

Readings

First Testament: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11
Psalm: Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14 (8)
Epistle: 2 Peter 3:8-14
Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

Commentary

Advent is a time to anticipate a new beginning with the life of the infant Jesus and with the new life of resurrected Christians. In Isaiah, God offers comfort to his people, people who must struggle to remain Faithful. The Psalmist recognizes difficulty remaining Faithful, by pleading, "Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation." 2 Peter recommends patience while awaiting the reward for Faithfulness. Finally the Gospel of Mark prepares the Faithful to recognize the hand of God in the life of Jesus that John the Baptist anticipates.

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Annotated Bibliography

Material above the double line draws from material below the double line. Those uninterested in scholarly and tangential details should stop reading here. If they do, however, they may miss some interesting scholarly details.

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Isa 40:1-11

Gregory J. Polan, O.S.B., review of John Goldingay, The Message of Isaiah 40—55: A Literary-Theological Commentary¹

Polan quotes Goldingay,

... Isa. 40-55 holds together departure from Babylon and homecoming to Jerusalem, as the Pentateuch holds together the departure from Egypt and arrival in Canaan, though, like the Pentateuch, it incorporates no arrival in the land. ... The purpose of the prophecies is to get the people ready for that event. (p. 7)

Advent readies the Faithful for new life.

¹ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 3 (July 2007) 544.

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Isaiah 40:1-11

Joseph Blenkinsopp, review of John Goldingay and David Payne, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40—55, Volume 1, Introduction and Commentary on Isaiah 40:1—44:23; Volume 2, Commentary on Isaiah 44:24—55:13.²

Blenkinsopp agrees with Goldingay, who argues that Isaiah 40:1-11 is addressed to the diaspora communities in Babylon about 540 B.C. and that Isaiah 48:20-21 uses Isaiah 40:1 as an exhortation to leave Babylon.

Isa 40:2

Reed Lessing, review of Archibald L. H. J. M. Van Wieringen, The Reader-Oriented Unity of the Book of Isaiah³

Van Wieringen argues that “Israel is punished for its own sins (40:2; 43:27-28; 50:1), whereas the Servant suffers for the sins of others (53:4-6).” Lessing concludes by asserting that the strength of Van Wieringen “is his ability to provide structural sense in a biblical book that often appears to be a meandering homily with no stated communicative goals.”

Isa 40:2

Stanley D. Walters, "'To the Rock' (2 Samuel 21:10)"⁴

Walters draws from Rizpah, the concubine of Saul, to argue that Rizpah “is a figure of penitent Israel longing for restoration and blessing. The death of her sons is not just a *lex talionis* payment but a figure of war as divine judgment ...”

Isaiah 40:3-5

Steven L. Bridge, review of Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (eds.), Isaiah in the New Testament⁵

Bridge writes,

Isaiah’s considerable influence is demonstrated by the ways in which the NT authors repeatedly draw upon his prophecies to validate, shape and infuse content into their writings. In the Gospels, Isaiah’s oracles appear at crucial moments of Jesus’ life. They validate and explain his virgin birth (Isa 7:14, his forerunner (40:3-5 [used here]) ...

² the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 2 (July 2008) 342-343.

³ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 1 (July 2008) 133.

⁴ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 3 (July 2008) 460.

⁵ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 1 (July 2007) 190.

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Isaiah 40:3-5

Charles H. Talbert, review of Michael E. Fuller, The Restoration of Israel: Israel's Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts⁶

Taylor writes, "There are continuities between this [Fuller] view of restoration and the varieties of early Jewish beliefs, but there seem to be even more discontinuities." In other words, Taylor does not think much of Fuller.

Isaiah 40:3

John Paul Heil, "Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13"⁷

Heil presents Jesus, the Son and servant of God, as the antitype of Israel. Mark 1:6 associates locusts and camel's hair with John the Baptist. Heil concludes,

That Jesus is with wild animals but the angels minister to him confirms and reinforces for the audience that Jesus is indeed the beloved and favored Son and Servant of God empowered with God's Spirit (1:10-11) to "baptize" with the Holy Spirit (1:8) the sinful and repentant Son of God, Israel (1:4-5).

