo* meaning to be strong prefaced with the preposition *pros*, signaling direction towards-which. In other words, *proskarteo* suggests a concentrated focus consistent over time without deviating from the task at hand. And those tasks are four as follows:

1) Teaching of the apostles or *didache*. Such teaching can refer to the insights the closest followers of Jesus had begun to formulate after the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. It was fresh and in many ways though quite basic. They were still scrambling to assemble Jesus' words and teaching so as to pass on to others. *Didache* also applies to instruction, concrete ways people could implement what Jesus had taught. There were many in the Jerusalem area who must have met Jesus and some became witnesses to him, even if casually, while others may have disdained him. However, his followers were eager to solidify his teaching and eventually put it down in writing instead of relying on oral tradition.

2) Fellowship or *koinonia*, this word being typical to describe the early church and implies familiarity among the members. Those comprising it are, as said above, the recently baptized group of some three thousand. They aren't specified as Jews but presumably were such. Already they had well established places of assembly for religious purposes, especially in the Jerusalem temple. For them to direct attention to *koinonia* meant something new while at the same time retaining their Jewish identity centered upon the temple. This must not have been easy, let alone harmonious, but it worked because the early church owes them her identity, preparing it for reception of the Gentiles.

3) Breaking of bread or *klasis*, the Eucharist which here is in its most seminal form shortly after Jesus had instituted it the night before he had died. Those engaged in this *klasis* must have been aware of the Passover when Jesus had instituted the Eucharist with his disciples. How to integrate it with this new form of gathering must have been as contentious as the forming of that first *koinonia*.

4) Prayers or *proseuche* perhaps referred to well-established one in Jewish tradition such as the psalms. The new converts relied on these plus may have begun to formulate new ones to take into consideration Jesus Christ, the formidable nature of which we have difficulty to appreciate today.

Consider two words towards the close of this excerpt (vs. 47): having favor “with all the people” and “added to their number.” The preposition *pros* is used (cf. *proskrateo* above) as well as prefaced to the verbal root *tithemi* (to set, to place). We could say that the devotion...the *proskrateo*...of the newly baptized spilled over to a more general witness outside their number, that is *pros* the people and *prostithemi* or people being added to their number. And so at this very early stage everyone organized themselves with a certain intensity and provisional manner because they believed Jesus Christ would be returning soon. The problem of his delay had yet to be worked out.

**4 May, Third Sunday of Easter**

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words..."Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with thy presence.' "Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. Acts 2.14 & 22-33

A fairly lengthy excerpt for the first reading but one which sums up the earliest credo, if you will, produced by the church...not only the church but her first leader, the head of the apostles. Many times in the Gospels Jesus and the writers speak of the disciples not being aware that the scriptures must be fulfilled. This common thread runs through them all, and the significance of Jesus' mission as well as his identity don't become clear to the apostles until the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. We are fast approaching that day, and today's excerpt from Peter's address on Pentecost is a premonition.

In contrast to this overall ignorance about Jesus vis-a-vis fulfillment of the scriptures, here we have Peter boldly proclaiming from scripture. Vs. 14 is cited followed by a gap of seven verses where Peter addresses his audience. In vs. 14 we have *rhema* for "words" whereas in vs. 22 it is *logos*. As noted in an entry above, *rhema* pertains to that which has been uttered or any sound which has a precise meaning whereas *logos* is broader or more inclusive: discourse, the act of speaking or faculty of speech. In the passage at hand, *rhema* may be taken an introduction of sorts to Peter's citation of Joel 2.28-32 whereas *logos* introduces Ps 16.8-11. In sum, these two passages come to his mind immediately after the Holy Spirit's descent.

