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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-2-2014



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The first reading is from Malachi Chapter 3. Malachi is the last of the Old Testament Prophets, and he wrote concerning the era just after the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem. The story of the rebuilding of the temple of God, along with the re-establishment of the people of God of God after exile is chronicled in the Prophet Nehemiah, a Prophet contemporary with Malachi. Malachi also saw near term and distant events "telescoped" together, like Isaiah who we discussed last week. As you read, see if you can determine the identity of the messenger referred to in the first verse.

> *1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. 2 "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. 3 And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 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)*

Malachi said that God would send His messenger in order to prepare the way for God the Messiah, designated by "Me" in verse 1. In other words, Malachi said that God would send someone to announce the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. No human can stand before the Messiah, because He is the ultimate in holiness. God said that the Messiah would purify the Levitical Priesthood, in the same way that the dross was burned away during the refining process of gold and silver (v.3). The stated purpose of the refinement of the Priesthood was so that they could once again present sacrifices to the Lord (v.4). While this may seem distant to those of us reading who are not of the Levitical Priesthood, the New Testament informs us that all Christians are "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). So the Messiah has already begun this purifying work in the hearts of his followers, as we surrender ourselves to Him and allow Him to be Lord of our lives.

It's interesting to note that in the original language the word that was translated "messenger" was "malak," meaning "angel or messenger," the root of the name of Malachi. Therefore, as a prophet, Malachi was a messenger of God. But, to whom was he referring to as the messenger in verse 1? We know from the Gospel of Saint Matthew that the "messenger" (v.1a) was John the Baptist. Jesus said, "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU'" (Matthew 11:10). The coming of this messenger was also predicted by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptist, the greatest man that ever lived until that time (Matthew 11:11), had a very important mission. John's mission was to announce the coming of yet another messenger, the Lord Himself, spoken of by Malachi as the Messenger of the Covenant (Malachi 3:1). Jesus was the Messenger of the covenant people we know as the Jews. The Messenger of the New Covenant, none other than Jesus Christ Himself, will as Malachi said, "sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness" (Malachi 3:3). What do we mean by the New Covenant, and by calling the Jews a "covenant people?" Let's explore those concepts below.

The Jews were a covenant people, meaning that God had sworn various covenants with them. There are five covenants in the Old Testament Bible. First was the Noahic Covenant spoken of in Genesis Chapter 9 in which God promised never to destroy the earth again with a flood. The New Testament records that instead the earth will be renewed by fire (2 Peter 3:7). The second covenant was the Abrahamic Covenant from Genesis Chapter 12. In this God promised that Israel would be a great nation (Genesis 12:2), that they would be led to the Promised Land (v.1), and that through Israel the entire world would be blessed (v.3). These unconditional promises will be fulfilled through the Nation of Israel, somehow, in the future. The third covenant was the Mosaic Covenant through which God introduced the Law (Exodus 19). The promises of the Covenant were conditioned upon the people's obedience to the Law, something that only Jesus could fulfill. The forth covenant was the Davidic Covenant in which God promised that David and his descendants would rule over the House of Israel forever. This covenant will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who is of David's kingly line of Judah. The last covenant of the Old Testament (and the entire Bible) was the New Covenant

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We read in Hebrews Chapter 8, the same book we will look at in the second reading, that Jesus was the fulfillment of the New Covenant promises.

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The life of Jesus is manifested in believers through the Person of the Holy Spirit Who indwells us at the moment of our spiritual birth (John 3:3). Paul said, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). We celebrate our new life by being obedient to the things which Jesus calls us to accomplish. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, Chapter 2. As you read keep in mind the verses that we just read from Chapter 8, and ask yourself the question: how is Jesus able to come to our aid when *we* are tempted?

> *11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render*

> *powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*
> *(Hebrews 2:11-18 Note: The second reading included verses 14 – 18, verses 11-13 were added to provide the necessary context).*

God helps us, as believers in Jesus and descendants of Abraham (v.16) to resist temptation. Jesus knows about temptation, having suffered terribly in temptations that we cannot comprehend. "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (v.18). Saint James told how temptation comes about. "14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). How does God provide deliverance for us from temptation (Matthew 6:13)? Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). God helps us to endure our temptation when we turn to Him *before* we yield to the sin (James 1:15a) and stand firm in His promises that we will be delivered. Knowing that Jesus is an empathetic high priest is an important component to be able to turn to Him in the midst of temptation. Since He has experienced temptation and has conquered it, we can ask Him for strength and wisdom to also resist and conquer. While this sense of victory may not happen overnight, we will steadily grow in our ability to receive His help in our times of need. In the meantime, we are growing in our relationship of trust with Jesus when we turn to Him and not to our own strength or willpower.

Here's an illustration about counting on the promises of God to deliver us from temptation. On certain days, very bad weather arose during the times that I wanted to fly my airplane. Since my airplane was a very well equipped machine that possessed most of the bells and whistles, including weather radar, it was easy to launch into weather conditions which were overly challenging. I remember staring up at the overcast sky one day as the ragged clouds almost reached down to the tops of the trees at the airport from which I wanted to "depart," pun intended. I remember thinking of a promise that I had made to myself some years before. All I had to do was to be patient and wait and at some future date the miserable gray sky would be replaced with a perfect blue (and safe) atmosphere in which I wouldn't kill myself (at least so easily). If I would just wait a few days, the very same patch of sky that held nothing but clouds and rain would one day soon hold beautiful clear sky and sunshine. All that I had to do to keep from getting in trouble in that miserable overcast weather was to keep remembering my promise. All we have to do when we find ourselves in a position of temptation is to remember the promises of God. He will make the gray skies of temptation clear for us if we will stand on His promises and trust Him to deliver us.

The Gospel lesson today is from Luke Chapter 2. This passage tells us about when Jesus was brought to the Temple to be dedicated to the LORD as a baby. As you read, make a list of all of the different people mentioned along with the roles.

> *22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:22-40).*

Joseph and Mary went to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law as specified in Leviticus Chapter 12. The requirements were as follows. After the circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3) Mary was to wait thirty-three days, then present the Baby Jesus to the priests in the temple and make a sin offering. "When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering" (v.6). "But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean" (v.8). Mary and Joseph fulfilled the requirements of the Law by making the offering to God through their intercessor, the priest in the temple.

After a prophetic silence of four hundred years, God revealed to Simeon and Anna the identity of the

much-awaited Messiah. The identity of the Messiah was confirmed by two witnesses as was required by Old Testament Law, per the principle in Deuteronomy 19:15. Simeon knew that the Messiah would appear during his lifetime and when He did appear, he made a prophecy about His ministry. Simeon revealed more about the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, that the plan of salvation would be unfolded through Jesus to include the Gentiles (v. 31). He also said to Mary that "a sword would pierce her soul" and a general prophecy about how the Messiah would be received. He said, "this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed." We know that this was indeed the case; many of Jesus' own people rejected Him. Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were **unwilling**" (Matthew 23:37, emphasis added). Though God was silent for four hundred years He spoke powerfully through the birth of the Messiah Jesus.

Looking back to our discussion on the covenants it's important to note that although Jesus' parents obeyed the Jewish Law, after Jesus' death and resurrection the Levitical priesthood was set aside. This provision in the New Covenant ushered in something that many may not have expected by the Old Testament Prophets – the era of the priesthood of all believers, which was mentioned earlier. Christ our High Priest has made one sacrifice for sin for all time (Hebrews 10:12), and there is no more sacrifice for sin that can be made (Hebrews 10:26). But as priests once offered other kinds of sacrifices in the temple, so it is clear from 1 Peter 2:5,9 that God has chosen Christians "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We play a vital role in representing God to the world by living lives that are consistent with His holiness.

While the Levitical priesthood was set aside and the New Covenant era of the priesthood of all believers was begun, this setting aside was only temporary. Paul explained this in the following verses from Romans.

> *For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, (Romans 11:25-30)*

We can rejoice that although God used the disobedience of the Jews to bring many Christians to trust in Jesus, He has not abandoned His plan for Israel. Paul said that in the end times, "all Israel

will be saved" (v.26). We can also celebrate that God was patient with us, not wanting any of us to perish and all to come to the knowledge of everlasting life (2 Peter 3:9). Jeremiah prophesied that God would give us a new heart, something that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3 as being born from above (John 3:3). Paul explained that this new birth came from believing that we are sinners (Romans 3:23), accepting that our due payment for sin was eternal separation from God to pay the debt we owe (Romans 6:23), and then placing our trust in Jesus as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Praise God for His eternal provision for us!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How can we lean upon the promises of God if we don't know the promises of God? Read the following verses and in your journal begin memorizing these so you have them in your mental toolkit.

> *Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

> *Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

> *Romans 8:37-39 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

2. To continue understanding your role as a New Testament believer and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, look up the following Scripture to see what your proper response is to this high calling:

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- 1 Peter 2:5-9
- 1 Peter 3:15
- Hebrews 13:9-17
- Ephesians 2:10
- Titus 2:11-14
- Romans 12:1-2
- 1 Cor. 6:9-12
- Rev. 1:6
- Rev. 22:3-4

Talk to God about where you need His help prompted by the reading of any of the above passages.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020214.cfm

First Reading MAL 3:1-4

Malachi 3:1-4 NASB 1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. 2 "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. 3 "And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.

Second Reading HEB 2:14-18 (Plus vv.11-13 for context)

Hebrews 2:11-18 NASB 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Gospel Reading LK 2:22-40

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Luke 2:22-40 NAS95 22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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We read in Hebrews Chapter 8, the same book we will look at in the second reading, that Jesus was the fulfillment of the New Covenant promises.

> *7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 10 "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." 13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:7-13)*

The life of Jesus is manifested in believers through the Person of the Holy Spirit Who indwells us at the moment of our spiritual birth (John 3:3). Paul said, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). We celebrate our new life by being obedient to the things which Jesus calls us to accomplish. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, Chapter 2. As you read keep in mind the verses that we just read from Chapter 8, and ask yourself the question: how is Jesus able to come to our aid when *we* are tempted?

> *11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*
> *(Hebrews 2:11-18 Note: The second reading included verses 14 – 18, verses 11-13 were added to provide the necessary context).*

God helps us, as believers in Jesus and descendants of Abraham (v.16) to resist temptation. Jesus knows about temptation, having suffered terribly in temptations that we cannot comprehend. "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (v.18). Saint James told how temptation comes about. "14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). How does God provide deliverance for us from temptation (Matthew 6:13)? Paul said, "No temptation has

overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). God helps us to endure our temptation when we turn to Him *before* we yield to the sin (James 1:15a) and stand firm in His promises that we will be delivered. Knowing that Jesus is an empathetic high priest is an important component to be able to turn to Him in the midst of temptation. Since He has experienced temptation and has conquered it, we can ask Him for strength and wisdom to also resist and conquer. While this sense of victory may not happen overnight, we will steadily grow in our ability to receive His help in our times of need. In the meantime, we are growing in our relationship of trust with Jesus when we turn to Him and not to our own strength or willpower.

