

Personal Notes  
051225 Christmas 014B  
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Who is Jesus? A source of everlasting, incomprehensible joy. Jesus Christ is the chief beneficiary of the Messianic promises,<sup>1</sup> which the Faithful, in turn, inherit. Two different realities are at work. First, is the reality of what happened, namely the birth of Jesus. The Holy Family would have celebrated his birthday from the very beginning. According to Margaret Barker, the early church celebrated the birth of Jesus at Yom Kippur, the ancient Jewish New Year festival, in the fall of the year.<sup>2</sup> Birthdays are not very scientific in explaining what happened. Lack of academic rigor is the first reality.

The second reality is the explanation of what happened. The explanation is for those at a distance, like the Faithful in some ways, but not for the immediate family. The explanation of the Incarnation, God becoming human, or the virgin birth were beside the point on the birthday cakes as years went by.

Through grace, the Faithful become one in family with God. This means that the technical aspects of reality pale in comparison to the person of Jesus, especially as found in the Eucharist. Partly for this reason and partly because of the quantity of scholarly work in English available, I neglect the Greek this Sunday, other than to point out that *Eucharist* is a derivative for Thanksgiving, such as the holiday.

In order to evangelize, the first apostles and the early Church needed to explain their joy in Jesus. Western thought only began to consider the theology of the virginity of Mary about 400 A.D.<sup>3</sup> The early Church also looked at the First Testament with excitement, looking for signs of the Messiah. Luke 2:11 is convinced that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah.<sup>4</sup>

In explaining what happened at Christmas, the early Church was not concerned with the finer points of exegesis, such as what did the inspired writers mean as they wrote. The first Christians, concerned about what the First Testament meant to them, reinterpreted the First Testament without worrying too much about the finer points of scholarship. Saint Peter, the first Pope, was no academician.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, Observations on the "Miracle Chapters" of Matthew 8-9, the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978), 563.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 127.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Globe, "Some Doctrinal Variants in Matthew 1 and Luke 2, and the Authority of the Neutral Text," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 1980), 59, fn 26.

<sup>4</sup> Robert H. Stein, *The Matthew-Luke Agreements Against Mark: Insight from John*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July 1992) 499.

Several weeks ago, I noted that I had completed the Fathers of the Church in their Sunday Sermons.<sup>5</sup> I am now beginning to incorporate the work of Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003). Barker is especially adept with ancient Hebrew. To this point, I have cited scholars as a mark of respect. Barker is different.

In the Preface, she writes, "...nor can 'canonical' texts continue to enjoy a privileged position." From the way I was brought up, canonical texts will always enjoy a privileged position. Barker does not address that aspect of my background. Barker seems relatively cavalier about any need to determine what is inspired and what not. That bothers me. I am not the only one bothered.

Kevin P. Sullivan of Illinois Wesleyan University included the following comment in his the Catholic Biblical Quarterly review of Barker. "I find Barker's claims about the angelic nature of the priesthood unconvincing." He goes on to mention the work of other scholars, whom Barker does not mention.<sup>6</sup> When I attribute material to Barker, I mean to include a special sense of skepticism against her scholarship. The volume of citations to her study may mislead the unwary.

The Lectionary readings begin with First Isaiah, promising good fortune to the offspring of David. Barker regards the Davidic monarchs as God and king, when

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<sup>5</sup> *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume One: From the First Sunday of Advent to Quinquagesima*, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996)

*The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Two: From the First Sunday in Lent to the Sunday after the Ascension*, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996)

*The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Three: From Pentecost to the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost*, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996)

*The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading and Meditation: Volume Four: From the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost to the Twenty-fourth and Last Sunday after Pentecost*, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996)

<sup>6</sup> Kevin P. Sullivan, review of Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 314.

they entered the holy of holies.<sup>7</sup> Though these Lectionary readings are the source for explaining much Christmas joy, they also explain some anger on the part of Jesus.

When Matthew has Jesus living in Capharnum, angry with his fellow-townsmen, Jesus quotes Isaiah 1:1-2 in his anger, *the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...*<sup>8</sup> Barker remarks, "The familiarity of these words should not obscure the fact that they are very strange."<sup>9</sup> According to Barker, the king was an angel, born in many forms of light,<sup>10</sup> that very light that characterizes the *Clare* in Poor Clare. Isaiah 9:6, *both now and forever, The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!* is not looking centuries down the line to Jesus, except after Christians got around to reinterpreting the prophecy.<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 9 does stress significance of the promises to David,<sup>12</sup> whatever they mean. The birth of Jesus is a great joy, though difficult to explain within the parameters of academic rigor.

