

## Liturgical Reflections 2022

The following brief outline is lifted from the website of the Catholic bishops of the United States. This liturgical cycle is Year C which focuses upon the first reading. It is the sixteenth such document, the first extending back to the year 2007. Perhaps this time around the reflections will center around one verse or two instead of the entire passage. However, that's the intent and remains to be seen. I state this more or less as an indication of where the texts may lead.

Please note that over the years a number of documents were composed dealing with books from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, all done from the point of view of *lectio divina*. In some cases excerpts from these books are taken and inserted here, although they are modified to fit the existing format.

### Principal celebrations of the liturgical year 2022

First Sunday of Advent November 28, 2021

Christmas Day, December 25, 2021

Ash Wednesday March 2, 2022

Easter Sunday April 17, 2022

The Ascension of the Lord [Thursday] May 26, 2022

Pentecost Sunday June 5, 2022

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ June 19, 2022

First Sunday of Advent November 27, 2022

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### 28 November, First Sunday of Advent

*14) Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15) In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16) In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."*  
Jeremiah 33.14-16

*Hineh* or "behold" is a perfect word to start off the new liturgical year and has special application with regard to the expectant mode of Advent. It grabs your attention right off the bat and sustains it throughout the passage. If the Lord were not to have inserted *hineh* here as he does elsewhere in Jeremiah as well as other prophets, the people would go their merry way without having any regard for their present danger nor the Lord.

The passage at hand contains three references to days, the plural being used which suggests time in the more conventional sense though certainly it's influenced by time as a *kairos* event or time-as-occasion, something special or out of the ordinary. The first is associated more directly with *hineh* which sets the stage for manifestation of the other two. No specific time is given, just that the days are coming as back up by "says the Lord," the verb *na'am* fundamentally as to mutter or to murmur and more often associated with the Lord himself. As for the content, if you will, of this first set of days, it has a lot to do with the Lord fulfilling a promise he had made to both the house of Israel and Judah, "house" suggestive of a more domestic approach to the situation at hand. The verb is *qum* or to arise inferring continuous fulfilling, not something done once and that's it. It's object is *davar* which means word-as-event. If taken literally we'd have something like the Lord making this word to arise. As to the time frame of the *davar* at hand, most likely it refers to Dt 28.1-4.

The second set of days has "that time" or *heth* which is not unlike the above mentioned *kairos*. Note the hiphil of the verb *tsamach*, "I will cause." That is, it's indirect with the Lord slightly removed from the action as pertaining to a Branch described as righteous. It's difficult to articulate clearly why the Lord chose such an approach; only by reading the Hebrew does it make sense. *Tsemach* is the noun derived from the verb *tsamach* with *tsedaqah*, a noun: "Branch of righteousness." This is destined for (*l-*, to) David. The purpose of this Branch with David? To execute justice and righteousness, *mishpat* and *tsedaqah* in the land. That is to say, the second is a natural outflow of this Branch which goes by the same name.

The third set of days deals with Judah and Jerusalem being saved and dwelling in security, *yashah* and *shakan* operating as one and the same. As for the first verb, it's the root for the proper name Jesus. As for the second verb, it also means to lie down and is found with *betach*, the noun for trust.

The last words of this excerpt refer to "it" which seem to refer to both Judah and Jerusalem, perhaps suggestive of the temple. Here the third mention of *tsedaqah* or righteousness is with the first person plural, giving those attentive to this excerpt confidence in the Lord bringing about what he had said about the three sets of days.

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

*1) Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. 2) Put on the robe of the righteousness from God; put*

on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. 3) For God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. 4) For your name will for ever be called by God, "Peace of righteousness and glory of godliness." 5) Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height and look toward the east and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One rejoicing that God has remembered them. 6) For they went forth from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you carried in glory as on a royal throne. 7) For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up to make level ground so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. 8) The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. 9) For God will lead Israel with joy in the light of his glory with the mercy and righteousness that come from him. Baruch 5.1-9

This excerpt is the last chapter of Baruch and contains the following seven commands...not really as such...because of the joyful tone running throughout: take off, put on, put on, put on, arise, stand upon and look. When reading them in the spirit of *lectio divina*, keep in mind the various subtle uses of prepositions because they contribute mightily to the overall significance of this text. As for the verbs at hand, note that the first four have to do with putting on or putting off clothing:

-The first is *exduo*, also as stripping off or from (*ek-*) with regard to a *stole*, also as raiment of apparel which here consists of *penthos* and *kakois*, also as grief and ill-treatment, this word similar to *kakos*, the adjective for evil.

-The second is *enduo*, the same verbal root but prefaced with the preposition *en* or in and pertains to the beauty associated with glory coming from God. *Euprepeia* means a goodly appearance, *eu-* being the adverbial form of *agathos* (good) and refers to divine *doxa* or glory. Here *doxa* is specified as from God or more accurately and appealingly as beside God, *para* being the preposition.

-The third verb is *periballo*, literally to cast around with regard to literally a double robe or *diploida* as it pertains to righteousness, *para* being used again as from...beside...God.

-The fourth and final verb pertaining to clothing or in this instance, a diadem is *epitithemi*, literally to place upon, *epi*. As with the second case of *enduo*, it is associated with divine *doxa* or glory, more specifically as pertaining to the one who is Everlasting, *Aion* which also means a period of existence.

-The fifth verb at hand is in vs. 5, *anistemi* or arise with regard to Jerusalem.

-The sixth verb following right after *anistemi* is *histemi*, the verbal root of *anistemi* with regard to being upon the height.

-The seventh and final verb as a command from the Lord is *periblepo* or to look around (*peri*) and is directed eastward.

All seven verbs work toward achieving one end, the return of the Israelites who have been sent into exile. Jerusalem (mentioned in vs. 5) has been left desolate of her inhabitants and was undergoing an exile-in-place, if you could put it like that. Not unlike the well known passage from Isaiah, the Lord will make a highway: "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low" [Is 40.4]. Thus the ground in Baruch will be made level or *homalizo* for safe passage, the verb being *badizo* which implies going slowly and carefully, not in a rush which you'd think would be the case. Tied in with this necessary *badizo* is God leading Israel with joy, *hegeomai* suggestive of going before. Thus the care of *badizo* makes more sense in light of this verb.

## 8 December, Immaculate Conception

9) *But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"* 10) *And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."* 11) *He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"* 12) *The man said, "The woman whom gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."* 13) *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."* 14) *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.* 15) *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

Today is one of those major feast days of the Catholic Church that defy explanation. That makes it an easy target. However, the attitude reflected in such hostility stems from a lack of the contemplative element not just among Christians but in Western society as a whole. Today does represent a profound insight into the divine and human you don't explain but grasp by sudden insight. For example, you have to deal with sin, a favorite topic among Christians and grasp what it means from the get-go. That involves going back to its source, the Garden of Eden story so familiar to everyone.

The essence of that is human knowledge of good and evil, a sphere reserved for God. It sounds like a great type of knowledge to have, a temptation with which we can sympathize. However, a harder look at such knowledge isn't desirable. It implies a kind of busy-bodiness, of constantly discerning this from that. A person so engaged never is at rest. No small wonder that the man and woman hid themselves from the Lord while he was out for an evening stroll. The image itself is magnificent, very casual, but one where the man and woman made a big mistake. They took this casualness as an occasion when their desire for knowing good and evil would be revealed.

Okay, fast forward from then to the Virgin Mary or at the threshold of the Christian era. When you take a really hard look at what had happened, death logically is the only solution to abolish the busy-bodiness associated with knowledge of good and evil. Nothing else will suffice. The solution has to be total, and to look at it this way is fine but almost always preferring the negative because it's so obvious. However, this obviousness is designed as a first response, if you will. It's to be taken seriously but has a latent invitation for us to move beyond it into something new and positive.

So you come down to the concrete. That means the Immaculate Conception focuses upon one person and one person alone. Everyone knows the story, so no need to get sentimental over it. Taken literally, this person without sin...without being entwined with the busy-bodiness so well put as a consequence of knowing good and evil...at one time was walking around like the rest of us. No difference, really, except minus this constant preoccupation with good vs. evil. If you look at it this way, it's easy to appreciate how this individual, basically a pre-teen or teenage girl for all practical purposes ignorant and living a backwater existence, is not only under-appreciated but overlooked completely. Then again, she lived in a perfect environment. It was humble almost to the nth degree in so many ways. That means she had little occasion or let's say temptation to exercise knowledge of good and evil. It did exist in that context, of course, but was minimal in relation to the larger picture.

So when it came time for this girl to give birth to Jesus Christ and we take Jesus Christ as the Church presents him, God incarnate, it's easier to see how someone like Mary slides into the position of being his mother. Throughout what happened just prior to her pregnancy followed by the birth of Jesus and on to his death, we see this inability to judge between good and evil become more operative. We don't see it directly, of course, but mirrored in the essential hostility shown toward her son. So while Mary did suffer, in another way she was not really identified with this suffering.

## **12 December, Third Sunday of Advent**

*1) Woe to her that is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city! 2) She listens to no voice, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God...9) "Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord. 10) From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. 11) On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. 12) For I will*

*leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, 13) those who are left in Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall pasture and lie down, and none shall make them afraid."* Zephaniah 3.1-2, 9-13

The first two verses start off with *hoy* or “woe” with regard to the inhabitants of Jerusalem which essentially can be summed up by her not listening to no voice whatsoever, the preposition *b-* or “in” prefaced to *qol* making it all the more tragic. Following this lack of *shamah* are three other failures of a similar nature: the people accept no correction (*musar*, also as admonition), they don’t trust (*batach*, also to confide) in the Lord nor draws near to (*qarav*, also to approach, to admit) him.

The second part of this excerpt begins with *ky-’az* or “yet at that time,” ‘*az* also as “then” which signifies a positive transition from the willing deafness just delineated. That is to say, the Lord will turn (*haphak*, often in the sense of turning back) the speech or literally lips (*saphah*) of the peoples to being pure, *barar* which fundamentally means to separate, to choose. Note the plural, not singular, “peoples” or those which also are not Israelites. Once changed, they will be enabled to call on the Lord’s name, *qara’* with the preposition *b-* or “in” prefaced to *shem*, “in the name.” In addition to this *qara’* the peoples will serve (*havad* also means to be a slave) the Lord with one accord. This literally reads “with one shoulder” (*shekem*), implying that everyone will bear the burden of such *havad* equally.

In vs. 11 the Lord addresses directly those beyond the rivers of Ethiopia noted in vs. 10 which suggests the very limits of the known world or just beyond them. He begins with “on (*b-*) that day” or a special time or occasion (not unlike the Greek New Testament *kairos*) when those at the furthest point from Jerusalem will no longer be ashamed by their rebellion. In other words, the extreme distance applies not just to that between those beyond the rivers of Ethiopia and Jerusalem but the one between the people and the Lord.

As for these people considered to be at the ends of the earth or pretty close to it, the Lord will remove those who boast in themselves, *halaz* also to rejoice which is fine in itself but not when joined with *ga’avah* or arrogance, this noun also as ornament. What makes this worse is its presence in their midst, *qerev* being their very center. Such is the precondition for being on the Lord’s holy mountain, another way of saying to be in the temple at Jerusalem. Apparently those so far off had been there or if not, had knowledge of it’s existence.

Vs. 11 has *qerev* in the negative sense or where the people’s arrogance is located. The same word is used in vs. 12 with regard to a people humble and lowly, *hany* and *dal*. The former

connotes wretchedness and poverty whereas the latter, weakness or powerlessness. In other words, it's the same *qerev* but a different content.

Once the centrality of the people is take care of as signified by *qerev*, the people will be in a better position to seek refuge (*chasah*, also to flee) in the name of the Lord, *b-* as indicative of in-ness with regard to *shem* which ties in nicely with *qerev*.

This passage concludes with those left in Israel...those who hadn't gone in exile...as having as doing no wrong, not uttering lies nor having a deceitful tongue. Instead, they will both pasture and lie down, the latter being *ravats* applicable to quadrupedal animals which in the process of laying down gather their legs together beneath them. Thus *ravats* signifies a permanent settlement, one which won't be subject to disturbance.

### 19 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

*14) Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15) The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. 16) On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. 17) The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing 18) as on a day of festival. "I will remove disaster from you so that you will not bear reproach for it. 19) Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. Zephaniah 3.14-19*

This excerpt starts off with a bang, two exclamations with four spontaneous commands noted as follows:

-sing aloud: *ranan*, the sound of which echos its meaning, to give a ringing cry out loud which reverberates everywhere it's made

-shout: *ruah* which is similar to *ranan* by reason of its intensity, that is, to give a blast as on a horn, this often being used as in war

-rejoice: *samach* which connotes taking pleasure in, to be glad

-exult: *halaz* as in triumph after a battle

All four result from the Lord having removed any judgments (*sur* as to turn aside), he having accomplished this as in Israel's midst or *qerev*, her very center. Thus it's not unlike the removal by surgery of a cancer. Because this is such a momentous occasion in vs. 16 it's

designated as “that day” which is equivalent to a *kairos* event, a day different from all others.

A second time as in vs. 17 we have the Lord being in Israel’s midst or *qerev* which means she doesn’t have to move anywhere because she has all she needs and will ever want here and now. Again, the four spontaneous commands (they’re really not as such, more as an outflow of exuberance) represent awareness of this divine *qerev*.

*Qerev* has the following four effects, if you will. Each is identified with a give role respectively as warrior, with gladness, love and loud singing (*gibor*, *simchah*, *‘ahavah* and *rinah*):

- gives victory: *yashah* or to save, this being the verbal root for the proper name Jesus
- will rejoice over you: *sus* with the preposition *hal* or upon whose very sound connotes leaping
- will renew you: *charash* which fundamentally means to be silent
- will exult over you: *gyl* or to engage in a dance, usually as in a circle

Vs. 19 begins with *hineh* or behold, a way of getting one’s attention here with regard to “that time” or *heth* which is similar to the two examples of “that day” noted earlier. All three thus serve to make what’s being conveyed here as taking place right now, not in the future. The Lord will literally “place to praise to name” any shame resulting from oppression or physical ailments, the two nouns being prefaced with the preposition *l-* (to). This will be a kind of witness because the Lord will do it in all the earth

## **25 December, Nativity of the Lord**

*1) For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until her vindication goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a burning torch. 2) The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. 3) You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. 4) You shall no more be termed Forsaken and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. 5) For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62.1-5*

This excerpt is taken from the Vigil Mass.

Note the two verbs, keep silent and rest, *chashah* and *shaqat*, both of which the Lord will not do. The two are dependent upon the small word, “until” or *had*. That is to say, the Lord will remain as such until first vindication or *tsedaqah* goes forth (*yatsa*). This *yatsa* is accompanied by brightness or *nogah*, also as splendor which means it will be visible for miles around. The same applies equally to Jerusalem’s salvation or *yeshuhah*, this noun being closely related to the proper name Jesus. To the former belongs brightness or *nogah* while the latter isn’t explicitly mentioned as going forth but is a burning torch or *lapyd*.