Because today's excerpt deals with several verses from Ps 16, they are outline as follows, taking them from another text on this home page, the citation in Acts differing somewhat from the Hebrew. Peter was a devout Jew speaking to equally devout "men of Israel" [vs. 22] which means he and they were familiar with the original text, hence the reason for this excerpt. Chances are that not long after this address, both Peter and some of his audience sat down in the synagogue pouring over every detail of the text. Then they had to bridge what they read with the person of Jesus Christ, something no person could do unaided by the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 8: I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Such is the result of *yasar* during the *leyloth* mentioned above. The keeping of the Lord or *shawah* is a making equal or similar; second meaning of this verb is to fear. "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him" [Is 40.25]? The notion of resemblance is suggestive of a person being made in God's *eikon*, image. Note that such *shawah* is constant, *tameyd*, almost in the sense of an ontological identification of the psalmist with God. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two realities is maintained: before me, *lenegdy*, signifying place-in-front-of or not identical with. This word is prefixed by the letter *L*, literally as to; translation would be to before me. This implies Moses' words, "I pray you, show me your glory" [Ex 33.18], not your face which would be identical with God's own self.



Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

In many cultures the right has always been symbolic of good as opposed to the left hand. The word for right hand is *yamyn*; note that God is at the psalmist's *yamyn*, not the other way around. This word is also used for south, for when one's right hand is towards this direction, the face is towards the east or sunrise. With this in mind Ex 33.18 quoted in the paragraph above can be understood in terms of Moses having God situated at the south while Moses' face is towards the east, sunrise. This position results in constancy, in not being moved, *mut*; use of the future tense suggests continuance of that keeping or *shawah* already discussed.

Vs. 9: Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure.

Two aspects of the psalmist's condition which rejoice, heart (*lev*) and soul (*kavod*). The latter more accurately means liver which was considered the heaviest of the internal organs, *kavod* being the verbal root with this meaning. "My heart is poured out on the ground" [Lam 2.11], more specifically, that which is most interior is made exterior as a result of sadness. This rejoicing or *gyl* comes from the verbal root suggestive of a round dance.

My body also dwells secure.

The safety of the entire body rests upon the *lev* and *kavod* finding joy in God. The verbal root for body, *basar*, means to bring good tidings: "Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings" [Is 40.9]. The association of these two words is suggestive of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ...his assuming of a human body...with the Good News of the Gospel. The words "dwells secure" literally read "dwells to trust" or the constant abiding or *shakan* in the direction towards (*L*) this trust, *labetach*.

Vs. 10: For you did not give me up to Sheol or let your godly one see the Pit.

Give up or *hazav* connotes the finality of abandonment, an apt verb with regards to Sheol, the abode of the dead which the psalmist's soul or *naphash* escapes. This verse is quoted in Acts 2.27 by Peter on the day of Pentecost.

The psalmist identifies himself with being a godly one or *chasyd*, from the root *chasad* or one who is the object of God's tender love. The pit or *shachat* implies corruption: "But you have held back my life from the pit of destruction" [Is 38.17]. This text literally reads, "But you have in love to my soul," *chashaq* rhyming with *shachat* or pit. "To see" this pit is equivalent to actual presence in it.

Vs. 11: You show me the path of life; in your presence there is fulness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Because Sheol infers a downward direction, the path or *'orach* leads in the opposite or upward direction. Consider this verse in light of two ascensions, that of Enoch and Elijah: "Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him" [Gen 5.24]. Note the words he was not, *'eynenu*, signifying a thorough "noughting" or disappearance from the earthly sphere. The second ascension reads, "And as they [Elijah and Elisha] still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" [2 Kg 2.11]. This latter example is an upward movement effected indirectly by God through the medium of a chariot of horses; the former is by God himself.

The *'orach* or path is a more poetic word as compared with the more prosaic *derek*. Here its "upward" direction as noted in the last paragraph is associated with life, *chayeym*. It is God who shows this *'orach* to the psalmist, more accurately, causes to make known, the verbal root being *yadah*. I.e., we have here an indirect discovery on part of the psalmist of the path, not a clear manifestation.