Isa 40:3

Richard J. Dillon, "The Benedictus in Micro- and Macrocontext"⁸

Dillon explains in a long sentence,

The title given to the newborn [John the Baptist] by his father is "prophet of the Most High," which he immediately explicates by alluding to that mixed *vaticinium* [*ex eventu*, prophecy from the event]⁹ of Mal 3:1 and Isa 40:3 [used here] known to us from Mark 1:2-3 [used below] rather than from Luke himself: "for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (Luke 1:76), John's "going before" the *Kyrios* and his task of "preparing" for him a "people well suited" were the terms of his mission statement by Gabriel (Luke 1:17), who added the phrase "in the spirit and power of Elijah" and unmistakable phraseology from Mal 4:6 LXX (and of Sir 48:10, of course, which echoes the prophecy).

This article links the First Reading with the Gospel.

⁶ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 3 (July 2007) 580.

⁷ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 1 (July 2006) 67, 77.

⁸ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 2006) 472.

⁹ http://www.google.com/search?q=vaticinium&sourceid=navclient-ff&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1B3GGGL_enUS260US261 081019.

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Isa 40:6-8

David J. Verseput, "Genre and Story: The Community Setting of the Epistle of James"¹⁰

Verseput places Isa 40:3 in the New Testament context.

The remainder of James' epistolary opening (1:2-18) continues this note of consolation to the community. The opening challenge to rejoice in affliction is supported in Jas 1:9-1 by an unmistakable allusion to Isa 40:6-8, a text which is read as a threat of doom against those who currently oppress the community.

Isa 40:6-8 ends with " ... he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Isa 40:8

Reed Lessing, review of Bryan E. Beyer, Encountering the Book of Isaiah: A Historical and Theological Survey¹¹

This review contains considerable interesting material. Lessing concludes his review, "that those seeking a conservative Christian overview of Isaiah will be adequately served."

One of my problems has been confusing Babylon and Assyria. Lessing explains,

... during the Assyrian era Babylon possessed a prestige similar to that of Rome in the Middle Ages. Thus, Assyrian kings such as Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, and Sennacherib were proclaimed "king [sic] of Babylon." It may be argued, therefore, that Isaiah's oracles in 13:1—14:23 are addressed to Assyria and the Assyrian king Sargon II.

¹⁰ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (July 2000) 102 ff.

¹¹ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 3 (July 2008) 562.

Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14 (8)

Psalm 85:10

Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy¹²
Barker speculates about *justice shall look down from heaven*.

M. Idel has suggested that these *forms of glory* are evidence for reconstructing the oldest Jewish mystical traditions, that these forms in the sanctuary were a part of the priestly world view. Perhaps they occur also in Psalm 85, where Righteousness looks known from heaven ... Is the language of personification any longer appropriate?

As has happened so often in the past, I do not understand what Barker means. I use Barker because others see relevance, even if I do not. Others may then check the original pages for a better understanding.

Psalm 85:1-13

The Codex Sinaiticus has the verses, but I am uncomfortable with the numbering. In other words, I doubt Psalm 85 Sinaiticus is the same as the Lectionary Psalm 85.

Psalm 85:13

Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism"¹³

Gillingham links the Psalm with Isaiah, "... Isa 58:8 and Ps 85:13 [used here]: the phrase "righteousness will go before him" in Isaiah 58 reads ... and in Psalm 85 it is ..., perhaps indicating a formulaic expression adapted in different ways in each text."

¹² London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003, 191.

¹³ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 475.

2 Peter 3:8-14

While there are many discrepancies among the manuscripts, scholars are in agreement about which words best fit the eclectic Greek.

2 Peter 3:2-10, 11

Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism, 2nd ed. Erroll F. Rhodes, tr.¹⁴

Manuscripts with these verses date from the Third and Fourth Century. Plate 25 is a picture of the end of the epistle, with a prayer by the scribe for himself and the reader. This manuscript is now at the Vatican. A manuscript dating from the Seventh Century is in Cologne. An Eighth Century manuscript used to be at Damascus. Where it may be now, I have not figured out.

2 Pet 3:10-13

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, United States Catholic Catechism for Adults¹⁵

This is another instance of sloppy scholarship by the Bishops. The index the Bishops have prepared refers to page 158, but there is no sign of 2 Pet 3:10-13 there.

2 Pet 3:10

André Ménard, O.F.M. Cap., "The Spirituality of Transitus in the Writings of St. Bonaventure"¹⁶

The key phrase in this Lectionary verse is *will pass away*. For St. Bonaventure the spiritual life consists of focusing on God, to the detriment of everything else, especially *the world*. Elsewhere scholars have shown that Jesus came into the world to save it, not destroy it. Ménard argues that the key to understanding St. Bonaventure is "whoever wishes to endure forever must not become attached to that which passes away, but must rely on the divine words."

Relying on the divine words is what these Personal Notes do. Suiting the "pay, pray, and obey" spirituality, Ménard writes of "the contemplative passage that leads to learned ignorance and the darkness of the negative way." Ménard avoids any mention of the conflict between truth and politics that engages much in these Notes. Saint Bonaventure wrote, "... all intellectual activities must be left behind ...," which I think must be an overstatement.

¹⁴ Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, 92, 100,101, 123 (did not locate).

¹⁵ Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, 552.

¹⁶ Greyfriars Review, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2004) 43, 48.

This is particularly difficult when the bishops simply assert what needs to be proved in the case of when life gains human rights. The bishops simply write, “to defend human life, from conception until natural death.” Again, the bishops write about confronting “the almost incomprehensible fact that abortions extinguish the lives of nearly 4,000 children per day ...,” without making any distinction between procured abortions and natural abortions.¹⁷ As it is, the Bishops do not cite any research to support their 4,000 number.

When the bishops write about “equally serious” reasons, the bishops appear to take an equi-probabilist rather than a probabilist approach to the problem of abortion. Probabilism and equi-probabilism are technical terms in moral theology concerning when one may act. Probabilism offers more options than equi-probabilism. Probabilism only requires true probability that an act is licit, rather than the higher standard of equally probable. The bishops appear to close the option of considering abortion at any time in the first trimester as never reasonable. There is more about this in the Notes from 2005.

On the one hand, I see what the bishops are doing as in accord with the approach of Saint Bonaventure and, in that sense, a holy and righteous activity. On the other hand, I see what the bishops are doing as anti-intellectual and, in that sense, an unholy and unrighteous activity. With their reputation in a shambles over their sexual cover-up, their appearance in this questionable activity is most unseemly and may account for why forty-seven percent of all Catholics say they are “pro-choice,” according to a survey by Marist College’s Institute for Public Opinion commissioned by the Knights of Columbus. The Institute took the survey between September 24 and October 3, 2008 and released the results October 14.¹⁸

Luke 3:4, 6

Mark 1:1-8

Mark 1:1

Whether *Jesus Christ* belongs in the Greek is a difficult decision for scholars. *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.*

Mark 1:4

John the Baptist appeared in the desert is difficult in the original manuscripts.

Mark 1:8

With is difficult in *he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*

¹⁷ Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde, Bishop of Arlington and Most Reverend Francis X. DiLorenzo, Bishop of Richmond, “Voting with a Well-Formed Conscience,” The Catholic Virginian, Vol. 83, No. 26 (October 29, 2008), page 3.

¹⁸ Mark Pattison, Catholic News Service, Washington, “Survey shows Catholic views on moral issues,” The Catholic Virginian, Vol. 83, No. 26 (October 29, 2008), page, 1 col. 3.

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Mark 1:1-8

Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism, 2nd ed. Erroll F. Rhodes, tr.¹⁹

A manuscript containing these verses dating from the Ninth Century is in London; another from the Ninth Century is in Milan.

The Sinaitic Syriac manuscript preserves Mark 1:1-12.

To my surprise, there are at least six editions of the Vulgate cited.

The Alands explain the apparatus for Mark 1:2. "In Mark 1:2 the source of the Old Testament text is identified by *γεγραπηταις Ησαια τω προφητη*. The quotation is actually a composite from multiple sources, so that in the manuscripts we find the correction: *τοις προφηταις ...*"

Mark 1:1-35

The Codex Sinaiticus has these verses, enabling me to check the apparatus. Except for some spelling differences and letter formations, verse 2 is the same for both the Sinaiticus and eclectic editions.

Mark 1:1-15

Alicia Batten, review of Jean Delorme, Parole et récit évangéliques: Études sur l'évangile de Marc²⁰

Delorme was a scholar, priest, and pioneer in the application of semiotics to biblical analysis. Batten uses the word *semiotic(s)* at least seven times in the review. Semiotics is "a general philosophical theory of signs and symbols that deals especially with their function in both artificially constructed and natural languages and comprises the three branches of syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics."²¹ In other words, Delorme helps "readers to be more aware of how they find meaning in texts."

Batten goes on,

... the beginning of Mark announces the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God, and this gospel message is then "actualized" by the story. Throughout the entire narrative, this "gospel" is at work in the various stories; in other words, it is the primary referent of the stories. The entire Gospel must be read and studied, however, before one can go back to the beginning and appreciate how Mark

¹⁹ Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, 122, 250, 290.

²⁰ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 4 (July 2007) 820.

²¹ <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/unabridged?va=semiotics&x=0&y=0>
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1:1-15 [the Lectionary uses Mark 1:1-8 here] reflects, in condensed form, this orientation of the Gospel as a whole.

Mark 1:1-15

Elliott C. Maloney, O.S.B., review of Salvador Villota Herrero, Palabras sin ocaso: Función interpretiva de Mc 13,28-37 en el discursó escatológica de Marcos²²
Herrero focuses on semantics. He uses Mark 1:1-15, the beginning of the Gospel, to show harmony with Mark 13:2-37, the end of the Gospel.

Mark 1:1-15

Mary Ann Beavis, review of Ira Brent Driggers, Following God through Mark: Theological Tension in the Second Gospel²³
Beavis writes,

Driggers refines the frequent interpretive claim that Jesus is the main character of the Gospel with the observation that Mark's prologue (1:1-15) creates an expectation that God will be the story's main *actor* throughout the narrative. This distinction between main character (Jesus; cf. 1:1) and main actor (God; cf. 1:2-3) is useful, since, as D. observes, "in many respects the actions of human characters in the story may be seen as reactions to what God is doing, has already done, or, in some cases, is about to do" (p. 11).

Mark 1:1

Karl A. Kuhn, "The 'One like a Son of Man' Becomes the 'Son of God'"²⁴
Kuhn points out that "Son of God" in Mark 1:1 is only associated with "Son of the Most High" in 5:7. From a recently discovered *Aramaic Apocalypse*, Kuhn uses both titles to argue,

the presentation offered in Jewish apocalyptic writings of the unique transcendence of this awaited redeemer figure, of whom Christians professed Jesus as the fulfillment, likely had an important role in shaping Christian conceptions of Jesus long before the Gospel was proclaimed and articulated in a largely non-Palestinian milieu.

²² the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 1 (July 2008) 175.

²³ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 3 (July 2008) 597-598.

²⁴ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 1 (July 2007) 35, 42.

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Mark 1:1

Daniel W. Ulrich, "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew"²⁵

Ulrich argues that Matthew wrote because he was dissatisfied with Mark. Ulrich argues that even if *gospel* referred to oral proclamation as opposed to a written text before 150 AD; that did not prevent Matthew from having access to a written version of Mark, against which Matthew wrote.

Mark 1:2-3

John Paul Heil, "Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13"²⁶

See footnote 7, above.

Mark 1:4

Richard J. Dillon, "The Benedictus in Micro- and Macrocontext"²⁷

See footnote 8, above.

Mark 1:6

Paul Lawrence, The IVP Atlas of Bible History²⁸

Lawrence points out that that Palestine "has 4,700 species of insects, of which some two thousand are beetles and one thousand butterflies." He observes this in the context of John the Baptist eating locusts, flying insects that were 'clean' and, therefore, were permissible to eat. This factoid helps make what happened real.

²⁵ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 1 (July 2007) 68.

²⁶ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 70, No. 3 (July 2008) 67, 76, 77.

²⁷ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 2006) 477.

²⁸ Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 2006, 54.