Vs. 2 has another mention of *goy* and *tsedaqah* (nations and vindication) as in the previous verse with the addition of kings seeing (the common verb *yare*) Israel’s glory or *kavod* which fundamentally means heaviness. As for the new name (*shem*), no details are given which for now keeps both the nations and Israel in suspense. One thing, however, is certain, it will come directly from the Lord, his mouth, meaning he will be uttering it.

In vs. 3 the pair crown of beauty and royal diadem *hatarah* and *tsphyrah* are found together also in 28.5 only here both are located in God’s hand. The former will be in the hand of the Lord and the latter in the hand of the Lord. Actually they are the same but will slightly different emphasis.

Note the contrast between the two pairs in vs. 4: Forsaken and Desolate (*Hazuvah* and *Shemamah* versus My delight and Married, *Chephets* and (*Behulah*). This will apply to the ‘*erets* or land which infers the people as well as where they reside. As for this ‘*erets*, it will be married meaning it will not be desolate.

*Betulah* or virgin as in vs. 5 is equivalent to a bride, both as an image where God will rejoice over Israel, *sus* being the verb.

## **26 December, The Holy Family (Sunday)**

*1) Listen to me your father, O children; and act accordingly that you may be kept in safety. 2) For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. 3) Whoever honors his father atones for sins, 4) and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. 5) Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. 6) Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother; 7) he will serve his parents as his masters...12) O son, help your father in his old age and do not grieve him as long as he lives; 13) even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. 14) For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you; Sirach 3.1-7 & 12-14*

This excerpt contains essentially practical yet timeless advice when it comes to showing compassion and respect to one's parents. Given the society of the time, emphasis is placed upon the father as head of the household to whom his children are obliged to listen (*akouo*). Once they do this, they're obliged to follow through with appropriate actions, *poieo* being the verb. Both listening and doing really are geared for their own interest which consists in the safety of the children, the verb *sozo* (to save) being used.

This *akouo/poieo* rests upon a divine foundation because the Lord himself honors the father (*doxazo*, also to glorify). Not only that, he confirms the mother's authority over them, *stereo* fundamentally as to make firm or solid. And so the patriarchal system has divine authority to back it up, an unpopular view today.

Vs. 3 speaks of honoring and glorifying, the first as to one's father and the second as to one's mother, *timao* and *doxazo*, the latter as just above. Both resemble the act of laying up treasure, *apothesarizo* also suggestive of hoarding, so this is a kind of self-centered act for personal benefit. Furthermore, by honoring one's father, it will give a personal witness to one's own children, so all three will benefit (the son, his children and his father). Thus the patriarchy will remain in place, giving stability not just to the family at hand but to the larger community. Also the mother will benefit because she will be refreshed, *anapauo* also as to rest or to put to an end.

Vs. 13 sounds very contemporary in that it reflects taking care of one's father who in his old ages will lack understanding, *apoleipo* also as to leave behind. In other words, it sounds like someone taking care of an Alzheimer patient. And so this excerpt concludes on a positive note for the child caring for his father, that it will be credited for one's sins. The verb here is impressive in its length, *prosanoikodomeomai*, literally to be added for edification. Again, the building up of the family as well as the larger element of society is inferred. That is to say, we have the root for house (*oikos*) prefaced with two prepositions, *pros-* and *ana-*, the first suggestive of direction towards-which and the second as that which is above or upon.

## **1 January, Solemnity of the Virgin Mary**

22) *The Lord said to Moses,* 23) *"Say to Aaron and his sons, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,* 24) *'The Lord bless you and keep you: 25) The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you: 26) The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace'. 27) "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."* Numbers 6.22-27

Although this verse contains a widely popular and familiar blessing rather difficult to expand upon, it's appropriate for the first day of a new calendar year and should be thought of as such.

Vs. 22 has the second "The Lord *davar* to Moses" after the rather drawn-out ritual of making offerings and re-consecration of a Nazirite. From here to the end of Chapter Six it contains a blessing attributed to Aaron comprising of the following six elements. "You," of course, refers directly to the people of Israel:

- 1) bless or *barak*
- 2) keep or *shamar*
- 3) make shine or 'or. In the verse at hand it reads literally as "to ('el-) you."
- 4) be gracious or *chanan*
- 6) lift countenance or *nasa*.' Note the two references to face: the first is to shine and the second is to be lifted up after which comes peace.
- 6) give peace or literally, "will place to you peace" or *shalom*.

The concluding verse of this chapter contains a second blessing, if you will. Prior to that, the people are to put the Lord's name upon themselves which implies some kind of invocation. Then and only will the Lord give his blessing.

## 2 January, Epiphany

*1) Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 2) 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. 3) And nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. 4) 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. 5) 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. 6) 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*

The divine injunction to arise and shine (*qum* and 'or) fittingly comes after the misdeeds detailed in the previous chapter. The noun 'or or light is the same spelling as its verbal root. Such light is similar yet different from the Lord's glory or *kavod* which fundamentally connotes heaviness. The verb "has risen" or *zarach* pertains to the Lord, that his glory has happened already, and that the people are to respond by *qum* and 'or.

Behold or *hineh* beginning vs. 2 serves to contrast the light and arising of vs. 1 with darkness and thick darkness or *choshek* and *haraphel*. For the third, cf. Ex 20.21: “Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.” Both are to take place in the indefinite future compared with the past-ness of light in the previous verse. Also both are to cover the earth and peoples, *kasah*.

The conjunctive *v-* or “but” is important here, leading from a picture of gloom to the Lord who will arise (*zarach*) upon the people after which his glory or *kavod* (cf. vs. 1) will be visible upon the people. That is to say, those who are not of Israel will behold this sight.

*Goy* (cf 58.2) is the noun for nations in vs. 3 compared with *ham* in the previous verse for peoples, the former more intended to set off Israel from others. Also mentioned are kings or rulers of these *goy*.

Note the similarity yet difference with regard to light and brightness (*or* and *nogah*), the latter connoting splendor. *Nogah* is associated with *zerach* or rising and is the only use of this term in the Bible derived from *zarach* as in vs. 2 which connotes scattering or diffusion.

Vs. 4 is reminiscent of 49.18: “Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does.” *Nasa'* or lift up is not unlike to the instances of *qum* and *zarach* already mentioned though it is more active and has the sense of elevating, if you will. Such lifting up to see implies that the people had their eyes downcast, were too absorbed by their sins as recounted in Chapter Fifty-Nine. The scene for this can be on the walls of Jerusalem.

*Qavats* is the verb to gather and is applied specifically to sons and daughters of those within...not physically, but as part of the nation of Israel, those who have been taken captive and remained in exile. The arms carrying the daughters are not specified, that is, they could belong to those who had taken them captive and now are returning them, being captive in turn.

In vs. 4 the Lord bids the people to lift up their eyes and see whereas here they actually are seeing which makes the “radiant” or *nahar* (cf. 2.2), a verb which fundamentally means to flow as a river, etc. With that in mind, mention of the sea’s “abundance” (*hamon*: cf. 33.3 as ‘tumult’) as coming to the people makes sense as well as the “wealth” or *chayl* (cf. 10.14) of the nations.

In vs. 6 and several others following several places are mentioned starting with Midian and Ephah to the south, the latter being the only mention in Isaiah. Sheba is also to the south in Arabia. The gifts of gold and frankincense are not as important as these people coming (to Jerusalem's temple) for praising the Lord, this being the noun *tehilah*.

## 9 January, Baptism of the Lord

1) *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.* 2) *He will not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street;* 3) *a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.* 4) *He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.* 5) *Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:* 6) *"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,* 7) *to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."* Isaiah 42.1-7

Vss. 1-4 parallel Mt 12.18-21 which varies in certain places: "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud nor will any one hear his voice in the streets; he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick till he brings justice to victory; and in his name will the Gentiles hope." As for the previous chapter, it's set against the background of victories by King Cyrus of Persia whom the Lord has chosen (cf. 44.28). Perhaps those whom the Lord addressed there eventually came around to consider the servant (this being the first of four servant songs) as he. The Lord introduces this *heved* (fundamentally as a slave) with the expected *hineh* or behold without giving his name which makes him all the more mysterious and perhaps confused with Cyrus.

The Lord both upholds and delights in his *heved*, *tamak* and *ratsah*. With regard to the latter, the Lord specifically mentions his soul or *nephesh*, that is, his inmost being. *Ruach* or spirit (fundamentally as breath) is the direct result of this taking delight and has a special purpose, namely, justice or *mishpat* not just for Israel but for all nations. The verb *yatsa'* occurs last in 28.29 where it's suggestive of issuing forth, not just simply bestowing. In other words, it is a fitting verb to show the relationship between *ruach* and *mishpat* as a flowing-forth.

The words of vs. 2 and what follows with regard to the unnamed *heved* are not what anyone would expect. Compare with the personification of wisdom in Prov 9.14-16: “She sits at the door of her house, she takes a seat on the high places of the town, calling to those who pass by...Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!” Note that wisdom does not leave her house but bids passers-by to turn in which parallels the *heved* in his activity.

The two examples in vs. 3 of dying or near death with regard to a bruised reed and wick echo strongly among the people listening here, especially in light of the meekness of the servant presented at the outset of this new chapter. In this verse we have the second time the Lord is mentioned as bringing forth justice (*yatsa’* and *mishpat* as in vs. 1) but with the added feature of doing it faithfully or *‘emeth*, literally “to (*l-*) justice.”

*Kahah* and *ratsats* or (not) fail and be discouraged as in vs. 4 where the former suggests being feeble as well as dim. The latter suggests being oppressed and is found last in 36.6 but not noted there. Both will not stop in the Lord’s way to establish (*sum*, to place or set up) justice or *mishpat* as in vs. 3.

Vs. 4 has the first reference to coastlands since 41.1, the place to which the Israelites had fled before the advance of King Cyrus. Now that that crisis is over, people there are waiting for the Lord’s law or *torah*, the verb being *yachal* which connotes trust and found next in 51.5, a similar context though the verb is different: “the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.”

After having spoken of his servant, in vs. 5 the Lord turns attention to himself as indicated by *koah-* or thus which is relative to four powers belonging to him alone: “created, stretched, spread forth and gives breath.” The first or *bara’* hearkens back to the first act in Genesis. The second or *natah* is similar to 40.22. The third or *raqah* (cf. 40.19) is the verbal root for firmament, *raqyah* as in Gen 1.6. The fourth or *neshamah* (cf. 30.33) intimates the mortality of a living creature compared with the more spiritual nature of *ruach* or spirit.

After the brief introduction of the previous verse where the Lord refreshes the memory of his people as to his role in their lives, in vs. 6 he says simply, *‘any YHWH* or “I am the Lord. Such words should suffice to get and keep anyone’s attention. This verse consists of three five parts which, of course, are connected: righteousness, taken, kept, covenant and light or *tsedeq*, *chazaq*, *natsar*, covenant (*beryth* and *‘or*.

Vs. 7 continues with three more actions after the five of the previous verse with a distinction between those in a dungeon and in darkness, *masger* and *beyth kele’* which

literally reads “house of detention.” The latter is more confining in that it is associated with darkness, *choshek*.

## 16 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

*1) For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until her vindication goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a burning torch. 2) The nations shall see your vindication and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. 3) You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. 4) You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. 5) For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*  
Isaiah 62.1-5

In the first verse note the two verbs, keep silent *chashah* and rest or *shaqat*, both of which the Lord will not do, they being indicative of him being concerned. It seems that what follows must take place from Jerusalem’s own efforts, not his, this being the more precise reason for the Lord not keeping silent nor taking rest. Both are dependent upon the small word “until” or *had*. That is to say, until first her vindication or *tsedaqah* (fundamentally as righteousness) goes forth (*yatsa’*) followed by salvation or *yeshuah*, this noun being derived from the same verbal root of the proper name Jesus. To the former belongs brightness or *nogah* while the latter isn’t explicitly mentioned as going forth but is a burning torch or *lapyd*. “On that day I will make the clans of Judah...like a flaming torch among sheaves” [Zech 12.6].

Vs. 2 mentions *goy* and *tsedaqah* with the addition of kings seeing (the common verb *yare’*) Israel’s glory” or *kavod* which connotes heaviness or weightiness. *Goy* generally applies to all nations as distinction from Israel. Both are to be witnesses, if you will, and eventual participants. As for this new name (*shem*), no details are given which for now keeps both the nations and Israel in suspense as to what the Lord intends.

In vs. 3 the pair crown of beauty and royal diadem (*hatarah* and *tsphyrah*) are found together in 28.5 only here both are located in God’s hand. It is within this hand which is representative of divine power and majesty that Jerusalem will abide.

In vs. 4 note the contrast between the two pairs: Forsaken (*Hazuvah*; cf. 6.12) and Desolate (*Shemamah*; cf. 49.19) vs. My delight (*Chephets*; cf. 58.13) and Married (*Behulah*). *Behulah* derives from the verb *bahal* or to be master or someone in charge.

*Betulah* or virgin in vs. 5 is mentioned last in 37.22 and here is equivalent to a bride, both as an image where God will rejoice over Israel, *sus* being the verb. Note that not Jerusalem but her sons will be getting married.

### **23 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*1) And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. 2) And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3) And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4) And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Ma-aseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Misha-el, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5) And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. 6) And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. 7) Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Ma-aseiah, Kelita, Azari'ah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law while the people remained in their places. 8) And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. 9) And Nehemiah, who was the governor and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. 10) Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8.1-10*

This is a fairly long excerpt made longer by reason of two verses which contain many unfamiliar names. I was going to omit them but decided to let them be, mostly because they're assistants to Ezra. Besides, the names make the text more personal not only for Ezra but for the people.

In the **RSV** there's part of the last verse of the previous chapter giving the sate (seventh month) which acts as a kind of preface to the excerpt at hand, so might as well as keep that in mind. Vs. 1 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as "and" which makes more sense

with this date in mind. All the people or all the Israelites gathered as one man, *‘asaph* being the verb also as to assemble. The text doesn't say how this came about nor is there need to. Addition of phrase “as one man” isn't casual but suggests that given the circumstance—the reading of the book of the law or *Torah*—each person knew this instinctively, dropped everything wherever they were and simply were present. In other words, they didn't come in the conventional sense of gathering as by a decree or the like. If there's nothing else to take away apart from this, that's enough.

As soon as the people...the one man of Israel, if you will...assembled in the square, the next step followed automatically. They were primed to hear the *Torah* which is identified with Moses and having been given by the Lord to Israel. Thus the Lord, *Torah*, Moses, the people, the two sets of names that are mentioned and Ezra the scribe are that one man. Such a unity could never happen outside a religious occasion as the one at hand and therefore is unique.

In vs. 2 Ezra is identified as a priest in addition to being a scribe according to the previous verse. Without hesitation (again mirroring the oneness at hand) he brings the *Torah* before the assembly. Now it's designated according to its proper name, a *qahal* which has a definite religious identity, one that's naturally associated with the Israelites. As for all present, they are ones who were able to hear with understanding, *shamah* and *byn*, the latter connoting the ability to distinguish as well as to separate. And that ability depends directly upon the quality of *shamah* which is possible only if a *qahal* is present. Other than that, forget about it.

The time of this reading—*qara'* also means to call out which is appropriate given the size of the *qalah*—is from early morning (literally 'light') until midday. That meant the people had to rise well before dawn and assemble. There they stood listening without interruption until the hottest time of day when at last they broke off. vs. 3 says that everyone was attentive to the book of the *Torah*, *byn* again being used. Although the time span is long and includes children, not one person moved. The ears of each one was glued through *shamah* to the *Torah*, not in a forced sort of way but in an attentive one which is why *byn* is used. Thus despite the long time involved, it passed in an instant.

The *qara'* or calling out by Ezra during this time was uninterrupted. Because it's *Torah* that is being read, he experienced no weariness of body nor of voice but kept on going in a clear, constant manner. The same applied to everyone else present with regard to their *shamah*. Each person had an instinctive feel for *Torah*, so no need for anything dramatic. That's the reason why the previous verse has the words “the ears of all the people were attentive” or were engaged in their *byn*.

Ezra isn't standing alone on the platform but is accompanied by two groups of men. The first consists of thirteen in vs. 4 whose names are given but not identified. The second is in vs. 7. We can assume they or some of them might be fellow scribes and/or priests. Their very presence was a way of encouraging Ezra to continue his reading in an uninterrupted fashion.

Vs. 5 adds to the drama of the situation at hand. Ezra doesn't simply start reading at will but first opened the book of *Torah* literally "to the eyes" of all the people or to the *qahal* before him. This opening made everyone stand. Although it was still very early and quite dark, there was no need to have natural light. Everyone was primed by reason of being that one man to hear *Torah*.

Vs. 6 says that Ezra blessed (*barak*) the Lord before reading which evoked a double Amen or assent from the *qahal* consisting of bowing with the faces touching the ground. At this point we have mention of thirteen other associates along with Levites. They seemed to be interspersed among the people reading to help them understand (*byn* yet again) *Torah*. Note that the text says the people stayed in their place while this was going on. Chances are Ezra read some verses from the *Torah*, stopped at predetermined intervals which his associates knew beforehand so the *byn* could be carried out more efficiently. If we have Ezra reading and this *byn* taking place from early morn through midday, most likely not that much material was covered. It was more a collective practice of *lectio divina*.

Note that Ezra didn't read all the designated time. Vs. 8 says that the associates assisted in this *byn* of *Torah* by reading clearly or literally interpreting it, *parash* being the verb, literally to spread out or to break into pieces. In this way they imparted clarity or gave sense to the *Torah*, *sekel* being a noun meaning intelligence and understanding which ties in nicely here with the *byn* going on.

So instead of a confused picture of Ezra, his many associates and the people all interacting or alternating between reading *Torah* and coming to grips with an understanding of it, the unity with which this excerpt opened or "all the people gathered as one man" pervades the entire event.

### **30 January, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

4) *Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 5) "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations"...17) But you, gird up your loins; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them lest I dismay you before them. 18) And I,*

*behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests and the people of the land. 19) They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you. Jeremiah 1.4-5 & 17-19*

This book opens prophetically and significantly with the noun *davar* or word-as-expression which will play an important role throughout the ensuing fifty-two chapters. Here the plural form belongs to Jeremiah who is author of all that follows, but *davar*, of course, has its roots in the Lord. His background is described briefly as coming from a priestly class; other than that no further information is provided. For a prophet—and this would hold true if we could walk right up and ask him—any background or personal information is purely irrelevant. Like all those who came before, his attention is fixed wholly upon the Lord and what’s required of him. This makes Jeremiah more or less oblivious to earthly concerns, one reason why people—especially those in authority—tend to loathe him. In fact, the Lord warns him about this straightaway just as he had done with the other prophets.

Together with vs. 1, vs. 2 forms one sentence and is significant insofar as the *davar* of the Lord came to Jeremiah. If it weren’t for this singular divine *davar*, the prophet’s own *davar* which is plural would be of no value. The next two verses are careful to mention three kings of Judah which incarnates what the Lord wishes to *davar*. First in line is Josiah, thirteen years into his reign, a significant amount of time, and an auspicious moment for Jeremiah to get his career off the ground. As for this king, “he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” and most importantly of all, “walked in all the way of David his Father, and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” [2Kg 22.2]. For all Israel’s kings David is something like the gold standard by whom they are measured.

The second king is Jehoiakim, quite another story, who like many of his predecessors “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his fathers had done” [2Kg 24.9]. He set the stage, if you will, for King Nebuchadnezzar to lay siege to Jerusalem. However, Second Kings concludes on an upbeat note, that is, Jehoiakim was treated royally by his captives. Despite any hesitations as to his character, one has to overlook an individual case, for it turned out to forebode well for the Israelite captives. If he’s treated well in captivity, the same might apply to his people.

Finally we have Zedekiah who like Jehoiakim, “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” [2Kg 24.19]. His actions again provoked King Nebuchadnezzar who not only besieged Jerusalem but took him and the survivors captive. However, the Babylonians slew his sons and then blinded him, leaving him to linger on with bitter memories at the very last thing he saw.

Against this eventful background vs. 4 has Jeremiah speaking about the *davar* of the Lord coming to him. It begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “now” and serves to show the connection between two events. How and under what circumstances the *davar* came to him aren’t given. Still, Jeremiah had to be disposed to receive it which means he had a readiness to listen. As for the context, Israel was going through considerable political upheaval, especially the undoing of what King Josiah had accomplished, which must have shaken Jeremiah considerably. On the other hand, it was a perfect time for this divine *davar* to kick into action and define his mission.

Vss. 17-19

Vs. 17 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “but” with the Lord telling Jeremiah what to do in light of the disaster at hand. The enemy encamped outside city walls won’t as yet breach the walls but is on the verge of doing so. Girding up his loins is equivalent to tightening one’s belt for intense action ahead, this followed by *qum* or arise which implies suddenness or springing into action. “Arise and save us” [2.27]!

Once so prepared, Jeremiah is to *davar* all that the Lord had said to him. Then he gives a warning, a threat of sorts...not to be dismayed by whatever the people throw at him, the verb being *chatat* fundamentally as to be broken down with fear. “Learn not the way of the nations nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens” [10.2]. If Jeremiah succumbs to this *chatat*, the Lord with *chatat* him in return.

In response to the hostile forces which will take up their position outside Jerusalem and other towns, the Lord will fortify Jeremiah not so much against them but against Israel, implying that this will happen before the invasion. So to his own people it seems that the prophet is on the enemy’s side. That is to say, Jeremiah will become both a fortified city, iron pillar and bronze wall:

- 1) *Mivtsar* is a noun also as stronghold. “Assemble and let us go into the fortified cities [4.5]!
- 2) *Hamud* or pillar. “For thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars” [27.19].
- 3) *Chomah* or wall. “And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze” [15.20].

All three are to be done against the entire land, officials and priests. In sum, every inhabitant of Israel is included, a task no one could undertake unless with divine assistance...and a lot of it. Even though Jeremiah’s own people will fight against him, the Lord will step in and do it for him, *lacham*. “They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you” [15.20]. In addition to the Lord doing the heavy lifting, he will save

Jeremiah, *natsal* meaning to snatch as in vs. 7. And so Jeremiah faced a threat on two fronts: an enemy from without and one from within, the latter which will prove to be the more treacherous.

Thus the opening chapter has the call of Jeremiah to be a prophet followed by an impending invasion from the north which results from Israel's apostasy. The real battle is not against them—for they are divine agents, if you will—but against Israel. And so Jeremiah is left with the prospect of being an army of one man against his own people. Nothing is said of how he feels about all this which is secondary to the story, but certainly we are left wondering.

### **6 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*1) In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. 2) Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3) And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4) And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5) And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" 6) Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7) And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." 8) And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah 6.1-8*

At the very beginning of his prophecy Isaiah mentions King Uzziah who had reigned for fifty-two years. So between that opening verse until now Isaiah was unfolding the content of his *chazon* or vision. Now he shifts gears, if you will, speaking of his own divine commission. Chances are that if Isaiah hadn't decided to take this wise approach the people would have killed him on the spot for what he had presented to them thus far. Although Isaiah clearly speaks here of his *chazon*, this word is found one other time, 29.7, "a vision of the night." You'd think it would occur frequently but then again, the entire book of Isaiah may be taken as a *chazon*.

What Isaiah saw (the common verb *ra'ah*) takes place in the Jerusalem temple though that location isn't specified. Apparently he is there all alone because nothing is said of other people being present to witness the dramatic contents of Chapter Six. Despite the Lord being way up on a throne within the temple ('high and lifted up' or *rum* and *nasa'*), the rest of the building was filled with his train or *shul* which also means the hem of a garment.

The image is rather unusual, either a garment or its hem filling the temple. If the latter is taken, we can say that Isaiah got lost in the folds of this garment. “Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe (i.e., the priestly ephod) with gold bells between them” [Ex 29.32].

Although the Lord is upon this throne which is both high and lifted up, the seraphim were above him, *mimahal* also suggestive of being upon. Certainly the temple was full...bursting at the seams...allowing no one to enter. The next reference to seraphim (*saraph*) is vs. 6 and is derived from a verbal root meaning to burn, to consume. *Saraph* also applies to the fiery serpents which afflicted the Israelites in the Sinai desert. “The Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died” [Num 21.6]. In order to cure them, Moses fashioned a bronze seraph and mounted it on a pole. Those who looked at it were cured. With this in mind, we could say that the seraphim above the Lord were of this bronze color. Nothing is said as to the number of seraphim present above the Lord although Isaiah could make out clearly that each had three pairs of wings, two of which to cover himself and one to fly. Presumably the first two pairs were kept in their place out of fear and reverence even though while flying.

*Qara'* is the common verb for called in vs. 3 which must have been quite noisy because the temple was filled with a large number of seraphim. As noted in vs. 1, all were above the Lord meaning that they were doing this not in his sight. *Qadosh* or holy is the familiar cry uttered three times which means one seraph spoke first followed by another and so on, echoing back and forth. There must have been pauses between each set as represented by the noun *selah* used often in the Psalter, a kind of pause or break with liturgical connotations as when singing the Psalms. Most likely the seraphim observed a *selah* of sorts in order to maintain a rhythmic balance to their recitation. As for the glory or *kavod* which fills the earth certainly is present, although the harsh words of last two chapters applies to those who were blind to it.

Note the singular of the seraph of the one who called, perhaps the leader of this chorus, if you will, who began the threefold call of *qadosh*. His voice was louder than all the others, causing the temple's foundations to shake, the noun being '*amah* which commonly refers to a unit of measurement, that is, a cubit. It occurs frequently throughout Ezekiel with regard to the temple's measurements. In the verse at hand, '*amah* is joined with *saph* or threshold which also means a basin. Such a basin was part of the first Passover which must have come to Isaiah while he was in the temple. Those outside heard the commotion and saw the smoke but nothing else, perhaps recalling how the Lord appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai. As for the temple, it's called house (*bayth*) which is filled with smoke, the incident hearkening back to 4.5: “a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night.”

'Oy or woe in vs. 6 is similar to *hoy* of 5.18 and several subsequent verses, here coupled with the preposition *l-* or literally, "woe to me." Isaiah speaks like this despite having been privy to that *chazon* or vision with which this book begins. Despite knowing the Lord's dismay over the people's behavior, this verse reveals that for the first time Isaiah actually beholds the Lord.

*Damah* is the verb for lost which fundamentally means to be reduced to silence as well as come to an end. As soon as Isaiah utters these words he adds that his lips are unclean or *tame*,<sup>9</sup> (the verb has the same transliteration) which often relates to the nature of sacrifice and is found abundantly in the Book of Leviticus. Isaiah refers to his lips implying that he is unclean when speaking about his experience. Although not mentioned explicitly, it would be no surprise if Isaiah also considered his sight as unclean, that is, with regard to his *chazon*. If that weren't bad enough, he laments that he is living not just with people of the same unclean lips but in their very midst or *betok*. And so Isaiah claims that he has seen the Lord with the seraphim in attendance. However, he hadn't aligned this seeing (again, the common verb *ra'ah*) with his *chazon* or vision which belonged to another order of seeing.

As noted in vs. 2, the seraphim were stationed above the Lord who was enjoying this triple *qadosh*. Then on his own, we have in vs. 6 a seraph which flew down—dove down, if you will—to Isaiah with lightning speed. But before approaching Isaiah, the seraph went over to the altar to take a burning coal or *ritspah*, the only use of this noun in the Bible. It is closely related to *retseph*, a stone on a hearth on which food was baked. A sacrifice must have taken place or was being prepared in the temple for this coal to be ignited. Presumably no one was in the temple except Isaiah, but anyone outside who might have heard the approach of the seraphim vacated the area as quickly as possible, knowing that something was about to transpire.

The verb for touched in vs. 7 is *nagah* which also means to draw near or to approach. In the verse at hand, *nagah* is used with the preposition *hal* which reads literally, "upon my mouth," the same as with "upon your lips." The two verbs *sur* and *kaphar* are similar in this context. The former as taken away and the latter intimates making atonement, the two with respect to guilt and sin respectively.

As soon as the Lord begins to speak, the triple *qadosh* falls silent immediately. Of course, the Lord was fully aware that the seraph had approached Isaiah and by his divine authority, removed his guilt and sin without burning him with the coal from the altar. Then in vs. 8 the Lord ask rhetorically, "Whom shall I send (etc.)?" Without hesitation Isaiah steps forward even though he doesn't know where he will go nor what he is to do. However,

he had a clue about it from the *chazon* which began back in Chapter One, not an enviable mission.

### 13 February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*5) Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from the Lord. 6) He is like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. 7) "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. 8) He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." Jeremiah 17.5-9*

Vs. 5 begins with “Thus says the Lord” and runs through vs. 8, the previous verses being in prose form. The prose form resumes with vs. 19 and runs to the end of the chapter. A footnote in the **RSV** says that vss. 5-8 “probably are the source of Ps 1.” in light of this, that psalm is included for comparison:

- 1) Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked  
nor stands in the way of sinners  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
- 2) but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- 3) He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.
- 4) The wicked are not so  
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.
- 5) Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
- 6) for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Instead of Psalm One beginning with “Blessed is the man” we have in vs. 5 “cursed is the man,” *‘arar*. The reason for such a condemnation is that Judah puts her trust in human strength signified by “arm,” a sure-fire way to make one’s heart (*lev*) turn away or *sur*. Vs.

6 likens a man to a desert shrub in place of a tree by streams of water, for he can't see any good (*tov*). "Salt land" or *'erets* (cf. 16.17) is the opposite of land normally perceived as the place where Israel dwells.

Vs. 7 makes a transition from this bleak picture and is more in line with Psalm One by calling a man blessed or *barak*; however, the psalm uses *'ashry* (happy) instead. Such blessedness rests in trusting (*batach*) the Lord. Continuing into vs. 8, this man is likened to a tree planted (*shatal*) by water which shields him from a drought. *Da'ag* is the verb to be anxious as well as fearful. *Shatal* is the verb for planted. The imagery is reminiscent of Rev 22.1-2: "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit."

## 20 February, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

*2) So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph...7) So David and Abishai went to the army by night; and there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him. 8) Then said Abishai to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day; now therefore let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice." 9) But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?"...12) So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head; and they went away. No man saw it or knew it nor did any awake; for they were all asleep because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them. 13) Then David went over to the other side and stood afar off on the top of the mountain with a great space between them;...22) And David made answer, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and fetch it. 23) The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed." First Samuel 26.2, 7-9, 12-13 & 22-23*

The excerpt for this Sunday is a bit chopped up according to the way it's presented in the lectionary. Anyway, it's presented as such. Because of this, what follows is lifted directly from **Expansions on First Samuel** also posted on this homepage.

Vs. 2: So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.

Saul took the Ziphites at their word, for this verse begins with yet another instance of *qum* (cf. 25.42) as indicative of taking action. In this instance, the *qum* of Saul must have been painful and wearisome, again on the hunt for David. Now Saul takes a more substantial force of chosen men, that is, men whom he could rely upon and not desert to David's side. In the meanwhile Saul certainly heard of Nabal's fate and wondered if the same might be in store for him.

Vs. 7: So David and Abishai went to the army by night; and there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him.

When David saw Saul's spear nearby surely he was reminded of the two times Saul had tried to kill him, perhaps that very weapon. To slay Saul with that spear would have been sweet revenge for David, but he refused. At the same time he couldn't help but gaze at Saul's entire army helpless before him.

Vs. 8: Then said Abishai to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day; now therefore let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice."

*Sagar* is the verb for given into (your) hand noted last in 23.20 as surrender. Abishai couldn't resist slaying Saul with the very spear he had attempted to slay David. Although in the next verse David doesn't concur, surely he was tempted to allow Abishai to do this.

Vs. 9: But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?"

*Shachat* translates as destroy noted last in 14.32, a powerful verb meaning to annihilate and connotes acting wickedly. David reminds Abishai that Saul is the anointed of the Lord or *mashyach* as he had done in another incident in 24.6.

*Naqah* means be guiltless as well as to be pure or innocent. "Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression" [Ps 19.13].

Earlier Samuel had anointed David so he was naturally cautious of causing harm to Saul. If he allowed Abishai to kill Saul, what could prevent him or someone else to kill David on some later occasion?

Vs. 12: So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head; and they went away. No man saw it or knew it nor did any awake; for they were all asleep because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them.

*Tardemah* is the noun for deep sleep, the same noun used when the Lord took a rib from Adam's side to fashion a woman. "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man" [Gen 2.21]. In the verse at hand, *naphal* is the verb for had fallen which adds to the profound nature of this sleep, as though being unconscious.

Vs. 13: Then David went over to the other side and stood afar off on the top of the mountain with a great space between them;

Because of the *tardemah* or deep sleep the Lord made to fall upon Saul and his troops David could make his way at a leisurely pace to the mountain. Before he cried out from this safe distance he must have taken in the sight of an entire army encamped with the intent of coming after him, the campfires flickering in the darkness.

Vs. 22: And David made answer, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and fetch it.

David used Saul's spear, perhaps the very one he attempted to kill David on two occasions, as a taunt which must have embarrassed Saul exceedingly. At the same time Saul was relieved that the distance between them both was too great for David to cast it at him.

Vs. 23: The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed.

The verb *shuv* means rewards and more usually refers to turning back as noted last in 15.11. In the verse at hand it refers to a person's righteousness and faithfulness or *tsadaqah* (cf. 12.7) and *'emunah* (the only occurrence in First Samuel). "A God of truth without iniquity" [Dt 32.4].

The two verbs *shalach* and *bo'* (cf. 24.19 and 25.26) are rendered literally as "I will (not) go to send" with reference to David's hand against (*b-*, in) the anointed (*mashyach*, cf. vs. 9). After all, David was *mashyach* by Samuel but thus far known to a few people such as his family.

**27 February, Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

4) *When a sieve is shaken, the refuse remains; so a man's filth remains in his thoughts.*  
5) *The kiln tests the potter's vessels; so the test of a man is in his reasoning.* 6) *The fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree; so the expression of a thought discloses the cultivation of a man's mind.* 7) *Do not praise a man before you hear him reason, for this is the test of men.* Sirach 27.4-7

This verse opens with a very concrete, even striking image, comparing our thoughts with refuse left in a sieve, *kopria* = *logismos* which connotes the act of thinking, of reckoning. What makes it even more vivid is the verb *diameno*, literally as to remain through (*dia-*). That is to say, such *kopria* doesn't just sit at the bottom of a sieve as our thoughts do in our minds (which is bad enough). Instead, they worm their way into them, thereby effecting a thorough corruption.

In both vss. 5 and 6 note what can be designated as the axis "so-so" (*kai* and *hotos* or and thus). It rests upon the image of a kiln or *kaminos* more for smelting metal which means it burns hotter than a conventional oven, fit as implied here for firing vessels made by a potter. The conjunctive *kai* as the first "so" associates this image with *peirasmos* or test (also as temptation). Within this *peirasmos* as within a *kaminos* is fired, if you will, human reasoning, *dialogismos*. This, of course, parallels the above mentioned *logismos* prefaced with the preposition *dia-* or through as in the verb *diameno*.

The second axis or second "so," if you will, equates fruit of a tree with the expression of a thought. The text reads literally as "the utterance of a piece of reasoning (or argument) in the heart of man." *Logos* or utterance is more word as expression which serves to disclose *enthumema*, meaning, sense. It consists of the preposition *en-* or in prefaced to *thumos*, intense expression coming from within. As far as its location, it's the heart or *kardia* of a person.

This short excerpt concludes with a second mention of *peirasmos* or test. One gets the measure of a man by the way he reasons, *logismos* being representative of what's inside him. Only then is it possible to either praise or condemn him, the former being mentioned which is *epaineo*, literally to praise upon, the preposition *epi-* indicative of a more focused expression of such praise.

## 2 March, Ash Wednesday

12) "Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning; 13) and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in

*steadfast love and repents of evil. 14) Who knows whether he will not turn and repent and leave a blessing behind him, a cereal offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? 15) Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; 16) gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. 17) Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, "Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, `Where is their God?'" 18) Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. Joel 2.12-18*

Right after such dramatic words in vs. 12 the Lord virtually begs his people to return (*shuv*), mentioning this a second time in the same verse. As for the first, it's to be done "even now" (*gam-hatah* or 'also now'). I.e., he wishes this to happen immediately as well as to continue, keeping in mind the four uses of the preposition *b-* or "in:" heart (*lev*), fasting, weeping and mourning. Practically speaking, the heart contains the other three. Thrown in for good measure is tearing this heart, not one's garments. As for the second *shuv*, without further ado the Lord mentions (actually boasts) that he is gracious and merciful, *chanun* and *rachum*, the two verbal roots being *chanan* and *racham*. The first means to be inclined favorably and the second implies that which comes from deep within, the intestines.

The first words of this verse provide a great way to begin the Lenten season, "yet even now" or *gan-hatah*, literally "also now." What makes it even better is that such words come directly from the Lord. It is associated with a return or *shuv* to the Lord, not just simply as such but one with (*b-*, literally 'in') the heart, fasting, weeping and mourning. As for the former (heart, *lev*), the Lord bids his people to rend them instead of their garments, *qarah* also as to cut or to tear.

In the same verse (13) the Lord claims the following three for added good measure:

- Slow to anger: *'erek 'pym* which connotes a stretching out of time before divine anger is manifested.

- Abounding in mercy: *rav-chesed*: great *chesed* which is equivalent to the NT *agape*.

- Repents of evil: *nacham*, literally "on (*hal*) evil" or *rahah*.

Vs. 14 is put forth as a kind of open-ended question, "Who knows" (*yadah*)? The way this sets up the verse suggests a person may or may not turn, repent and leave a blessing (*shuv*, *nacham* and *berakah*). Most likely the blessing will be in the form of a cereal and drink offering.

Vs. 15 resembles the first verse of Chapter Two with regard to blowing the trumpet as well as 1.14 but adds the sanctification of a fast, the verb *qadash* or its setting apart. It adds or repeats solemn assembly, gathering people, sanctifying the congregation, assembling elders, gathering children, nursing infants and bridegroom with his bride. In other words, there are no exceptions regardless of age or status.

Although a specific place for this assembly of the entire nation of Israel isn't given, vs. 17 speaks indirectly of the temple at Jerusalem. The specific place is between the vestibule and altar, *'ulam* also as a porch before the temple where the priests are to weep. There they are to ask the Lord to spare his people, *chus* as to have compassion literally "on (*hal-*) your people." Also they are to beg the Lord not to make Israel a reproach and byword, *cherpah* and *mashal* (also as scorn and proverb or song). The preposition *b-* or "in" is used, literally as "in the nations." The same *b-* is used with regard to "peoples" in the rhetorical question concluding this verse, that is, asking where is Israel's God.

Vs. 18 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as "then" to show that the Lord responded at once to Israel's heart-felt plea. Despite the multitude, such divine mercy filters down to the people instantaneously. The Lord decided to take the best approach possible, that is, to manifest jealousy and to have pity, *qana'* and *chamal* (also to envy and to be mild or gentle). To the first belongs the preposition *l-* prefaced to *'erets* ('to the land,' cf. ch 1) and *hal-* prefaced to *ham* ('on his people').

Once the Lord has accomplished what he proposed in vs. 18, in the next verse he responded by sending grain, wine and oil to satisfy his people, their stomachs being the best way to get their attention. Once this most basic of needs is taken care of, he promises never to make Israel a reproach or *cherpah* literally "in (*b-*) the nations." As for these nations, he continues to say that he will remove the northerner literally "from upon" (*min* and *hal* combined) you.

## **6 March, First Sunday of Lent**

*4) Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. 5) And you shall make response before the Lord your God, "A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6) And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us and laid upon us hard bondage. 7) Then we cried to the Lord the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression; 8) and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; 9) and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.*

*10) And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground which you, O Lord, have given me.” And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God. Deuteronomy 26.4-10*

As for the basket, in vs. 2 the person bringing it with some of the first fruit of the ground will go to the place or *maqom* which turns out to be a temple though that’s not specified. There a priest will receive the basket in vs. 3 after which he will set it down before the altar, *nuach* being the verb which implies coming to rest. Such *nuach* corresponds with the *shakan* of vs. 2 where the divine name is to rest. As for the priest, the person with his *re’shyth* is to say that he has come to the land sworn by the Lord. Here the identity between one person with the offering and the nation of Israel merger if not physically then in a more important collective fashion. Also the *re’shyth* is from land, the *‘erets* of Canaan itself. And so this emphasis upon a place, settling and resting can apply to Israel finally living permanently in the land of their inheritance.

In vs. 5 after this coming to rest, if you will, the person who brought the *re’shyth* is to make a proclamation meaning it is formulaic by nature and made before an assembly of sorts, this continuing through most of vs. 10. The proclamation starts off in a somewhat self-deprecatory fashion, that is, recalling Jacob who wandered throughout Canaan before going to Egypt at his son Joseph’s invitation. The verb for wandering is *‘avad* which actually means to perish, so the text reads literally “an Aramean who is perishing”...perishing in his frustration of not being able to settle down permanently and in his old age, moving to Egypt. In many ways Jacob was perishing upon hearing of Joseph’s demise, thinking all the while that he was dead.

Vs. 6 says that the not-mentioned Jacob sojourned in Egypt; nothing being said of his twelve sons, the verb *gur* which implies being a stranger which he and his family will remain no matter how long the time span in that land turns out to be. Given the area-wide famine at the time, the prospect was attractive, Jacob being aware of it before he knew about Joseph. Besides, Jacob figured why not go to Egypt? It was pretty much equivalent to a matter of survival, the future of Israel for all intensive purposes being put on hold. While in that second foreign land—the first being Canaan which was such to Jacob because of his wanderings there making it just as foreign to him—the people prospered for four hundred years though this time span isn’t specified. As for the harsh treatment in vs. 6, virtually a condition of slavery, it seemed to result from the unnamed pharaoh from whose bondage Moses led out Israel. Thus the suffering seems to be confined to the last stages of Israel’s sojourn in Egypt. If things were that bad, the Israelites would have dispersed elsewhere on their own.

Paralleling the account in the Book of Exodus, the profession of faith, if you will, continues by saying that the Lord heard Israel's voice after which he saw her dire situation put in terms of affliction, toil and oppression (*hony*, *hamal* and *lachsats*). The first is found last in 16.3. For the second, cf. Gen 41.51: "For God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." For the third, cf. Ex 3.9: "I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them." Countering these we have in vs. 7 and into vs. 8 the next the Lord's mighty hand, outstretched arm, great terror, signs and wonders or *mora'*, *'oth* and *mopheth* (11.25, 13.1 and 13.1 respectively).

Vs. 9 makes a distinction between place and land, *maqom* and *'erets* (cf. Vss. 2 and 3 respectively), the two being pretty much identical although the former can apply to the unnamed temple or place of sacrifice at hand. As for *'erets*, it flows with milk and honey first described by the Lord himself in Ex 3.8 just before he revealed himself to Moses. As for these two forms of nourishment, they stand in contrast to the quails and manna during forty years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness.

The formulaic or liturgical proclamation concludes in vs. 10 with the individual Israelite saying publicly that he is about to lay before the altar the gift of *re'shyth* (cf. vs. 2) or first fruits. Since this intimates the beginning of harvest, there must be plenty of people, if not the entire nation, coming to the temple to perform the required rites. In fact, they may be doing it in groups to move the process along. This gesture concludes with an act of worship which isn't specified followed by rejoicing or *samach* ( cf. 16.15) in the bounty they had harvested. It includes two parts of Israel's society singled out by reason of having no share in the land, that is, the Levite and sojourner (*ger*). The former class is much better off by reason of being central to the performance of liturgical rites whereas the latter is pretty much a step above being an indentured servant.