## 11 May, Fourth Sunday of Easter

*But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words...Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2.14 & 36-41*

This week's excerpt begins with 2.14 as a preface of sorts, that is, with regard to Peter's address. It was the same verse used as last week where it was pointed out that *rhema* is used for "words." The first *rhema* about Jesus Christ stems directly from the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which gives Peter's words special authority. After all, he's speaking about two divine persons, albeit seminally, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It will take considerable time for theologians to develop this relationship, but here we have the very first kernel. Note that Peter is not speaking alone. He is with the eleven other disciples who payed just as close attention to him as those he is addressing. Actually this is a brand new experience for the disciples, Peter taking the forefront right after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Surely they must have had in mind his betrayal of Jesus a few short weeks ago. These men didn't learn to accept his role as leader on their own, for to overcome jealousy and envy is beyond ordinary human endeavor. So when Peter lifts up his voice, he does so accompanied by the eleven with him. After all, the Holy Spirit's anointing was very fresh.

Peter speaks in a matter-of-fact way to his audience as those being responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. In other words, the plain truth with no elaboration as to condemning them because that would be infringing on the divine plan and harping upon their ignorance. After all, the disciples were not far removed in their misunderstanding of Jesus, if not more. They abandoned him in his hour of need despite having lived with him for three years. It was sufficient for the audience to be "cut to the heart," the verb being *katanusso*, to pierce or to sting sharply. That was sufficient, and Peter realized it. Time to move on and get down to the business of following Jesus which is evident by the question, "what shall we do?" The remedy follows a familiar pattern whose original form can be traced back to John the Baptist: repent, be baptized and the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself followed it at his own baptism, including repentance, although he had no need of it. In sum, he was fully conscious of setting an example which those present would record for posterity. Immediately after his baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit, he went off into solitude for forty days and forty nights. Perhaps some of Peter's audience followed his example: they set aside an extended period of time for reflection and consultation before proceeding further in their new roles.

Just prior to Peter speaking with these Israelites, the Holy Spirit had descended upon the disciples in a very public fashion. Peter seems to be intimating the same will happen again. Even if it may not follow the same public mode of expression, the main point is that the Spirit's descent is for the building up of the new Christian community. Therefore each and every *rhema* as well as *logos*, whether from Peter or future members of the church, would trace their strength and reliance upon God to that event.

In the last excerpt mention was made of the disciples being completely ignorant of incidents and words from Jesus' life as fulfillment of prophecy. Now Peter understands them all as well as the eleven with him. They are at the threshold of giving voice to this congruence of scripture which will set the stage for all future reflection of Jesus as fulfilling scripture or more practically, how today we do the same through our *lectio divina*. Peter

speaks of two such utterances but does not specifically mention their source: 1) "All who are far off" refers to Is 57.19: "Peace, peace, to the far and to the near, says the Lord; and I will heal him." 2) "They are a perverse and crooked generation" [Dt 32.5].

Mention of a crooked and perverse generation will be a recurring theme in the future as it had when originally formulated way back with the murder of Abel by Cain. Implied is that humanity has remained pretty much unchanged down to the present and will continue as such indefinitely into the future. Now Peter makes a clear demarcation between that unbroken chain of violence and the newly formed church. Those three thousand who joined now set themselves apart from this curse brought upon humanity and thus begin a totally new chapter in history. It's more dramatic, albeit invisible, than the destruction of the world by the flood waters. Note that this new generation which now counters the crooked and perverse one commences upon hearing Peter's "word" or *logos* which is an imitation of the divine *Logos* himself. And so this excerpt began with the *rhema* of Peter (again, to refresh: that which has been uttered or any sound which has a precise meaning) and ends with his *logos* about the *Logos*.

### 18 May, Fifth Sunday of Easter

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor, and Timon and Parmenas and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. Acts 6.1-7*

"In those days" suggests a certain amount of time had elapsed between the event described here and the author who is reflecting back upon it. Actually this is one of the first conflicts the church had to confront right after Pentecost, so it's worth recording. Note that membership in the nascent church is designated by "disciples" (*mathetos*), a term we associate normally with the more immediate followers of Jesus ('apostle' or *apostolos* is used a bit later). It could reflect the author's attitude towards membership in general at this early stage, for everyone involved was in close contact with the original twelve and could, by extension, be called disciples. We find *mathetos* again as a "body" or *plethos* (usually translates as fulness) which could be a larger consultative group working in conjunction with the twelve. So very quickly an organizational structure was put in place to deal with real issues.

*Goggusmos* is the noun for the English verb "murmured" and is more guttural sounding, as though something were caught in one's throat while attempting to speak. It suggests that a person is attempting to communicate over this blockage, for both are mingled thereby producing a gargling sound.

The twelve disciples respond to the crisis at hand as one voice, no one in particular being singled out such as Peter. Being so close to the Pentecost experience with many people pressing in upon them to hear more about it, naturally the disciples were preoccupied and easily could be annoyed by other unrelated requests. They have just begun to formulate their message as the last two excerpts (Sundays) recount, and are doing it with a certain urgency. Initially their response ('It is not right') sounds a bit dismissive, even derogatory, because the quarrel over the "daily distribution" was not tied in directly with getting word out concerning Jesus and the Holy Spirit. As for this "distribution," it is more revealing than at first glance, intimating that part and parcel

of the newly formed church was care for people in need. *Diakonia* pertains to service in general and here seems to be related to giving food to widows. To show concern for such women is quite extraordinary since in ancient times they had to fend for themselves. Thus the Holy Spirit was still hovering around after Pentecost, if you will, and may be said to reveal himself in this *diakonia* just as much as in the disciples' preaching.

As for *diakonia*, it is used almost in the next breath, "the ministry of the word" or *logos*, *logos* being a reflection of Christ as *Logos*. And so the two forms of *diakonia* are established immediately and will develop over the centuries while remaining true to their original forms. That seems to be the reason or part of the reason for the church's early success: first the "*logos* of God increased" followed by the same with regard to the "number of the disciples." Those set aside for the *diakonia* as it pertains to the widows had the hands of the apostles laid upon them. This is a reflection of the Holy Spirit having just alighted upon the apostles, a memory so vivid to everyone involved. From now on it will be the way ministry in the church will be transmitted, a practice unbroken down to the present day.

The text concludes with special mention of priests, most likely those associated with the temple in Jerusalem. The noun *ochlos* is used which means a throng or crowd, suggestive of a massive amount of people. These men have been raised in Jewish liturgical rites and would put their expertise to good service of the new faith. The new priests are described not as giving allegiance to the church nor the disciples but as "obedient to the faith" which intimates that every person regardless of status and ministry was equal. Later after the calamitous fall of Jerusalem in the year seventy this "throng" of priests would contribute to establishing a sound liturgical basis, thereby enabling early Christianity to flourish apart from reliance upon the temple.

## 25 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

*Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city...Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*  
Acts 8.5-8, 14-17

This incident takes place shortly after Saul had Stephen stoned, thereby initiating the first real persecution of the new Christian community. In this light, Philip's going down to Samaria is prefaced by vs. 4, "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." From this statement you get the clear impression that despite the dispersal, the disciples and their associates continued to spread the Gospel undeterred by any obstacles, pretty much knowing this would happen. The pressing task at hand was to get out the *logos*...the word...as quickly and as broadly as possible. If Philip were not present at the stoning of Stephen, surely he must have heard about it, being one of the apostles. He as well as others may have been tempted to take Stephen's place...to become a martyr...but it was far too early in the church's history for her leaders to be sacrificed. That would come a bit later and on a larger scale.

The description of Philip in this unidentified Samaritan town is not unlike Jesus Christ, that is, signs and casting out of unclean spirits. The people are identified by the noun *ochlos* or "multitudes" which usually is a less than desirable term, but the idea is that despite the persecution begun in Jerusalem, Philip was protected by virtually the entire population of Samaria. Saul knew better to avoid that territory. Surely Philip made it a point to speak about this persecution, that quickly it could reach the people with whom he took refuge.

This success in Samaria reached the apostles who were in hiding back in Jerusalem and quickly sent Peter and John. Note the play on words: *apostolos* and *apostello* or “apostle” and “sent,” revealing the essence of the Christian community's mission from the very beginning. These two chief apostles must have consulted Philip as to his success, but despite all he had done in close imitation of Jesus Christ, one thing was lacking. And that was the gift of the Holy Spirit for which the two prayed. We don't have any description of what this prayer was like but certainly it was in common...either vocal or quiet or a combination of both. Being Jews, much of it must have been based upon the scriptures which they read (in Hebrew) and discussed. And so the atmosphere was not unlike Jews gathering in synagogue or in more modern terms, a yeshiva. It contrasts with Saul...later Paul...who was engaged in an all-out persecution of the Christians, “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” [9.1].

Already Peter and John as well as others realized that without this Spirit the message and story about Jesus somehow was lacking. It couldn't be sustained otherwise, especially with the prospect of persecution by Saul. Note the relation of the Holy Spirit vis-a-vis the apostles, that is to say, it had fallen upon them back in the upper room which is what they are looking for here or at least falling that example. This falling upon of the Spirit is required to fulfill the baptism Philip had introduced and is transmitted by the laying on of hands. In other words, quickly the disciples learned that this was the best way to imitate the Holy Spirit's action which became the model adapted by the church.

## 29 May, Ascension of the Lord

*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father which he said, "you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1.1-11*

Many times the Gospels present the disciples as completely clueless with regards to some of the more important words and deeds of Jesus as they are related to the fulfillment of scripture. Here the author intimates that this ignorance has been resolved. His focus now is upon those special forty days when Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, details of which are not recorded but over time become evident through the apostles' teaching. These were tantalizing but unknown discussions about the divine kingdom, but they pale in comparison to the “many proofs” Jesus offered that he had been resurrected. Not long after this Paul was converted. Although Paul hadn't been present, let alone an original follower of Christ, he received the same insights as the disciples and passed them over to the growing church for further reflection and development. Paul even had a greater breadth of knowledge than the twelve, minus John. So he is a fine witness to much of what had gone on during those forty days which he picked up and capitalized upon.

*Tekmar* is the noun for “proof” and applies to an end or purpose as well as being a pledge. So to convey a *tekmar* is not to stand in front of a blackboard and describe stuff but to sit down and engage in heated

discussions as customary among Jews in the synagogue and elsewhere. Concomitant with conveying this *tekmar*, if you will, is Jesus “staying with” them. The verb here is quite striking, *sunalizo* or literally to eat sat together. This intimate sharing of a meal, salt being essential to the preservation of food and hence we could say the dialogue and ensuing memory, is essential for the apostles’ formation at this very early stage.

With this in mind, the apostles could wait without anxiety as Jesus had bade them, that is *parameno* which means to remain beside, until the Father bestows upon them his “promise” or *epaggelia* which connotes a public proclamation or acknowledgment.

Just above it was noted that the disciples were slow to grasp scriptural references foreshadowing Jesus. Along this line Jesus now actively excites the minds of his disciples by tying in this *epaggelia* with an incident at the inauguration of his public career, namely, his baptism by John. And so he makes a bridge between that beginning and the present when he is about to ascend into heaven, the place from which the Holy Spirit had descended upon him at the Jordan River. In light of this, the question about restoring the kingdom to Israel sounds absurd, very much so after all that had happened, especially after Jesus’ death and resurrection. In other words, the disciples just didn’t get the message, a testament to human opaqueness. Clearly Jesus could not remain with them for long; he had to depart as quickly as possible though that sentiment isn’t stated but can be intimated. Right after his ascension Jesus would have to delegate further initiation into the hands of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus ascends immediately (and as quickly as possible) after that question posed by the apostles. We have no actual account of the expression on his face but with the just mentioned opaqueness in mind, was glad to be on his way back to the Father. Surely in the ensuing nine days Jesus had a lot to talk about with the Holy Spirit, of how to handle such incredible human thickness. The two men in white robes standing by the disciples are not identified. They too must have departed much like Jesus, glad to exit this world. Both say that Jesus will return as he departed. Given the just mentioned dullness of mind, the difficult of getting rid of it, ensures that Jesus’ return won’t be for a long time, a very long time. The Holy Spirit will have plenty of work to do until then.