Where Isaiah 9:6 reads, *For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests*, the *us* are angels. *Dominion* means government.<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 9:6 is different from the Hebrew to the Greek. The Hebrew has four names: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, which the Greek changes to *the angel of Great Counsel*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 81, 217.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph A. Comber, C.F.X., *The Composition and Literary Characteristics of Matt 11:20-24*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (October 1977) 499.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 186.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 110.

<sup>11</sup> Randall E. Otto, "The Prophets and Their Perspective," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005), 220 fn 7, 233

<sup>12</sup> Richard J. Clifford, S.J., *The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (January 1993) 14.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 150, 241.

Personal Notes  
051225 Christmas 014B  
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Raymond J. Jirran

Isaiah 9:6	
<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. (verse 5)
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	admirabilis Consiliarius, Deus Fortis, Pater aeternitatis, Principis pacis. (verse 5)
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	Wonderful, Counselor, God the mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace.
<u>King James</u> (1611):	Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	Wonder Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
<u>New American</u> (1970):	Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. (verse 5)
New Jerusalem (1985):	Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace

I do not know why some use verse 5 and others 6.

Psalm 96 dates from the ancient Jewish monarchy, proclaiming the Messiah king.<sup>15</sup> Where the Lectionary reads *sing to the LORD a new song*, Psalm 96:1, the Hebrew equivalent, according to Barker, “should probably be understood to mean a ‘renewing song.’”<sup>16</sup> That is the true sense of the joy of Christmas.

Psalm 96:13 proclaims that the Messiah *shall rule the peoples...with his constancy*. Saint Jerome translates *constancy* with *truth*. Psalm 96:13 is particularly poignant that truth determines politics, including Church politics. The Dead Sea Scrolls have evidence for this verse.<sup>17</sup> Psalm 96 expands the rule of the Lord beyond the Chosen People to all people, therefore, a cause for the joy of the season.

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 110, 173-174, 182, 242, 251, 282, 291.

<sup>15</sup> J. J. M. Roberts, *The Enthronement of Yhwh and David: The Abiding Theological Significance of the Kingship Language of the Psalms*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 677.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 119.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick W. Skehan+, Eugene Ulrich, Peter W. Flint, *A Scroll Containing “biblical” and “Apocryphal” Psalms: A Preliminary Edition of 4QPs<sup>f</sup> (4Q88)*, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 2 (April 1998) 280.

Barker becomes excited about missing words in Psalm 96:10, *The LORD reigns from the tree*. While no manuscript with those words is available today, Justin and other early Fathers of the Church accused the Jews of changing the verse, because of what Christians were making the wood of the Cross out of it. Originally, the verse would have referred to the fine wood in the Temple.<sup>18</sup>

The Epistle to Titus identifies Jesus as our God and Savior. Titus and Paul expect to see Jesus again before they die.<sup>19</sup> This prophecy did not work out as originally understood.<sup>20</sup> The Faithful today explain the prophecy differently, now looking to what they expect to be as unreachable in this life as it ever has been for the Faithful who have gone before.

The Lectionary translated Titus 2:12 that God is **training** us to reject godless ways. The word Jerome uses is *educate*, *erudiens*, a far more humane act. Animals are trained, humans are educated.

Titus 2:14, in pointing out that *he* [Jesus Christ] *gave himself for us*, alludes to the sacrifice of Isaac and Abraham.<sup>21</sup> Titus then offers the reason why.

Titus 2:14

Lectionary (1998):

and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good.

The Vulgate (circa 410):

et mundaret sibi populum peculiarem, sectatorem bonorum operum.

Douay-Rheims (1582-1610):

and might cleanse to himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works.

King James (1611):

and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works

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<sup>18</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 243, 295.

<sup>19</sup> Randall E. Otto, "The Prophets and Their Perspective," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005), 220 fn 7, 234.

<sup>20</sup> David J. Downs, "*Early Catholicism*" and *Apocalypticism in the Pastoral Epistles*, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005), 646.

<sup>21</sup> Robert J. Daly, S.J., The Soteriological Significance of the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 1977) 67.