Here's an illustration about counting on the promises of God to deliver us from temptation. On certain days, very bad weather arose during the times that I wanted to fly my airplane. Since my airplane was a very well equipped machine that possessed most of the bells and whistles, including weather radar, it was easy to launch into weather conditions which were overly challenging. I remember staring up at the overcast sky one day as the ragged clouds almost reached down to the tops of the trees at the airport from which I wanted to "depart," pun intended. I remember thinking of a promise that I had made to myself some years before. All I had to do was to be patient and wait and at some future date the miserable gray sky would be replaced with a perfect blue (and safe) atmosphere in which I wouldn't kill myself (at least so easily). If I would just wait a few days, the very same patch of sky that held nothing but clouds and rain would one day soon hold beautiful clear sky and sunshine. All that I had to do to keep from getting in trouble in that miserable overcast weather was to keep remembering my promise. All we have to do when we find ourselves in a position of temptation is to remember the promises of God. He will make the gray skies of temptation clear for us if we will stand on His promises and trust Him to deliver us.

The Gospel lesson today is from Luke Chapter 2. This passage tells us about when Jesus was brought to the Temple to be dedicated to the LORD as a baby. As you read, make a list of all of the different people mentioned along with the roles.

> *22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation*

> *of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:22-40).*

Joseph and Mary went to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law as specified in Leviticus Chapter 12. The requirements were as follows. After the circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3) Mary was to wait thirty-three days, then present the Baby Jesus to the priests in the temple and make a sin offering. "When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering" (v.6). "But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean" (v.8). Mary and Joseph fulfilled the requirements of the Law by making the offering to God through their intercessor, the priest in the temple.

After a prophetic silence of four hundred years, God revealed to Simeon and Anna the identity of the much-awaited Messiah. The identity of the Messiah was confirmed by two witnesses as was required by Old Testament Law, per the principle in Deuteronomy 19:15. Simeon knew that the Messiah would appear during his lifetime and when He did appear, he made a prophecy about His ministry. Simeon revealed more about the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, that the plan of salvation would be unfolded through Jesus to include the Gentiles (v. 31). He also said to Mary that "a sword would pierce her soul" and a general prophecy about how the Messiah would be received. He said,

"this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed." We know that this was indeed the case; many of Jesus' own people rejected Him. Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were **unwilling**" (Matthew 23:37, emphasis added). Though God was silent for four hundred years He spoke powerfully through the birth of the Messiah Jesus.

Looking back to our discussion on the covenants it's important to note that although Jesus' parents obeyed the Jewish Law, after Jesus' death and resurrection the Levitical priesthood was set aside. This provision in the New Covenant ushered in something that many may not have expected by the Old Testament Prophets – the era of the priesthood of all believers, which was mentioned earlier. Christ our High Priest has made one sacrifice for sin for all time (Hebrews 10:12), and there is no more sacrifice for sin that can be made (Hebrews 10:26). But as priests once offered other kinds of sacrifices in the temple, so it is clear from 1 Peter 2:5,9 that God has chosen Christians "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We play a vital role in representing God to the world by living lives that are consistent with His holiness.

While the Levitical priesthood was set aside and the New Covenant era of the priesthood of all believers was begun, this setting aside was only temporary. Paul explained this in the following verses from Romans.

> *For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, (Romans 11:25-30)*

We can rejoice that although God used the disobedience of the Jews to bring many Christians to

trust in Jesus, He has not abandoned His plan for Israel. Paul said that in the end times, "all Israel will be saved" (v.26). We can also celebrate that God was patient with us, not wanting any of us to perish and all to come to the knowledge of everlasting life (2 Peter 3:9). Jeremiah prophesied that God would give us a new heart, something that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3 as being born from above (John 3:3). Paul explained that this new birth came from believing that we are sinners (Romans 3:23), accepting that our due payment for sin was eternal separation from God to pay the debt we owe (Romans 6:23), and then placing our trust in Jesus as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Praise God for His eternal provision for us!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How can we lean upon the promises of God if we don't know the promises of God? Read the following verses and in your journal begin memorizing these so you have them in your mental toolkit.

> *Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

> *Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

> *Romans 8:37-39 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us*

from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. To continue understanding your role as a New Testament believer and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, look up the following Scripture to see what your proper response is to this high calling:

· 1 Peter 2:5-9

· 1 Peter 3:15

· Hebrews 13:9-17

· Ephesians 2:10

· Titus 2:11-14

· Romans 12:1-2

· 1 Cor. 6:9-12

· Rev. 1:6

· Rev. 22:3-4

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Talk to God about where you need His help prompted by the reading of any of the above passages.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020214.cfm

First Reading MAL 3:1-4

Malachi 3:1-4 NASB 1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. 2 "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. 3 "And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.

Second Reading HEB 2:14-18 (Plus vv.11-13 for context)

Hebrews 2:11-18 NASB 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Gospel Reading LK 2:22-40

Luke 2:22-40 NAS95 22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had

been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-26-2014

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Welcome back to the Study Note for the Sunday Mass. This week we will again return to Isaiah and see in the Gospel lesson how the prophecy was fulfilled through Jesus. As in Isaiah's day, we too are living in a land of deep spiritual darkness, one in which we need both spiritual and physical healing through our Savior Jesus. After Jesus' First Advent, Scripture says that the best is yet to come when He returns to set up His Kingdom rule on earth. During this time there will no longer be any darkness because the Lord our God will be our Light (Revelation 22:5). As the believers during Isaiah's time celebrated because of his prophetic message of hope, we too can celebrate because of his prophecy of the coming Light through the return of the Lord Jesus. As we see evil men grow worse and worse (2 Timothy 3:13), similar to what was happening in Isaiah's time, we can look forward to the coming King who will reverse the curse placed upon the world through the sin of Adam (Genesis 3:17).

This week we are going to begin with the second reading and then cover the first reading and Gospel lesson last since the content on those two are closely related. The first reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Last week we looked at the introduction to this Letter that Paul wrote to the crossroads city, a place entrenched in immorality and worship of a plurality of gods. To review, Paul's overall purposes of the Letter were to deal with some divisions in the church, address some serious moral issues, defend his apostolic authority, and to specifically answer several questions from a letter they sent to him (1 Corinthians 7:1).

As you read, what is one word that best summarizes Paul's concern for the Corinthians in this

section?

> *10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17)*

What word came to your mind which best summarized Paul's concern? For me it was "disunity." Paul was calling the local church in Corinth to unite for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel. Look at verses 17 and 18, just past where the reading stopped. Here we see an insight into why unity was important in the church. Paul said, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 17-18). In other words, Jesus sent him to preach the good news so that the minds of the unbelievers would be transformed such that they recognized the power of God. Later in First Corinthians Paul said, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, **so that they may be saved**" (1 Corinthians 10:32-33, emphasis added).

Second, Paul was warning the local church in Corinth *not to unite* along the lines of a "cult of personality" (as has happened in so many churches since then). Paul provided specific examples of how this disunity was happening in the church through the practice of baptism of family members in the house churches of the region. Someone may have said something like, "I am more spiritual than you because **I** was baptized by Paul but you were only baptized by Apollos."

Paul stood in good company with those that called the local church to unity. Jesus said in His prayer about the church, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me **through their word**; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21). Jesus prayed on behalf of His disciples who had believed by firsthand knowledge *and* for those who believed through the *testimony* of His disciples (v.20b, "through their word").Unity is important in the church because it's through this unified message that God's power is revealed. All of the believers after the era of the disciples have come to faith in Jesus through the testimony of "**the word"** and "**their word**." "The word" is the testimony of the disciples through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit written into what we call the New Testament Bible. "Their word" is both the testimony of the disciples *and* the

testimony of all believers. Jesus' purpose in this message was a calling for the church of God be unified in their proclamation of the Gospel so that the entire world may believe (John 17:21f).

As we leave the second reading, we will move to the Old Testament reading and the Gospel message. The first reading is from Isaiah, the prophet whom we have studied extensively over the past several months. The context of this section of Isaiah was just after his warning to the Northern Kingdoms that they would be overtaken by Assyria. This was a time of gloom and anguish for the Nation of Israel. He wrote the prophecy and delivered it to Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah so that there would be two witnesses as required by the Law such that when the event was fulfilled his authority as God's spokesman would be confirmed (Isaiah 8:2).

Let's read the Scripture, and as you do it will become apparent who the Galilean is about whom Isaiah is speaking.

> *1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. (Isaiah 9:1-4 – Verse markings differ in this NASB version.)*

Clearly, Isaiah spoke about Jesus of Galilee (Mark 1:9). He said that people "will see a great light" (v.2b) in the future sense, yet he saw through a telescopic lens of prophecy through which he recorded near term and distant events together. In this case, he saw both the First and the Second Advent of Jesus together as the accomplishment of God's deliverance from their oppressor. Those that are in a state of spiritual darkness will rejoice when their oppressors have been broken (v.4). The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were distant areas just to the west of the Jordan in Galilee that were easily subject to invasion from the foreign enemies. It was in this area that the Lord Jesus called His first disciples, as we will see next in the Gospel message. The Battle of Midian referred to Gideon's victorious battle with his small army of just 300 men waged against the Midianites in Judges 7:22-21:25. It's also important to note that the prophecy of the multiplication of the Nation of Israel (Genesis 22:17) will be fulfilled in the yet future (v.3a).

In the Gospel message Jesus began assembling his first disciples after John the Baptist had been arrested. You will see how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy from the Old Testament reading.

> *12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the*

> *prophet: 15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES– 16 THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. 23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:12-23)*

In this message, Saint Matthew confirmed that Jesus did in fact fulfill Isaiah's prophecy and quoted it directly as proof. Since the Law required two witness (Deuteronomy 19:15, Isaiah 8:2), God satisfied this requirement through the testimony of both the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Father at Jesus Baptism (Matthew 3:16-17). Jesus took up where John the Baptist left off, saying the same thing as John, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17). Then he settled in the same region that Isaiah prophesied would see a great light (v.16). Here Jesus called four men into discipleship and ministry: Simon Peter, Andrew, and finally James and John, called the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). As He began his ministry he went about teaching, proclaiming the Good News, and healing (v.23). How wonderful would it be to have Jesus with us in his human presence so that we could avail ourselves of His powerful ministry? The truth of the New Covenant is that He does live with us each day through the Holy Spirit – teaching us, proclaiming the Good News, and healing us of our destructive ways. May we learn to listen and receive the ministry of Jesus in our daily lives.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the second reading from 1 Corinthians we mentioned the "transformation of the mind" for the purpose of spreading the Gospel message to the world through the power of God. Read the following verses and then answer the question below.

> *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2).*

> *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot*

> *see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)*
>
> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)*

What are the prerequisites for someone to have his or her mind be transformed in order to be able to recognize the power of God? How does this come about?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/012614.cfm

First Reading IS 8:23-9:3 (verse markings different in the NASB Version)

1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. (Isaiah 9:1-4 NAS95)

Second Reading 1 COR 1:10-13, 17

1 Corinthians 1:10-17 NAS95 10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17 NAS95)

Gospel Reading MT 4:12-23

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES– 16 "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He *said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. 23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:12-23 NAS95)

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-19-2014

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This week we will open with another of Isaiah's "Servant Songs." Last week we looked at the first of these prophetic messages contained in the first reading from Isaiah 42, and the fourth of the Servant Songs in the study question from Isaiah 53. We will look at the introduction to Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians them move onto the Gospel lesson in which we will see the event when John the Baptist announced the promised Messiah.

The first reading is from Isaiah 49, the second of the Servant Songs in which God the Father addressed the Nation of Israel as a personification of His Servant, and secondly He spoke to His Son the Messiah. As you read, take note of the purposes of the servants, the servant Israel and the Messiah Servant that whom we know as Jesus.

> *3 And He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory." 4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God." 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isaiah 49:3-6)*

The first purpose of the servants was to restore the Jews to God. The LORD said to His Servant Son that He "formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him" (v.5b-ff). Though Israel was the God's servant (v.3, "My Servant

Israel," this Servant Son was born with the express purpose of restoring the people of God to true communion with Him. Jesus said in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37).

The second purpose of the servants was to be a light to the Gentiles so that "My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (v.6d). The mechanism through which the restoration came wasn't through Israel, but through Jesus. As we will see later in the second reading, the Church temporarily usurped the role of Israel as a light to the nations, a condition which will be restored during the Great Tribulation. Jesus said to His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20b). We see that the Church is yet the third servant of God. In spite of the temporary unbelief of some of the Jews, Israel's disobedience was used by God to bring light to the Gentiles through the ministry of this third servant, the Church of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul said that, "a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" Romans 11:25c). The Church hasn't replaced Israel, because once God has completed his divine plan through the refining fire of the tribulation period all of Israel will be obedient to Him. Paul said, "[A]nd so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB" (Romans 11:26).

The discussion of the Church as the servant of God brings us to the second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Paul, a servant of God for the Gentiles (Romans 15:16) brought his message to this ungodly and carnal city of Corinth. The reading is from the opening section of Paul's first message to them. In this very important message his overall purposes were to deal with some divisions in the church, address some serious moral issues, defend his apostolic authority, and to specifically answer several questions from a letter they sent to him (1 Corinthians 7:1). As you read try to keep in mind the purposes of the servant Paul in the same manner we did in the first reading from the Servant Song in Isaiah.

> *1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:1-3)*

Here is some background about Sosthenes mentioned in verse 1. This man, whose name means "safe in strength" and pronounced "sose then ace" was likely the amanuensis who wrote the Book for Paul, meaning the one to whom Paul dictated it through the inspiration of Holy Spirit. It's likely that this scholar was a man of high standing in the church, and also the converted synagogue ruler who is mentioned in Acts 18:17. If this is the same man then he is the one who likely replaced the former ruler Crispus (Acts 18:8) who also became a believer in the Lord Jesus. Though Sosthenes probably wrote down the Letter, Paul added a greeting "in his own hand" at the end (! Corinthians

16:21).

Just as we did when we studied the Servant Song of Isaiah in the first reading, we will cover the purposes of the servant Paul in the opening of First Corinthians. The first purpose of the servant Paul was to speak to the church with the authority of God. He said he was "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (v. 1a). Later in Chapter 3 he said, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave [opportunity] to each one" (3:5). It's significant that Paul opened the letter with a statement of authority which stated that his role was ordained by God (v.1a). He made the same statement in the openings of Second Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:1), Ephesians (Ephesians 1:1), and Colossians (Colossians 1:1). This stamp of authority was very important in order for Paul to be able to speak with God's power to the Corinthians who were struggling with a variety of difficult issues in their church. In fact there was open immorality in the church with a man who was having a sexual relationship with his stepmother (5:1).

The second purpose of the servant Paul was to affirm the holiness (or sainthood) of all true believers (v.2c). Paul affirmed this in the Letter to the Romans when he said, "to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints" (Romans 1:7). The idea behind the usage of this particular word translated as "saint" from the original is holiness, meaning to be set apart. This means that one should be morally pure or blameless, unique from the ordinary culture that does not view human beings as much different than animals. Some Bible versions have used the word "holy" instead of "saint." Either way, the people of God are both called to *be* holy and are affirmed *as being* holy in Paul's opening statement. This "already, not yet" call to holy living is echoed throughout the Epistles. Through belief in Jesus the righteousness of God *has been* imparted to a believer (Romans 3:21-22). However, God calls believers to live righteously on an ongoing basis. Paul said in Romans, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, **acceptable to God**, which is your spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1, emphasis added). So we may remark that someone is a "saint" when they display unusual patience or kindness, but truly each child of God is a saint. Let's live up to this glorious calling in our moment by moment choices, attitudes and lives.

The third purpose of God's servant Paul was to affirm and call for the unity of the church. Paul said, "with **all who in every place** call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **their Lord and ours**" (2d, emphasis added). Unity in the church was one of Paul's most important purposes as later in Chapter 1 he launched into this critical topic for the Corinthians. He said, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). He continued, saying, "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's [people], that there are quarrels among you" (v.11). Later in the Letter Paul explained the importance of unity in the Church. He said, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ" (12:12). Then, he extended this analogy to a theoretical conversation between parts of the human body. "If the foot

should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body" (12:15). Since the human body has to be united in order to function, the Church of God must also be unified in their purpose.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, keep in mind how Paul spoke with the mind of God when he announced his purposes in the opening of the Letter to the Corinthians. In the opening verse of the lesson today from Saint John Chapter 1, John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest man that ever lived (Matthew 11:11), announced the beginning of the ministry and purpose of Jesus Christ. He also affirmed his authority as one who was appointed as the forerunner and witness of Jesus' baptism by both water and the Holy Spirit.

> *29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34)*

John the Baptist affirmed Jesus' mission to the world when he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (v.29b). The use of the word picture "Lamb of God" would have alerted those familiar with the sacrificial system the nature of Jesus' mission. By His death on the cross, He made the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. But we must accept this sacrifice on our behalf for it to save us. Have you recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away your sin?

John announced that although he was baptizing with water (as a sign of the people's repentance from sin), Jesus would baptize in a different way, with the Holy Spirit of God (v. 33d). This baptism of the Holy Spirit is the gift that Jesus left the Church. Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; [that is] the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, [but] you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you (John 14:16-17).

A second purpose of John was that he affirmed his personal humility and faith in God's announcement concerning the Messiah. He said, "And I did not recognize Him" (v.33a). Does this means that the even the greatest man that ever lived didn't immediately recognize the Messiah? He certainly knew Jesus as a person, but not as the Messiah, until it was revealed to him explicitly by God through the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the way in which the Holy Spirit would come upon the Promised One. Imagine the life of John the Baptist. From the day he was born, he was told by his parents and then through divine messages from God in the form of the Old Testament Scriptures that he was to be the one that announced the long awaited Messiah. Then when Jesus

actually arrived on the scene to begin his public ministry he stated that he didn't recognize Him as the Messiah until God granted him a divine revelation that this was indeed the One whom he was expecting.

How about us, are willing to humbly admit our inability to see Jesus? Do we trust in God's word concerning Him, as John the Baptist did? It's like the little boy Johnny who always wanted to be a fireman, in a region that hadn't had a fire in hundreds of years. His parents told him he would be a firefighter. His friends told him he would be a firefighter. When he graduated high school, he enrolled in training to be a firefighter. One day the alarm bell rang in the training center and he knew that he was going to see a real fire. When he got there, he said, "Boy, I have never actually seen a fire before, that doesn't look like a fire." At that the fire chief said, "Johnny, that's a fire," which quickly settled the matter. Johnny may have looked a bit silly in front of his classmates, but he truly spoke what was on his mind. John the Baptist, whose whole short life was dedicated to the express purpose of the forerunner of the Messiah, the one to announce His ministry; was in a similar spot. When he saw Jesus he didn't recognize Him right away as the Messiah. But, when God spoke the matter was confirmed once and forever.

Let's be humble like John the Baptist and admit we need eyes to see the reality of the Messiah as we read Scripture and we live our lives. Since God wants to reveal the Messiah, He will help us to see with fresh awareness the glory of Jesus as the Messiah and what a difference He can make in our lives even today.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What about us, what has God raised us up to be watching for? What are the purposes that God has placed upon *our* hearts as servants of the Lord?

2. If all true Christians are "saints" how does that change your view of your life's purpose and meaning? How can you live into the identity of being set apart for special use?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011914.cfm

First Reading IS 49:3, 5-6 (plus skipped verses)

Isaiah 49:3-6 NASB 3 And He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory." 4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is

with the LORD, And My reward with My God." 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Second Reading 1 COR 1:1-3

1 Corinthians 1:1-3 NASB 1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reading JN 1:29-34

John 1:29-34 NASB 29 The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him, and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 "And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 "And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 "And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-12-2014

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This week we will again look at Isaiah and a prophecy concerning Jesus. Then we will move onto a study of Jesus' baptism and discuss Jesus' nature as both God and Man along with his radical obedience to the Father's plan for His life.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah Chapter 42. This is the first of what is known as Isaiah's "Servant Songs." This first song continues past the end of today's reading in verse 7 onward to verse 10. The Servant Songs prove in a powerful way that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Righteous Servant, the long awaited Messiah. The overall preceding context is the preparation of Judah's return from captivity at Babylon, something we know happened during the times of Nehemiah. As you read, take careful note of the characteristic of the Servant.

> *1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one 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 out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not be disheartened or crushed, Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." 5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison." (Isaiah 42:1-7)*

Isaiah said in verse six that God's Servant would be a light to the nations, which means to the Gentiles. Last week we discussed the revealing of this marvelous mystery, that the Messiah would bring salvation not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. Here God reaffirms that message, and stated that the Messiah would be appointed "as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations (Gentiles), To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison" (vv. 6e-7). God compared the spiritual darkness of the Gentiles with blind people (7a), and with those in prison living in darkness (v. 7b-ff). Note that the only person in that society that would have had the authority to free an entire people group from prison was the King. Also, remember that in those days the prisons were gruesome dark places. Isaiah said that the future Servant, whom we know as Jesus, would act with kingly authority to free the prisoners from darkness. Saint Paul confirms this by saying, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13).

You may wonder what Isaiah meant in verse 3 when he said, "A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish." A lack of social justice was one of the primary themes of Isaiah, with widows and orphans especially oppressed (Isaiah 1:17). The reed referred to the weak people in the world, those wounded souls that truly need and seek the Messiah to save them. The "dimly burning wick" was symbolic of something which would have to be nurtured to keep going, a tiny flame which required kindling in order to make enough of a fire for a person to use. The Messiah won't stamp out the flame, He will enliven it! In fact, Jesus quoted the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) version of this text to prove that His coming was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus said, "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY" (Matthew 12:20).

What does this Servant Song mean for us today? First we can be sure that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy and came as the servant Messiah. The delight of the Father was on Him and the Spirit of the Lord was in Him. This same Messiah, the Righteous One, is the One in whom we put our trust to bring us salvation. He is worthy of our worship, our faith and our surrender. Second, as we surrender, we can trust that He will not take advantage of our weakened condition. In fact, on the contrary, He will nurture us and bring us to a place of fuller relationship with the Father. He will enliven what little faith we have as we open our hearts up to Him to do His good work in us. Lastly, the message of salvation is not just a theoretical freedom from the strangle-hold of sin, but an experiential reality that Jesus wants us to grow up into. He has set us free from the tyranny of sin and we no longer need to live in the dark prison that Satan had us in. Unfortunately, many of us do not know of this freedom and continue to live in the dungeon of guilt, worry and fear. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

As we move onto the second reading and the Gospel message, I would like to share some background of the key figures in Church history to provide you with a better understanding of the occasion of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. One of my hobbies has been the study of Church history and especially some of the main characters who played a role in shaping the doctrines held

by Christian believers in what would be future times for them. In some cases, these characters postulated theological theories that, with adequate biblical support, became accepted by the early Church. Yet others proposed heretical ideas that during the process of being opposed by the Church led to the unexpected result of calcifying the *true* beliefs of the Church. In essence what happened was that when theological incorrect ideas came along, the church was forced to examine their presuppositions and beliefs more closely in order to state more clearly what they believed. For example, Marcion of Sinope, who was the son of an early bishop and in the early Second Century, proposed an early and incorrect canon of the Bible that ultimately led to the Church responding with one which was accepted by the early Church leaders. Another in this latter category was Nestorius Archbishop of Constantinople who, although later denied the teaching for which he was accused, proposed that the human Jesus and the divine Christ were two different persons. He was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This brings us to a fellow named Eutyches whose teachings are important for us in understanding the Gospel message for today.

Eutyches was a presbyter at Constantinople and opposed Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus. He founded the teaching known as Monophysitism which said that Jesus had only one nature, rather than maintaining His divine nature and adding a human nature after his birth through Blessed Mary (Luke 1:48). Eutyches said that Jesus' human and divine natures were combined into the single nature of Christ "without any alteration, absorption or confusion: that of the incarnate Word." While some may maintain that this is theological hair splitting similar to asking "How many angels can fit on the head of a pin" it is extremely important that we understand the nature of Jesus. If Jesus wasn't fully man then how could he have fulfilled the Law. He also wouldn't have understood what it was like to live in our fallen world. If Jesus wasn't fully divine He couldn't have atoned for the sin of the entire world. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish them, but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). And the author of Hebrews said, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Somehow, Jesus was both fully man and fully God. The response of the Church to Eutyches was to formulate doctrine along the lines that Jesus was a unified whole being Who consisted fully of both human and divine nature without defining some magical quotient of the degree of mixing of the two. Jesus was 100% human and 100% divine! To say anything less would be a violation of the clear teaching of Scripture.

Jesus emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine attributes during His earthly ministry. We see this in Paul's Letter to the Philippians.

> *6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)*

Let's step back and summarize since we are juggling a lot of balls in the study today. We spoke about Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus would be God's Righteous Servant, acting as light to Gentiles and

all people, and One whom would free the poor and oppressed people from spiritual darkness. In our overview of some important historical figures of Church history, we discussed the controversy over the nature of Jesus brought about by Eutyches, which led the Church to formulate theology about Jesus' nature consisting of both human and divine as a unified whole Being without a formula to the degree of mixing between the two natures. As we move to the Gospel reading we will see that since Jesus was 100% human (and 100% divine, how can that be?), as God's Righteous Servant He would have to submit Himself to the full measure of the Law. This meant living in submission to the plan of salvation predicated by His Father, which included the program of John the Baptist as the forerunner in the spirit of Elijah. As we will see, Jesus submitted to John's baptism of repentance to demonstrate his full compliance with the divine plan of the Father.

> *13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. 16 And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17)*

Jesus had to fulfill all righteousness, and part of this was to submit to John's baptism of repentance. The Jews of that era were used to *repeated* ceremonial washings. However, John's baptism represented a person's *one-time* public confession of repentance, a willingness to turn from their sin and to the plan of God for their lives. Even though Jesus was sinless in His essence as God, He had to live a perfect, sinless life as a man, and this meant submitting to the Father's will through the ministry of John the Baptist. Otherwise, when King Herod came to kill all of the infants, as we saw last week, Jesus' death would have atoned for the sin of the world and that would have been the end of His ministry. "But God" had other ideas, and Jesus submitted to the Father's wishes. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). We can celebrate that Jesus was willing to submit to the Father's plan.

As we make the sign of the cross, we can remember Jesus' baptism and how it demonstrated the reality of the Holy Trinity. We saw during the baptism that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus the Son like a dove (v.16e), and the Father announced, " This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased (v.17b). God said through Isaiah in the first reading, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him" (Isaiah 42:1). God is delighted in His Righteous Servant, and He delights in us as servants of the Lord Jesus.

As we finish with the New Testament reading, take note of what we said earlier about Isaiah's prophecy regarding freedom for the Gentiles living in darkness, as well as how Jesus was obedient to God as a Servant, even submitting to baptism by John the Baptist.

> *34 And opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)– 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him." (Acts 10:34-38)*

Peter said that God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus was available to everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. He said that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power (38b). Read verse one from the first reading in Isaiah again. "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1). Do you see how precisely the prophecy was fulfilled through Jesus? This is the One in whom we trust.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. When Jesus went to John to be baptized he made a public statement about his willingness to submit to the Father's plan through whatever form it would take. Though the Scriptures didn't seem to foretell the event of Jesus' baptism, there was plenty of prophecy regarding the obedient nature that God's Servant Messiah would take. Reflect upon the following verses from Isaiah regarding our Suffering Servant the Lord Jesus.

> *1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? 9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. 10 But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will*

> *prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:1-11)*

How does understanding the radical obedience of Jesus empower you to answer the calling that God has placed upon your life?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011214.cfm

First Reading IS 42:1-4, 6-7 (plus skipped verses)

Isaiah 42:1-7 NASB 1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one 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 out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 "A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed, Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." 5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.

Second Reading ACTS 10:34-38

Acts 10:34-38 NASB 34 And opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him. 36 "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)– 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him.

Gospel Reading MT 3:13-17

Matthew 3:13-17 NASB 13 Then Jesus *arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he *permitted Him. 16 And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the

water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday January 5, 2014



The gift-giving season of Christmas has just passed from our radar screens. But the tradition of gift giving is found in each of the readings of the mass this week. In the Old Testament reading, we see that people will give gifts to Jesus, the King, who will reign on earth during His second advent. The New Testament reading shows us how St. Paul was God's gift to the Gentiles. And the Gospel reading recounts the story of the Wise Men who came from the East to give gifts to Jesus during His first advent.

This week we are first going to examine the second reading from Saint Paul because the first reading from Isaiah and Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew must be studied together in light of the

insights from Paul. The second reading is Ephesians Chapter Three where Paul unveiled a mystery that had been hidden throughout the ages until after Jesus' First Advent, what we just celebrated at Christmas. As you read this section of Ephesians (without all of the skipped verses) try to select the single verse that Saint Paul provided which summarized this mystery.

> *1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles– 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel, (Ephesians 3:1-6)*

Even though Saint Paul did minister to the Jews (see for example Acts 13:14) his *primary* ministry was to the Gentiles. In contrast, Peter's main ministry was to the Jews. Paul, through the providence of the Holy Spirit, said that God placed him into the position of stewardship over the Gentile believers in the Church (verses 1 – 2). He said elsewhere in Galatians, "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised" (Galatians 2:7). God determined that the *primary* focus of his ministry was to give the Gospel to the Gentiles, the same way that He sent Saint Peter to bring the message to the Jews. Though God set Paul apart to concentrate his ministry on the Gentile people, his background was that of a devout Jew (Philippians 3:5) and his heart was set upon winning the Jews to the Kingdom of God.

In this week's reading, the mystery was that the Gentiles would be gloriously grafted (Romans 11:17) into the people of God through the Church. It is important to understand, at least from a high level, Paul's background while we discuss this mystery which was revealed to him. He was formerly a member of the Jewish group known as the Pharisees, a cult which we have discussed extensively in the context of Jesus' interactions with them. The Pharisees were a group of devout Jews who from all accounts would have abhorred the concept of unconverted Gentiles joining their strictly Jewish sect. A modern analogy would be to think of the children's game where the goal is to hammer round and square wooden pegs into their respectively shaped holes. One could never hammer a square peg into a round hole regardless of how forcefully a person went about it or how talented they were, and regardless of their background. In the same way, the Pharisees could never have in their wildest imaginations envisioned a time when large populations of Gentiles would be invited and subsequently accepted into the family of God. They should have envisioned this as the Old Testament Scriptures predicted that this would happen. Isaiah said, "Then it will come about in that day That the **nations** will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10, emphasis added). The concept of the Gentiles coming to God appeared throughout the Old Testament. We see this again in Isaiah in the section being covered today in the first reading, which with the benefit of history we find that this was in the

context of Jesus' Second Advent. "And **nations** will come to your light, And **kings** to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:3, emphasis added). The square pegs of the Gentiles will then fit nicely into round holes through God's mysterious unveiling of His divine plan of the Church. If you are not of Jewish heritage, but consider yourself a part of God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, then you can thank God for using the life of St. Paul to bring about this paradigm shift. Yes, even the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

The quotation above from Isaiah brings us to the first reading, found in Chapter 60. As we said before, with the benefit of history and hindsight we understand that this section of Isaiah refers to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, namely when He returns in glory. With this context in mind, study the reading and take special note of the gifts that the Gentile believers will bring to the LORD.

> *1 "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For behold, darkness will cover the earth, And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you, And His glory will appear upon you. 3 And nations will 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 will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. 5 Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. 6 A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD. (Isaiah 60:1-6)*

Isaiah said that God would use "deep darkness" (v.2a) to bring Gentiles (the nations, v.3a) to Him. The Old Testament Prophets referred to this time of deep darkness as the "Day of the Lord," something which we discussed at length in the study for November 2, 2013. The timing of the Day of the Lord was hidden from the Prophets, but what we know is that it occurs just before Jesus' Second Coming and in the context of the Great Tribulation spoken of in the Book of Revelation Chapters 6 – 18. During this period God will accomplish two objectives. First, He will complete His disciplining of the Nation of Israel, bringing them to return to Him, and second He will judge the godless, unbelieving Gentiles remaining on the earth. After this time, Jerusalem will become the capital city of the universe. The Prophet Ezekiel said, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her'" (Ezekiel 5:5) and about the Jews "who live at the center of the world" (Ezekiel 38:12e). God will use the tribulation of the end-time period to bring believers from all nations to Him, while the unbelievers will be permanently excluded from God's eternal Kingdom (Revelation 22:15).

Note the types of gifts that the future Gentile leaders will bring to King Jesus. "They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD" (Isaiah 60:6d). Throughout history, gold has been the most valuable of all metals. It's a rare and valuable treasure, and the perfect commodity that never degrades – making it an excellent gift to bring to Jesus, who is

reigning as LORD. Frankincense is something very familiar to any Catholic, as this material produces a most pleasant aroma when burned and has the smell of perfume in its native form. I was an altar boy for most of my younger years and was frequently in close proximity to the priest burning this sweet swelling material. The burning of incense is symbolic of the prayers of the faithful rising to heaven (Revelation 5:8). The future world leaders will present their gifts of gold and incense directly to the Source of their salvation, the Lord Himself! What a joyous occasion this will be!

This brings us to the Gospel lesson from Matthew Chapter Two in which we find the Magi presenting their gifts to the King of the Universe. Read the text and take particular note of their **three** gifts.

> *1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." 3 And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, 6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER, WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him." 9 And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. 10 And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:1-12)*

The context of this section is that Jesus had already been born in Bethlehem and his parents had moved him out of the stable into a house. He was an infant, probably less than two years old as we see from Herod who later in Matthew made a plan to kill all infants two years old or younger. The Magi were likely people from the Babylonian region along the Euphrates River in present day Iraq south of Baghdad. These mysterious scholars were highly educated people that were part pagan priest, part magician, and part scribe. They were also interested in astrology and this was woven into their mystical religious beliefs. Nowhere in the text does it say that there were three of them, as in the famous song about the three wise men. This designation comes from the three gifts they brought with them to present to the King. There were likely a small group of them but they would have been accompanied by a large number of guards and servants. Thus this would have made their arrival that much more disturbing to King Herod.

The Jewish priests and scribes told the Magi the prophecy from the Prophet Micah, which they

evidently weren't aware of, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). This must be the case or they would have gone directly to Bethlehem in the first place and avoided King Herod. Verse 9 said, "And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they **had seen** in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was" (emphasis added). Then, the star reappeared! So what did they do? Did they stop and ask for further directions? No, followed it and went to Bethlehem! Now they had both the prophetic prophesy from the Jews, and the star to guide them. Therefore, they kept going on the journey, but had to BELIEVE God's revelation and follow it.

Finally, when they arrived in Bethlehem and located Jesus, they presented their *three* gifts to him. The Magi's gift of gold would have been very useful to the holy family during their subsequent flight to Egypt necessary to flee King Herod. Notice the similarity of their gifts mentioned in the first reading from Isaiah 60 but with one glaring addition: myrrh. Myrrh was something used throughout the eastern world as an embalming agent. These kings of the east presented Mary and Joseph with a precious gift that could be used for the future burial of their Son. Look at it this way. One day you attended the baptism of an infant in the church, and afterwards one of the guests presented the happy couple with a beautiful new coffin for the child. Yes, the coffin could be sold and the money used to raise the child, but what kind of a message would the presentation of such a gift make to the parents? The magi, unbeknownst to themselves, predicted the death of the Messiah. Little did they know that His death was a necessary part of the redemptive story so that you and I might have eternal life. In a future age Gentile believers will present gifts of gold and incense to Jesus, the need for myrrh has been done away with because Jesus rose from the dead and conquered death for you and me.

The chain of ideas that emerged from the text is as follows. First, God gives revelation in order to find Jesus. Second, God calls us to believe his revelation and follow it. Finally, when we truly meet with God our response is joy, worship and giving! The bottom line is this. God calls us to believe and follow His revelation about Jesus and when we do our response is joy, worship and giving.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Think about the message that you send implicitly when you send someone a gift. A child gives his father a pair of gloves for Christmas. Another child gives his mother a box of candy. In light of the New Year and the idea of making resolutions for the next twelve months, what single gift could you present to Jesus this year?

2. It is easy to criticize the Pharisees for judging the Gentiles and for considering them "unworthy" of being saved. The definition of grace is that no one is worthy of it. It is God's unmerited favor. Think about your own attitude towards those who seem unlikely to become Christians. Is there someone who you can identify as unlikely to be a fellow heir, a fellow member of the body and a fellow partaker in the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel? Commit to pray for this person and look for ways to be like St. Paul by loving them and speaking the truth of the Gospel to them.

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Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/010514.cfm Third Sunday of Advent

First Reading Isaiah 60:1-6

Isaiah 60:1-6 NASB 1 "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 "For behold, darkness will cover the earth, And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you, And His glory will appear upon you. 3 "And nations will 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 will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. 5 "Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. 6 "A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD.

Second Reading Ephesians 3:2-3A, 5-6

Ephesians 3:1-6 NASB 1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles– 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel,

Gospel Reading MT 2:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12 NASB 1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." 3 And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, 6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER, WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him." 9 And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. 10 And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another

way.

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-29-2013



This week after the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ on Christmas, we will look at the events that occurred immediately after the birth of Jesus. We will also investigate teaching by Saint Paul about Christian character.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha, which you will need to look up on your own. The second reading is from Paul's Letter to the Colossians. The purpose of his message was to contradict false teaching that was happening among some in the church at Colossae regarding strict rules about the observance of religious festivals, eating and drinking, and the idolatrous practice of worshipping angels.

The context of the whole of Chapter 3 has the idea of "taking off" the things that are contrary to God's ways and "putting on" the ways of God. Paul opened this section by saying, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2). Next, he provided a list of behaviors to "take off," because such things were not in keeping with the character of the Lord Jesus and His call to holiness in the church. Paul said, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry" (v.5). He continued, "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, [and] abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its [evil] practices" (vv.8-9). Paul admonished the Colossians to put aside these ungodly behaviors because as believers we "have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (v.10).

As you study the reading, which picks up at verse 12 create a list of the things that you are to "put on."

> *12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart. (Colossians 3:12-21)*

How many godly characteristics did you count? Paul said to "put on" the following behaviors:

1. A heart of compassion (v.12b).
2. Kindness (v.12b).
3. Humility (v.12b).
4. Gentleness and patience (v.12b).
5. Forgiveness (v.13b).
6. Love (v.14).
7. The peace of God (v.15).
8. The Word of Christ (v.16a)
9. Admonish one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (v.16b)
10. A heart of thankfulness to God (v.16)
11. Wives' submissiveness to husbands (v.18a).

12. Husband's love of their wives and not being bitter against them (v.19)
13. Children's obedience to their parents (v.20).
14. Fathers not exasperating their children (v.21)

Paul also called the people to thankfulness in addition to the admonition to "take off and put on." Paul said to be thankful in verses 15b, 17c, and further down in 4:2. The call to put on a thankful heart runs throughout the Letter. Paul said in the opening of the Letter, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (1:3). He closed with a call to "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with [an attitude of] thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:1).

However, how can Paul be thankful while he is in prison? How can we be thankful while we go through the troubles of life? The key to the secret of thankfulness is in verse 12: "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved . . ." It is only when we recognize that God has chosen us (He wants us), we are holy (the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin), and we are beloved (we have entered into the most deeply bonded relationship with God through His great love) that we can put off the old ways of doing life on our own and put on the new way of life. Without the truth of our new identity in Christ, our self-empowered efforts to "be good" are not enough.

An illustration from my life may help to provide some insight into how we as believers in Jesus Christ can be thankful in spite of difficult circumstances. This past week I was blessed to do some snowboarding in Northern Michigan. The snow was fantastic as they had received daily dumps of snow, and our last day was no exception. On what was to be the last run of the day, I slipped while getting off the ski lift, which resulted in badly twisting my hip. I kept asking myself what I could have done differently to avoid this catastrophe. I began recounting the promise of God: "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5c, Deut 31:6). Since I was barely able to walk, I found that the only way I could get around was by leaning on my wife. I was very thankful to have a wife who cared for me and who I could lean upon to help me to get back home. In a similar way, Saint Paul was able to be thankful during his time in prison by leaning upon the promises of God and on other believers. In his final greetings, Paul mentioned many of the people who he was working with in ministry including Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nympha, and the brothers at Laodicea. Paul leaned upon the people of God. Paul put off the ungodly practices of the world and put on the things of God. Through this he was able to "rejoice in the sufferings of your sake" because he was "filling up what (was) lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of the body, that is the church" (Colossians 1:24).

As we move onto the Gospel lesson for today, we remind you that the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of a large number of Old Testament prophesies. We looked at some of those last week. This week we will address the fulfillment of three prophesies regarding the early life of Jesus. As you read, take note of these three prophetic fulfillments.

> *13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I*

> *tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." 14 And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "OUT OF EGYPT DID I CALL MY SON." 16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi. 17 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, 18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE." 19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 20 "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." 21 And he arose and took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene." (Matthew 2:13-23)*

Three specific prophecies were fulfilled from this Gospel reading during Jesus' early life. First, like Moses, Jesus was to be called out of Egypt (v.15). Joseph carried Jesus to Egypt because an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him to flee from the persecution of King Herod. In the Jewish mind, Egypt represented all that was bad about society including idolatry and a whole host of ungodly practices. However, Jesus was to be "called out of Egypt" in both the moral *and* physical sense, just like Moses. The prophecy that was addressed was from Hosea 11:1. "When Israel [was] a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son."

Second, King Herod fulfilled the prophecy of a slaughter of children spoken of in Jeremiah 31:15. Jeremiah's prophecy appeared with a set of verses that promised future blessings for Israel and all nations (Jeremiah 31:10). Jeremiah said, "And they shall come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, And they shall be radiant over the bounty of the LORD–Over the grain, and the new wine, and the oil, And over the young of the flock and the herd; And their life shall be like a watered garden, And they shall never languish again" (31:12). The prophecy regarding the slaughter of the innocent children was placed after these verses of blessing. Saint Matthew's quote regarding this event was taken directly from the Greek version of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint. Since Jeremiah's prophecy of this future event was not thematically intuitive, we can see how God supernaturally fulfilled his prediction through Herod's execution of the infants throughout the region of Bethlehem.

Third, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that He was to be called a "Nazarene," but in a different way than the Jews would have expected. A Nazarite in the Old Testament was someone that took a certain vow for religious purposes (Numbers 6:1-27). This included refraining from drinking wine or other alcoholic beverages, from cutting their hair, and a list of other behaviors. The purpose of the Nazarite vow was to focus upon the things of God during a particular period. Many people,

including Paul (Acts 18:18) took the vow of the Nazarite for certain periods in their life. Some, like John the Baptist, took the vow for their entire life (Luke 1:15, Luke 7:33). Jesus evidently didn't take the vow of a Nazarite, at least during the period of His public ministry, because he drank wine (Luke 7:34). Instead, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of being called a Nazarite by living in the City of Nazareth. Joseph, along with Mary and Jesus, "came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'" (Matthew 2:23). Jesus fulfilled the prophecy but in a different way than could have been imagined.

We can trust in God because we can see how exactly He carried out the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus down to the exact detail. These predictions weren't fulfilled in a manner in which anyone could predict. Who would have thought that Jesus would have been called a Nazarite because of the fact that he lived in Nazareth instead of being called that for taking the vow of the Nazarite, something with which the Jews were very familiar? Who could imagine the ghastly circumstances surrounding Herod's slaughter of the innocent children in Bethlehem? In addition, what could ever cause Jesus to be known as One that was called out of Egypt? We can trust in God because we see that He does what He says He will do, and does so through miraculous means that we would never be able to predict. This should stand as a caution to us that although we think we understand many of the details of Jesus' return, this will most likely not play out exactly as we think. We can rest in the fact that after we see the fulfillment of Christ's return we will be able to look back and understand the prophecies, just as we did in the Gospel study today.

Knowing that God protected Jesus during His early years is a testimony to God's love for us. While we may not be protected from every painful circumstance, God has provided for our ultimate deliverance by preserving the life of His anointed One, the Messiah. He came to do more than save us from temporary bad circumstances, He came so that we might be saved from the eternal consequences of our sin. This is the good news of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus for us today.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Looking at the reading from Colossians, which characteristics of putting on the new self that is in Christ most resonated with you? Spend some time talking to the Lord about how you would like Him to change you.

2. As you think about God's fulfillment of prophecy after the birth of Jesus, how does His attention to detail encourage you in your day to day life?

Readings for the Week

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Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122913.cfm

First Reading SIR 3:2-6, 12-14

See http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122913.cfm

Second Reading COL 3:12-21

Colossians 3:12-21 NASB 12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.

Gospel Reading MT 2:13-15, 19-23 (plus skipped verses)

Matthew 2:13-23 NASB 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." 14 And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "OUT OF EGYPT DID I CALL MY SON." 16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi. 17 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, 18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE." 19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 20 "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." 21 And he arose and took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass: Sunday, December 22, 2013 Fourth Sunday of Advent



This week as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ like last week we will be studying some important prophetic voices from the Old Testament. We will also be reading from the Gospel of Saint Matthew to hear how he confirmed that the coming birth of Jesus would fulfil these predictions made centuries earlier.

Before we turn to the first reading from Chapter 7 in Isaiah it's important for us to explain the personality of King Ahaz, the King of the Southern Tribe of Judah, about whom Isaiah will be speaking. Ahaz was son of King Jotham, the latter whom was a godly ruler of Judah. King Ahaz came into power when he was 20 years of age and he went bad immediately at the beginning of his reign. Second Chronicles provides an important insight into the personality of the King. "But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baals" (2 Chronicles 28:2). Not only was Ahaz an idolater who caused the circulation of idols to the god Baal, but he even burned his own children as sacrifices to false gods. The Scripture said, "But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of

the nations whom the LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel" (2 Kings 16:3). He went from bad to worse after the attack of the King of Assyria who had already overtaken the Northern Tribes.

> *20 So Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. 21 Although Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the LORD and out of the palace of the king and of the princes, and gave it to the king of Assyria, it did not help him. 22 Now in the time of his distress this same King Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the LORD. 23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they became the downfall of him and all Israel. (2 Chronicles 28:20-23)*

As if that wasn't bad enough, Ahaz then went on to block the entrance to the temple in order to prevent the true worship of God (2 Chronicles 28:25). King Ahaz started out bad and continued in his ungodly rule until the very end of his life without ever having a change of heart and repenting of his sin. It's with this understanding of the king that we turn to the text of the first reading from Isaiah.

> *10 Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" 13 Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? 14 "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:10-14*

The Lord gave King Ahaz the opportunity to trust in Him by asking for a sign. Instead of asking for a sign, King Ahaz spoke out of the pride and self-reliance of his heart, which displeased the Lord. God had given him an invitation and he refused to accept it. This "tried" the patience of the Lord because he persisted in his independence and refused to trust in God's provision of a sign to assure him. God used this event of obstinate disobedience to foretell of Messiah. This prophecy was ultimately fulfilled through the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary.

Because the Gospel reading relates to the prophecy of Isaiah from the first reading we will consider that passage next. This reading is from the first chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

> *18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their*

> *sins." 22 Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." 24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, 25 and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)*

While many of us are already familiar with the narrative concerning the birth of Jesus, this passage highlights important truths for our lives. First, Saint Matthew brought out the fact that Jesus was born not through natural human relations but through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. This is important because since God is without sin this was the only means by which the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the second coming of the Lord will play out, how the world will be eventually unified under Jesus' earthly reign. Third, Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins. This is God's special invitation to counteract the destructive nature of sin in order to stand before a Holy God and not be rejected at the judgment. This is not only "a" plan for salvation, it is "the" plan. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Matthew's Gospel also brings out an important prophetic fulfillment regarding the title of Jesus as Immanuel. This title means "God with us" which is an important relationship aspect of the Messiah's advent. The Messiah reveals the heart of God as One who lives among us. The implications of Jesus being called Immanuel are twofold. First, Jesus came so that we might come to the Father through Him. Second Jesus moved into the neighborhood to stay in order to show us God's love so that we might live eternally with Him. Christianity is the only belief system that purports that God became a man and died for our sins. That is the powerful implication of Immanuel, God with us.

In the second reading from Romans, Saint Paul also confirmed the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding Jesus. While these are introductory remarks and salutations, there are many meaningful truths contained here.

> *1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7)*

It would be easy to read this passage casually and gloss over the deep insights, but Paul confirmed the following truths about Jesus and His people.

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1. Jesus birth and ministry was predicted by Old Testament Scriptures (v.2).
2. Jesus would be born in the line of King David as to his earthly genealogy (v.3).
3. He would be the Son of God and as God would have the power to be resurrected from the dead (v.4a), and be filled with the Holy Spirit (v.4a).
4. He would be perfectly holy (v.4b).
5. He would be the Lord of the Church.
6. All grace would flow through Jesus (v.5)
7. Jesus would establish the apostles of the church, including Paul (v.5).
8. His Church would bring about obedience and faith (v.5).
9. Paul's ministry would extend to the Gentiles (v.5).
10. All believerswould be called "saints" and, like the apostles, called out to ministry (v.7).

Saint Paul knew Jesus in a multi-faceted way, which should be a model for us as followers of Him today. Most importantly, we need to recognize Jesus as the Son of God who was raised from the dead and lived a holy life through the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can receive His grace. Receiving His grace means that I am now in good favor with the Father and I am declared righteous.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Review the list above from the second reading in Romans 1 about Jesus. Choose one point and think about how this truth affects your life.

2. What difference does it make to you to know that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us"?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122213.cfm Fourth Sunday of Advent

First Reading Isaiah 7:10-14

Isaiah 7:10-14 NASB 10 Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" 13 Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? 14 "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Second Reading Romans 1:1-7

Romans 1:1-7 NASB 1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of

God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reading Matthew 1:18-24 plus skipped verse 25

Matthew 1:18-25 NASB 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." 24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, 25 and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-15-2013

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5



Did you know that even as firm believers in Jesus Christ that it's natural to have doubts about our faith? There may be days when we feel like we can walk on water, but other days we feel like we are slipping down into a deep, dark, sea. Throughout history, even some of the most famous Christians have experienced moments of doubt regarding their faith. We will see in the Gospel lesson today that one of those people who experienced doubts was none other than John the Baptist. In the Old Testament passage, we will also see that the people of Israel were struggling to believe in the promises of God. Isaiah was sent as a messenger to encourage God's people to keep covenant (or relationship) with God. The passage we looked at last week sets the stage for the unfolding good news that God has not abandoned His people.

The first reading today is from Isaiah Chapter 35. Before we read the text, it's important to take note of the context, the audience to whom Isaiah was speaking, and information that we can glean from other prophetic voices in the Bible. This prophet ministered to the people of the Southern Tribes of Israel including Benjamin and Judah during the time that the Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by Assyria. Micah and Hosea were prophets speaking on behalf of God at the same time as Isaiah. His message was one of repentance and subsequent hope for the future. Isaiah was a forerunner, one that announced the coming Messiah and his future kingdom, much like John the Baptist in the New Testament. Like the other prophets, Isaiah often saw near and far term events "telescoped" together, but even more so because of the greater range of his visions. When we look back in hindsight, it's easy for us to differentiate between the near term events and those in the distant future that have yet to be fulfilled. However, when we look at the events which haven't been fulfilled yet, such as the future era known by biblical scholars as the Millennial Kingdom, it's more

difficult to determine the order and timing of the events. This portion of Chapter 35 concerns the coming Kingdom which would be brought in by the Messiah. Looking back we understand that this would be fulfilled at Jesus' Second Coming. But Isaiah did not have the advantage of knowing the difference between what would happen when Jesus came the first time and what is yet to take place at His second coming. This is why it's important to understand the whole of Scripture when we read isolated portions of the prophetic Books.

As you study the first reading, pay attention to Isaiah's proclamation of the future hope for Israel and the whole world of believers, in the context of the future Millennial Kingdom.

> *1 The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus 2 It will blossom profusely And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, The majesty of our God. 3 Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. 4 Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. 7 And the scorched land will become a pool, And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass becomes reeds and rushes. 8 And a highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it. 9 No lion will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, 10 And the ransomed of the LORD will return, And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isaiah 35:1-10)*

One of the things that Isaiah looks forward to in the Millenial Kingdom reign of Jesus is that the broken parts of this earth will be restored; that includes nature and people. If we pause to assess our world, it seems that every part of it is broken at some level. Families are torn apart, lives are exhausted, fear and anxiety seem to be rampant. Although Isaiah prophesied long ago, his words are very relevant today. Isaiah's prophecy is meant to remind God's people that one day all will be well—He will set the record straight. He will save us. Those who trust in God to save them are those who are called the "redeemed" and the "ransomed" of the LORD. To be redeemed is to be bought back or restored to one's original intent. To be ransomed is to be set free from being in the grip of an enemy with a payment. Both of these descriptions can be treasured terms of endearment for those who walk on the "Highway of Holiness" by trusting in Christ's holiness to save them.

As a Christian, it's important to be patient and wait upon God, even when we see great injustices going on around us. Impatience was one of the issues that got into the way of the Jews properly interpreting the passages concerning the coming Messiah. One may think that if the First Century Jews had a good grasp on the Scriptures so many of them wouldn't have missed the First Coming of

Jesus. The Jews had endured centuries of persecution from the various world powers including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and finally the Romans. From all appearances the Prophet Micah made it very clear what would happen, even if this forerunner didn't explain the exact timing of the events. Micah said, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). Micah named the exact town in which the Messiah would be born. Though there were two towns named Bethlehem, he differentiated between the one in the North and the one near Jerusalem in which the new King would be born. Like the other prophets, Micah also telescoped near and far term events today when he saw the kingdom of Jesus.

> *1 And it will come about in the last days That the mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, And the peoples will stream to it. 2 And many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion will go forth the law, Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 3 And He will judge between many peoples And render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they train for war. (Micah 4:1-3)*

Micah said that the kingdom of the Messiah would be a time of peace, when weapons of war would be turned into peaceful use (v.3). In this age the city of Jerusalem would be the capital city of the universe (v.1) and the King would serve as the perfect judge over the entire world (v.3). The Jews misinterpreted this to mean that the Messiah would immediately usher in His Kingdom when he came, and who can blame them? It was only after Jesus was crucified, raised from the dead, and explained the Scriptures (Luke 24:27) to them that **some of them** understood. Even then, some doubted (Matthew 28:17).

Malachi was another prophet who called the people of God to be patient. He provided clear details about the events concerning the coming of the Messiah. In fact, Malachi announced that a forerunner, who we know as John the Baptist, would precede Jesus. He said, "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:1). This New Testament Prophet would come in the spirit of the Prophet Elijah (John 19:21), and that Elijah would return during the coming tribulation period. Malachi said, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5).

Exercising patience is very important especially when we expect God to come rushing in and fix the events in the fallen world. This is even more important when, like the Jews, we experience injustice at the hands of our civil rulers. In the second reading today from Saint James, we see this important leader of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:13) cautioning the young Church about the need to be

patient concerning the return of the Lord Jesus.

> *7 Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. 10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:7-10)*

James reminded us that the Prophets were an example of those who were patient and persisted through suffering and quoted from them as scriptural authority. He admonished us not to complain against one another, because living in the spirit of "unthankfulness" would bring about judgment (v.8). This hearkens back to Jesus' words: "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:2). James exercised authority over the believers gathered during the Jerusalem council (refer to Acts 15) and exhibited great patience towards those with whom he disagreed. One of the ways in which he did this is to claim the authority of the prophets. James said, "And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written" (Acts 15:15), and then he went on to quote from the prophets. James, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was supremely wise because he rested his authority on the weight of the supremacy of Scripture by relying upon the writings of the Prophets.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson about a New Testament Prophet, I wish to have you ponder this question. Some time ago, someone asked me who I thought was the greatest man that ever lived. I responded with a question. "Do you mean the greatest man that ever 'lived' in the past tense?" "Yes in the past tense," they said. My answer was easy. I said, "John the Baptist, and the greatest Man that ever 'lives' is Jesus." Who do you think was the greatest man that ever *lived*? Study the text from the Gospel lesson and as you read, try to ascertain why the greatest man that ever lived would ask Jesus the question that he did.

> *2 Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 6 And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." 7 And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces. 9 But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom*

> *of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:2-11)*

Why would John the Baptist, the greatest man that ever lived (v.11), send someone to ask Jesus whether he was the Messiah? Well, if you were in prison for speaking the truth and you expected the Messiah to deliver you, you might have trouble discerning whether Jesus was the promised one just like John the Baptist. The question for all of us, is whether we want the real Messiah or whether we want our own version of the Messiah (someone who doesn't leave us in prison). Saint Paul said, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Even though John was the greatest man that ever *lived*, John the Baptist was a fallible, imperfect man. But he was commended by Jesus for his faithfulness in fulfilling the role of the forerunner or messenger. In response to John the Baptist's question about whether Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus said, in so many words, YES! Since He was in the process of fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies (the blind see . . . the deaf hear and the dead are raised to life), He was reassuring John that his faith was well-placed in Jesus being the Messiah of God. As we saw before, Malachi said, "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple" (Malachi 3:1b). Jesus clearly fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah, including Malachi, and quoted it as proof of His divinity. (Matthew 11:10).

John the Baptist's shortcomings stand to give Christians hope, especially during the upcoming Christmas season, which is such a difficult time for so many people. Since even the greatest man that ever lived experienced periods of doubt in his life, we too shouldn't be surprised when it happens to us. Saint Peter said, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What about you, have you come to the place where you are doubting your faith? Read the advice from Jesus, the Greatest Man that Ever **Lives** and see what He has to say about coming to a place where you either confirm your faith in Him or find faith in Him for the first time.

> *16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. (John 3:16-21)*

Saint Paul explained, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in

righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

How do these Scriptures provide you with hope, especially during the Christmas season? Perhaps you would be willing to leave a comment on this web page or Facebook.

2. When you think of the terms "redeemed" and "ransomed" in regards to your relationship to God through Christ, how does this give you hope and patience for God to "work all things together for good" as He continues to conform you to the image of Jesus (Romans 8:28-29)?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/121513.cfm Third Sunday of Advent

First Reading Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10 (plus skipped verses 6B-9)

Isaiah 35:1-10 NASB 1 The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus 2 It will blossom profusely And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, The majesty of our God. 3 Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. 4 Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. 7 And the scorched land will become a pool, And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass becomes reeds and rushes. 8 And a highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it. 9 No lion will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, 10 And the ransomed of the LORD will return, And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Second Reading James 5:7-10

James 5:7-10 NASB 7 Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. 10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Gospel Reading Matthew 11:2-11

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Matthew 11:2-11 NASB 2 Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 6 "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." 7 And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces. 9 "But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' 11 "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass: Sunday, December 8, 2013 Second Sunday ofAdvent

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What are you looking forward to? This question may have a myriad of answers: Christmas, time with family, a new year, a raise . . . But after all of this comes and goes, what else are you looking forward to? At the end of your life, what do you have to look forward to? When nothing seems to be going right, is there something outside of the rollercoaster of this life to look forward to?

The Bible speaks much about expectation, hope and things to come. Because it is divinely inspired, it has the unique voice to speak to us from an eternal perspective about real hope and what we can look forward to. This week we will begin with Isaiah's prophecy to the Jews in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, the Jewish hope of a Deliverer. Next, we will study what Saint Paul had to say about Jesus as the hope of the Gentiles, and conclude with a Gospel lesson from Matthew about John the Baptist's pronouncement of the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Today, both the first and second readings as well as the Gospel lesson were either directly from Isaiah or drawn from this Old Testament prophet. As a review, Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah during the period from about 740 to 700 BC. He spoke words of both condemnation and hope to the tribes of Benjamin and Judah concerning their impending capture by the Babylonian empire. This was during the same time in which the Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by Assyria in 722 BC.

The first reading is from Isaiah Chapter 11. Isaiah writes in a form called "prophetic foreshortening" in which two events (one near and one far away) are written in such a way that seems to convey that

they happen at the same time. Study the text and see if you can locate the transition point where the prophecy regarding Jesus shifts from the First Coming to His Second Coming.

> *1 Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. 3 And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; 4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. 5 Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. 6 And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. 7 Also the cow and the bear will graze; Their young will lie down together; And the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. 9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. 10 Then it will come about in that day That the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious. (Isaiah 11:1-10)*

Isaiah revealed some important truths about the source of the Messiah, the nature of the Messiah, and the nature of his future "millennial" kingdom on earth. Isaiah said that Jesus would come from the line of Jesse (v.1), who was King David's father. He said that He would possess the "Spirit of the LORD", wisdom and understanding, and the "spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (v.2). Next, in verses 3-4 a transition occurred which pointed to the future reign of Jesus initiated at His Second Coming. Isaiah said, "He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked." This means that justice will finally reign on the earth because Jesus will be physically ruling and reigning. Right now in this era of human history, evil is not always immediately punished and many times the wicked prosper by their cunning schemes. Not so in the millennial reign of King Jesus. The first time Jesus came to the earth as a Servant and like a Lamb (Isaiah 53:7). But when Jesus returns a second time He will rule the earth with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:27) and as a Lion (Revelation 5:5). Jesus' reign will occur during the future Millennial Kingdom when Jesus will reign over the earth for a thousand years beginning immediately after the end of the Great Tribulation period. If this sounds terrifying to you, it doesn't have to be. When you place your faith in Christ's righteousness, you do not have to fear His rule and reign, because you are united with Him forever. "There is therefore, now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). If you are not in Christ Jesus, then your fear should be a wake-up call to consider your eternal destiny.

As we move onto the second reading from Romans 15:4-9 (plus the skipped verses 10-12), again we

find a writing from Isaiah, one of the most frequently quoted of the prophets. The text opens with an important admonition about the value of the Old Testament Scriptures. As you read, note the importance of this admonition as well as the connection to the first reading from Isaiah 11.

> *4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; 6 that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME." 10 And again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." 11 And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM." 12 And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." (Romans 15:4-12)*

The opening admonition was that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (v.4). Saint Paul went on to quote from several Psalms and then Isaiah. In verse 12 Paul quoted directly from the same section of text that we read in the first reading, Isaiah 11 verses 1 and 10. Paul did so to show that this portion of Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus at His First Coming, and to give hope to the Gentile Roman believers. He said, "Let all the peoples praise Him" (v.11a), not just the Jewish believers but believers from every tribe and nation. We can encourage one another through these words since we see that the Scriptures are true, and that this prophecy is fulfilled through Jesus. We can trust that the since the prophesies concerning Jesus' First Coming were proven to be true we can trust that the prediction of the things that will happen at His Second Coming are also true.

Before we move onto the Gospel lesson, I want to share a section in the Gospel of Saint Luke Chapter 4 because it helps to illustrate the importance of Isaiah's prophetic writings. When Isaiah wrote his Book all of the events concerning Jesus were yet future. Yet in this section in Saint Luke Jesus quoted from Isaiah and said that a portion of it was being fulfilled at that very instant. But Jesus stopped his quote exactly at that point at which the prophetic timetable turned to events concerning His Second Coming. In Luke Chapter 4, Jesus is just beginning His ministry and he had returned to his home town of Nazareth. The context of this section is just after Jesus' baptism, which is the same time period as the Gospel lesson today in Matthew that we will look at later in this study. Read the text from Saint Luke and carefully note Jesus' quotation from Isaiah that is marked in all CAPITAL LETTERS.

> *16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He*

> *entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, 18 "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE DOWNTRODDEN, 19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." 20 And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)*

In this section of Luke, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2a but stopped short of the concluding portion of Isaiah 61:2. Verse two, with the section highlighted that Jesus omitted from Isaiah, said "To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD, **And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn**." Jesus said in verse 21b of Luke 4, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v.21b). It's very significant that Jesus stopped where he did when he was quoting from Isaiah because it is important to understand the distinction between the purpose of His First Coming and of His second coming. We live in the "pause" between the First and Second Coming of Christ. This era allows us time to choose to embrace the favor of the Lord (grace) through faith. The next era, though, will usher in the day of "vengeance of our God." Who can stand in the midst of Him setting the record straight? None of us has a chance outside of God's wonderful provision through the death of His Son, Jesus at His first coming. Understanding this distinction will make it possible to properly understand the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. It also helps to interpret the future events in the Book of Revelation including the purpose of the Great Tribulation period that we discussed last week.

The Gospel lesson today was from Matthew Chapter 3. Again, the text contained a quotation from the Prophet Isaiah.

> *1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" 4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and*

> *I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:1-12)*

In this Gospel reading, John the Baptist announced the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He quoted from Isaiah 40:3 showing that he was the one about whom the Prophet Isaiah was speaking when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT." Next, Matthew described the ministry and nature of John the Baptist including his opposition from the two prominent groups that later also opposed Jesus, the Pharisees and Sadducees. John the Baptist warned that Jesus would eventually judge these oppressors (v.12). In retrospect we understand now that Jesus' judgment of them will not occur until His Second Coming, something which was unexpected – likely even to John the Baptist. The apostles expected Jesus to set up His Kingdom at any moment (John 6:15). The text today was just before Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:16). After Jesus was baptized another portion of Isaiah 11 was fulfilled when the Spirit of God descended like a dove and came to rest on Jesus (Matthew 3:16). Looking back to the first reading we see, "the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him (Isaiah 11:2a).

What's the importance of the Gospel reading for your life as a believer in Jesus Christ? First, we can trust the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus' First Coming because we can read about the facts of their fulfillment in the New Testament. Second, since we can trust the prophecies about Jesus' First Advent we can trust those about His Second Coming. Jesus' Second coming is when the believing world will realize the wonderful promises from God including restoration of the world to its pre-fallen, sinless condition. Isaiah said in the first reading, "And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). We have hope that Jesus' Millennial Kingdom will be a world of universal peace. This promise should motivate us to reach out to those in our community who don't know Jesus Christ personally. Thirdly, the Gospel reading warns us to not be deceived about our standing before God. The Pharisees and Sadducees were putting their trust in the wrong place (being children of Abraham). John the Baptist confronted this false belief and pointed them to put their trust in the only One who could truly save them, Jesus, the Promised Messiah.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Even though prophecy constitutes about one third of the Bible the importance of this genre is frequently downplayed and the interpretation spiritualized. Yet we know that living with a proper anticipation of the Lord's return encourages holy living as well as dedication in loving Jesus with our whole heart. Read the following Scripture. How does this cause you to live a more holy life as well as to reach out to others that don't know Jesus?

> *7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the*

> *purpose of prayer. 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7-11)*

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/120813.cfm

First Reading

Isaiah 11:1-10 NASB 1 Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. 3 And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; 4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. 5 Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. 6 And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. 7 Also the cow and the bear will graze; Their young will lie down together; And the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. 9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. 10 Then it will come about in that day That the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious.

Second Reading Romans 15:4-9 plus skipped verses 10-12

Romans 15:4-12 NASB 4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; 6 that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME." 10 And again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." 11 And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE

PEOPLES PRAISE HIM." 12 And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE."

Gospel Reading

Matthew 3:1-12 NASB 1 Now in those days John the Baptist *came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" 4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 "And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 12-01-2013

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In the lesson today, we will study the importance of being prepared and the dangers of not doing this in spite of having adequate warnings. We will look at an illustration from history as well as the Old Testament Books of Genesis and Isaiah. Finally, we will turn to the Gospel of Matthew and conclude with teaching about the End Times from what is known as the Olivet Discourse.

On June 25, 1876, the Indian scout named Goes-Ahead warned General George Custer not to attack the Indian encampment at Little Bighorn, South Dakota. Goes-Ahead was so certain about the negative outcome that he removed his US Army uniform and changed into traditional Native American Indian clothing, which was supposed to ease the entry of his soul to the afterlife. Custer considered these actions as "defeatist" and was so angry at this and the other scout's behavior that the General dismissed them on the spot, an action which saved the Indian's lives. Custer continued with the attack that in retrospect had very predictable results. Not a single Army soldier in Custer's brigade survived the attack and as a result, little was known about what actually happened during the battle. It wasn't until General Terry arrived two days later on June 27 that anyone even knew that the brigade had perished. "Custer's Last Stand," as it came to be known, was a disaster for Custer and his men because he was ill-prepared for the battle. The well-skilled and qualified General was alert, yet he ultimately wasn't equipped with the resources necessary to win the battle. Even though he was forewarned, he wasn't prepared enough to win the Battle, though those after him learned from his mistakes and went on to be victorious.

What can we learn about General Custer's Last Stand? Although this military leader was forewarned, he and his troops were not well enough prepared to win the battle. Likewise, people

are warned about the return of the Lord and the coming tribulation for those who haven't trusted in Him through faith, yet many still persist in their sin and unbelief. The Bible is full of admonition for people to believe while they still have the chance. The Prophet Isaiah said, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near." In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, God instructed Noah to build an ark to save his family from the coming global flood (Genesis 6:13). Although the people didn't have the Bible, Noah, who was called a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), warned the people about their coming destruction. In spite of the fact that they were cautioned for 120 years (Genesis 6:3) the entire world perished except for Noah and his family (7:21-22). Though only Noah's family believed, it's certain that anyone would have been allowed to enter and be saved.

The Holy Scriptures play a very important role in warning the people in the modern era about the need to repent and trust in the finished work of Jesus for forgiveness of their sin and deliverance from the tribulation that is prophesied to come upon the earth. People in the western world today have even less of an excuse to say that they haven't been warned since the Bible is readily available to them. In past eras this wasn't always the case. Not everyone has had access to the Bible in order to receive proper instruction about how to become a believer in God and His plan of salvation. Many years after Noah's flood in the Old Testament, there was an era when the Bible became lost to the Jewish people and was rediscovered during the reign of godly King Josiah. This discovery led to a vigorous revival among the Jews. If you desire to read more, this history is found in Second Kings Chapter 22. The moral of the story from Custer's Last Stand and the teachings of the Bible is to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

A prominent theme in the Bible is the prophecy concerning the eventual restoration and spiritual awakening of the Jewish people. In the first reading, we see the Prophet Isaiah making a prediction about the future restoration of the Nation of Israel. The reading is from Isaiah Chapter 2. Read about God's plan for Israel and the prominent place that Jerusalem will play in the future. As you read, underline the word "will" each time it appears in the text.

> *1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that in the last days, The mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will 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 concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD. (Isaiah 2:1-5)*

In the introduction today, we saw that the prophetic message of the Bible was to listen to God's warnings and to be prepared in order to avoid future judgment. In Isaiah's message, the point

wasn't to tell the Jewish people about the need to be prepared, but rather to tell all the people in the world what God will do regarding His People Israel. Isaiah said that in the "last days" God will establish Jerusalem as the true religious capital of the world (v.2). Jerusalem will be where God will live and judge the nations, and the location of His teaching that will go throughout the world (vv. 3-4). God will bring worldwide peace and weapons will be eliminated and converted into devices for peaceful use (v.4). The entire nation of Israel will then walk in the light of the Lord (v.5). Though Isaiah's message wasn't something that we can act upon by being prepared it can bring us hope that God's plan for His people will ultimately prevail and bring worldwide peace. As in-grafted believers in Israel (Romans 11:17) this should provide us with comfort that God can and will work in our lives as well.

In the second reading today (unlike what we saw in the first) we **do** find a calling from God for us to be prepared, as we saw in the opening illustration about Noah. As you read the second reading from Romans, be thinking about some specific actions to which God may be calling you take in your life.

> *11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)*

God told us in verse 12 to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" but then went on to tell us to take off other things. In verse 13 Paul said to "put on the armor of light" and take off drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, and envy (v.13) and lust (v.14). Paul said in Colossians 3, "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, [and] abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its [evil] practices" (vv.8-9). God offers us empowerment to be able to take things off through the putting on of the mind of Jesus Christ. There isn't a magical formula about how we can put on the mind of Jesus Christ, but some ways are through the study of His Word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers. By studying God's Word, seeking the Lord in prayer and fellowshipping with other believers, we start to recognize the patterns of the darkness and begin to make no provision for the flesh (the old way of life apart from Christ) so that we can walk in newness of life. It is a battle, and unless we surrender daily to God's Spirit who gives us the power to resist the Enemy, we will have as much success as Custer in his last stand.

In the Gospel reading today, we leave the Gospel of Luke we studied last week and turn to Matthew and the subject of eschatology, the study of the final events in the history of the world. This section of Scripture is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave it on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley from the Temple. As was the case in the second reading from

today, God made a call for people to be prepared. He used an illustration from Noah, whom we discussed today in the introduction.

> *36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. (Matthew 24:36-44)*

The timeline of these future events is near the end of what is known as the tribulation period. The purpose of this seven year span is to restore the Jewish Nation and cause them to follow God (Ezekiel 39:22b). We saw an insight from Isaiah regarding this future restoration in the first reading today. The first event on the prophetic horizon is the return of the Lord for His Church described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." After the Church is removed and after some unknown period of time the tribulation will commence. Just before this section of the text in Matthew we see the introduction of the tribulation period. "[F]or then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall" (Matthew 24:21). What Jesus is explaining in this section is how unbelievers who have survived the seven years of tribulation will be judged and not allowed to enter in God's eternal kingdom in earth, the first thousand years of which is referred to as the millennial reign of Christ. Just as in the days of Noah, God warned the people to repent of their sin and turn to Him for rescue from the coming judgment. In this case God warned the people during the entire seven year period to repent of their sins and to turn to God for salvation (Revelation 16:11). To be certain that everyone heard the message of salvation God even sent an angel that preached from the sky! "And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." (Revelation 14:6-7). Even though everyone heard the warning, not everyone responded. One of the "two men in the field" (v.40) and one of the two women at the mill (v.41) will be taken in judgment (as non-believers) and not allowed to enter into Jesus' kingdom reign on earth. This judgment is known as the "Harvest of the earth" and is described in Revelation 14:19 as "the great winepress of the wrath of God." The other woman and man are those that came to believe during the tribulation period. They will be allowed to enter into this eternity of peace with God because they responded to the message of salvation offered to

them.[1]

What does the teaching in the Olivet Discourse mean to us today? First, we must believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ in order to escape God's coming judgment. Even though we have been warned we must also be prepared by seeking God while it's still possible. Second, God calls us to instruct others so that they also find salvation through the only means possible, faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). If we accept God's offer of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus we can have comfort that God will spare us from the tribulation period coming upon the earth (Luke 21:36, 1 Thessalonians 5:9). In addition, we become people of eternity, living for another world and we find that this world is not our home. This changes our daily life because it redefines our value system and priorities. Finally, we must allow God to place us into situations that require us to trust more in God. Saint Paul said, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the second reading we asked you to jot down at least two specific actions to which God is specially calling you take in your life. Pray as follows then read this Scripture again (below).

> *Dear God, You are Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords. I praise you for preserving Your Word in the Bible and making it available to me to read. Please show me what you would have me do regarding the reading from Romans today. I pray this in Jesus' Holy Name, Amen.*
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> 11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

A. Write down the actions that you feel God is calling you to do.

B. Tell at least one other person one of the insights that you gained from your study and answer to your prayer for insight.

2. In the first reading we saw a list of the things that God will do regarding the nation of Israel. Read the following Scripture and write down at least three things that God has promised in His word that He will do for you.

> *4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly*

> *places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Ephesians 2:4-9)*

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/120113.cfm First Sunday of Advent

First Reading

Isaiah 2:1-5 NASB 1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that In the last days, The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will 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 concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Second Reading

Romans 13:11-14 NASB 11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Gospel Reading (plus skipped verse 36)

Matthew 24:36-44 NASB 36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 "For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "For this reason you be ready

too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

Other Scriptures Used this Week:

2 Kings 22

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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[1] ***Note: There are many different eschatological views and every biblical scholar approaches the text with a certain degree of pre-understanding. We are no different and have arrived at our eschatological view after many years of Bible study. Our position falls into what is known as the futurist, premillenial, and pretribulational view. We believe that there are correct and incorrect views on this subject but strive to hold our position loosely enough that we are open to alternative interpretations and show grace to those who hold these views that God may receive all the glory.***