Personal Notes  
051225 Christmas 014B  
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- Jerusalem (1966): and to purify *a people so that it could be his very own* and would have no ambition except to do good.
- New American (1970): and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good.
- New Jerusalem (1985): and *to purify a people to be his very own* and eager to do good.

The italicized words are from Exodus 19:5. At a later time, this also merits a look at the Greek.

Of all the studies examined for these December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005 Personal Notes, the most interesting is the one asking who Quirinius, Luke 2:2, Governor of Syria, may have been. There is an historical Quirinius, who would now place the birth of Jesus in 6 A.D. Quirinius is a better historical marker, than Caesar Augustus, because the Emperor Caesar never would call for a census of the whole Empire. There is no such record for the whole Empire. The Emperor, however, would authorize a governor to call for such a census.

Moving away from Barker, then what about Joseph? If everyone who could trace some sort of lineage back to David, as Matthew sets it up,<sup>22</sup> millions of people would have been involved.<sup>23</sup> Far more likely, Joseph owned a second house in Bethlehem that gave him a tax break for registering there. Bethlehem was not far from Jerusalem. Despite the long Christian tradition, a tax break makes the most rational sense for the Holy Family heading for Bethlehem. Were that the case, then who knows why the Holy Family was unable to gain access to their property for the birth?<sup>24</sup> After a while, explanations can become crass. That may explain why there was no study like The Birth of the Messiah, by Raymond E. Brown,<sup>25</sup> examining the rationale behind Christ in a scholarly manner, until about 2,000 years after the event.

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<sup>22</sup> Brendan Byrne, S.J., *Jesus as Messiah in the Gospel of Luke: Discerning a Pattern of correction,* *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003), 81, 89.

<sup>23</sup> Mark D. Smith, *Of Jesus and Quirinius*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2001) 288.

<sup>24</sup> Mark D. Smith, *Of Jesus and Quirinius*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2001) 289.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Anchor Bible Reference Library: An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997)

Trying to understand what Luke writes, what are *swaddling* clothes, Luke 2:12? Narrow strips of cloth wrapped around an infant to restrict movement. That does not suit the crèche scene either. The joy of Christmas, like the joy of any birthday, does not require immediate academic rigor.

Sometimes angels make their presence known through speech, as when the angel spoke to Joseph in a dream.<sup>26</sup> In the Latin, Saint Jerome has the angel make his presence known by wishing peace to men of good will, Luke 2:14. The song of the angels is one of renewing creation.<sup>27</sup> The Lectionary translation is *peace to those on whom his favor rests*, which is almost *good will toward men*.

Luke 2:14

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	peace to those on whom his favor rests.
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	pax in hominibus bonae voluntatis
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	peace to men of good will
<u>King James</u> (1611):	peace, good will toward men
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	peace to men who enjoy his favor
<u>New American</u> (1970):	peace to those on whom his favor rests.
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	peace for those he favors

I grew up noting the difference between the Douay-Rheims and the King James. I will get at the Greek some other time.

Richard Bauckham makes some interesting feminist remarks about Luke 2.<sup>28</sup>

Even more striking is Joseph's complete absence from the story of Mary's motherhood in Luke 1. Even though Joseph inevitably becomes the publicly putative father of Jesus in Luke 2, Mary does not bear a son for Joseph. A certain kind of feminist critique would say that in all this Elizabeth and Mary merely become instrumental in the desires and designs of the divine Patriarch, in place of an earthly husband. But this is to equate subservience to another human being with obedience to God in a crassly literalistic way, neglecting one of the central insights

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 116-117.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003)

<sup>28</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 66.

Personal Notes  
051225 Christmas 014B  
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of biblical spirituality: that the service of God is the true liberation and fulfillment of the self. Mary is most fully herself, the active and responsible subject of her own story, when she acts as the Lord's servant (Luke 1:38, 48), taking God at his word and taking responsibility for acting with trust in that word. (1:38, 45).

Christmas is a season to let the emotions override the intellect. Isaiah, Psalm 96, and Titus are about joy despite unfulfilled prophecies. The Gospel of Luke explains the fulfillment in a way unexpected, up until that time. The intellect will never understand God becoming human, anyway. That struggle can be left for another season. For now, the Faithful celebrate Christmas in the spirit of Isaiah, the Psalmists, Titus, and Luke.

For more on sources see the Appendix file. Personal Notes are on the web site at [www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes](http://www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes)