

Personal Notes
060101 The Octave Day of Christmas: Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the
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Here we are in the Lectionary, celebrating a Feast of Mary, all the while Joseph is nowhere found.¹ The Pre-Vatican II Church called this odd Feast, the Feast of the Circumcision. The idea is that the Holy Family presented Jesus to God in the in the temple of their hearts. Presenting themselves to God enables the Faithful to bring the presence of God into their own being.

The Gospel chosen by the Lectionary is not about the Presentation of the Child Jesus at the Temple, but about the shepherds reacting to the angelic proclamation, *glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen* (Luke 2:20). For Luke glory and praise are the appropriate responses to realizing the presence of God.² In the next verse, Luke 2:21, does use the word *circumcision* offering parents a chance at a sexual anatomy lesson. The reading from Numbers offers parents an opportunity to pray over their children.

Numbers 6:26 probably shows how the Jewish clergy blessed the Holy Family, at the end of the circumcision service, just before the Holy Family continued on their way back home.³ This Jewish priestly blessing is still a way in which the Faithful are able to bless one another, *the LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace*. Peace is an attribute only suited for someone in power, in control of the situation. This prayer is well suited for those difficult to get along with, in the temple of the heart. The Christmas Season, although about Peace, is often anything but peaceful. Christmas can be very stressful for very many trying to celebrate the arrival of God among the Faithful.

Psalm 67:2 continues the same theme bringing down the presence of God, *may he let his face shine upon us*. Carroll Stuhlmueller explains that Psalm 67 is a thanksgiving for the harvest. Stuhlmueller continues,⁴

¹ See 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), 52-72.

² Dennis Hamm, S.J., "What the Samaritan Leper Sees: The Narrative Christology of Luke 17:11-19," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 56, No. 2 (April 1994) 283.

³ Dennis Hamm, S.J., "The Tamid Service in Luke-Acts: The Cultic Background behind Luke's Theology of Worship (Luke 1:5-25; 18:9-14; 24:50-53; Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 2 (April 2003) 219.

⁴ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599 197.

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the world mission of Israel was perceived more through God's action across the world in rain and fertility—or in international politics—than in purely religious sources. It is equally clear that the hidden presence of God in nature and politics would remain too obscure without an explicit revelation to Israel about her role of being God's elect people with a mission.

Brian Britt observes that contact with the divine describes “divine favor idiomatically as causing the face to shine.” The presence of God transforms people.⁵ The presence of God in the Temple must have transformed Holy Family at the time. The transformation is like the transformation the sun works upon the earth through the changing of the seasons.⁶ Light, a Poor Clare theme, is also a theme of the presence of God in the First Testament.⁷ The Faithful celebrate with Christmas lights, which blink and shine as reminders of the baby Jesus. Through the liturgy, Jesus, the light of the World, remains the way in which the presence of God shines through the veil of creation.

As God sent his son, so Mary and Joseph offered Jesus back to God at the time of his circumcision. As part of the Christmas observance, Galatians 4:4 explains how the process of ransoming the Faithful from the effects of sin developed. *When the fullness of time had come.* During ancient history, time was not an economic matter, bought and sold. In this instance, *the fullness of time* refers to process, no matter how long it may take. Galatians means the process had developed to the point where *God sent his son*.⁸

The relationship between Jesus and the Father translates into the relationship between the Faithful and the same Father, as a constant theme in the writing of

⁵ Brian Britt, “Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scent,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 50.

⁶ J. Ross Wagner, “From the Heavens to the Heart: The Dynamics of Psalm 19 as Prayer,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 1999) 252.

⁷ Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 186.

⁸ Bruce J. Malina, “Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 22-23.

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Saint Paul.⁹ A similar sense of process happens in the Faithful as they mature, growing up in their Faith. The Holy Family exemplifies the same phenomenon on this Feast Day.

When Galatians 4:4 refers to *born under the law*, Galatians means that through Saint Joseph, Jesus inherited the line of David. Galatians 4:5 is a translation substituting *ransom* for *redeem*, supposing the Faithful would better understand *ransom* than *redeem*. Saint Jerome uses *redimeret*. I think *ransom* is too materialistic and narrow a description of what happens.

Galatians 4:6, *God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out "Abba Father!"* At this stage of development, the Holy Family would not have known the human life Jesus would lead. Like the Faithful through the ages, however, the Holy Family would have recognized their inheritance, *no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God* (Galatians 4:7).¹⁰

Under the law is a special phrase with no equivalent in ancient Jewish literature in Hebrew or Aramaic. For Paul, especially in Galatians, *under the law* "becomes a term exclusively associated with sin, oppression, slavery, and the curse."¹¹ As implied above, I think the Faithful are *redeemed* rather than *ransomed* from sin.

In this passage from Galatians, Saint Paul privileges the all-inclusive covenant from Abraham over the Chosen-People covenant from Moses. Saint Paul does not want encumbrances from laws. Salvation in Christ is inclusive of Gentiles as well as Jews.¹² Brendan Byrne, S.J., writes,¹³

⁹ Joseph Plevnik, S.J., "The Understanding of God at the Basis of Pauline Theology," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 4 (October 2003) 561-562.

¹⁰ John Paul Heil, "From Remnant to Seed of Hope for Israel: Romans 9:27-29," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 706.

¹¹ Joel Marcus, "Under the Law": The Background of a Pauline Expression," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 72, 82.

¹² Robert A. J. Gagnon, Why the "Weak" at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 77.

¹³ Brendan Byrne, S.J., "The Problem of Νομος and the Relationship with Judaism in Romans," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 307-308.

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The true continuity lies between Abraham and present-day believers (Rom 4:23-25; Gal 3:15-22), who bear responsibility for a ministry of surpassing, lasting, and untrammelled glory, in contrast to the temporary, veiled, even deceptive administration of condemnation associated with Moses (2 Cor 3:4—4:6).

Trying to encumber my soul with a sense of untrammelled glory is an effort I see accomplished both in the souls of the Poor Clare nuns and in the retired Josephite priests at their Baltimore Manor saying Mass despite all of their infirmities. The Holy Family must have been similarly happy.

In line with Josephite physical infirmities, permit me to bring in Galatians 4:24-25, the story of Hagar, a tragic tale of servitude and surrogacy, flight and exile, that appears nowhere in the Lectionary. My Concordance to the Douay Version of the Bible does not have an entry for Hagar.¹⁴ Hagar had a difficult time being happy. She was a concubine of Abraham.

Galatians 4:21-30, about Ishmael, the son of Hagar and Isaac, the son of Sarah, “is one of the most disturbing and confusing passages in the New Testament,” according an internet commentary November 29, 2005.¹⁵ This place in the Lectionary is as close as I will be able to find, to work in some scholarship on the matter.

One reason to work in the scholarship is that the life story of Hagar is in striking parallel to the African-American experience of slavery and abuse.¹⁶ In this biblical story, God treats Hagar badly exiling her away from the family of Abraham, along with their son, Ishmael, Abraham’s first born. Sarah, Abraham’s legitimate wife, instigated the exile, because Sarah was jealous of Hagar.

John L. Thompson observes, “Of all the stories in Scripture, Hagar’s alone receives an allegorical interpretation which is canonically approved—licensed, so to speak, by

¹⁴ Rev. Newton Thompson, S.T.D. and Raymond Stock, Concordance to the Bible (Douay Version) (15 & 17 South Broadway, St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder Book Co., 1942) 471.

¹⁵ <http://biblescripture.net/Galatians.html> on November 29, 2005 at 10:57 a.m.

¹⁶ John L. Thompson, “Hagar, Victim or Villain? Three Sixteenth-Century Views,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2 (April 1997) 213.

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Saint Paul.”¹⁷ Galatians 4:24-25, "The one [Covenant] given on Mount Sinai—that is Hagar, whose children are born into slavery; now Sinai is a mountain in Arabia and represents Jerusalem in its present state, for she is in slavery together with her children." Unpersuaded by the allegorical interpretation in Galatians, Martin Luther observed, "all of those who have had their Faith tested will understand perfectly..."¹⁸

Despite the fact that Hagar was mistreated, she is also one of the most blessed women of Sacred Scripture. Hagar is the first person in the Bible visited by an angel (Gen. 16:7); the first to receive an annunciation (Gen 16:11-12); the only woman receiving a promise of innumerable descendants (Gen 16:10); and, most strikingly, she has a power attributed to no one else, the power to bestow a name on God. Hagar gave a name to Yahweh who had spoken to her, 'You are El Roi,' by which she meant, 'Did I not go on seeing here, after him who sees me?' [I do not understand this either, but it is what it says.] This is why the well is called the well of Lahai Roi; it is between Kadesh and Bered" (Gen 16:13).¹⁹

Margaret Barker does not cite Gen 16:7 in her Index of Biblical and Ancient Texts: Hebrew Scriptures. Her Index of Persons, Places and Subjects does not include Hagar, either. The Catholic Biblical Quarterly reviewers, chosen because of some familiarity with the material, consistently downgrade the reliability of Barker's scholarship. Some snippets help. In 1993, William Adler wrote, "the author's [Barker's] thesis totters...her second-God theology is hardly recognizable from any one of the sources that she has examined...evidence not supportive of her theory is dismissed as either a misunderstanding or a deliberate suppression...farfetched...a conversation piece."²⁰ In 2002, Susan F. Mathews wrote, "...no bibliography...little evidence...no rationale...no critical discussion...secretly...secret...lack of grounding of her fundamental position in direct evidence...unclear or tenuous...insufficient

¹⁷ John L. Thompson, "Hagar, Victim or Villain? Three Sixteenth-Century Views," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2 (April 1997) 230.

¹⁸ John L. Thompson, "Hagar, Victim or Villain? Three Sixteenth-Century Views," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2 (April 1997) 229 paraphrasing Martin Luther.

¹⁹ John L. Thompson, "Hagar, Victim or Villain? Three Sixteenth-Century Views," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2 (April 1997) 214.

²⁰ William Adler, review of Margaret Barker, The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 4 (October 1993) 797.

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evidence.”²¹ Of the book by Barker I am using, in 2004, Kevin P. Sullivan wrote, “...she posits that there existed a `secret tradition’...she rejects the scholarly preference for canonical literature...makes some bold claims...she offers little other support for such a claim...that case is not made here...unconvincing...not mentioned...makes interesting reading...”²²

With all of that in mind, Barker regards the blessing in Numbers 6 as a secret tradition of the Jewish priests whereby the priests experienced the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish clergy only permitted reading the blessing in public, without explanation.²³ A shiver of holiness must have passed through the Holy Family as clergy read this blessing without explanation.

Barker gives special meaning to the Alleluia verse, writing, “there may have been a double meaning to the familiar cry `hallelujah’, since the first meaning of *hll* is `shine’. Was the cry `Make the LORD shine’, cause [*sic*] his presence to shine forth, as the psalmist had prayed?”²⁴ The Holy Family knew they arrived at the Temple to draw down the presence of God. Numbers 6:23-24 demonstrates the Jewish expectation of drawing down the presence of God, the Shekinah. The Faithful do the same whenever they pray, especially when they help offer the Mass.

Barker makes a great deal out of angels, though angels are not mentioned by name in the Lectionary reading. Barker has a fertile imagination, which comes across as petty, ignoring the facts and evidence. Barker is reliable as a *conversation piece*, but not for academic rigor.

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

²¹ Susan F. Mathews, review of Margaret Barker, The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Son Take Place (Revelation 1:1) in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002) 367-368.

²² 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) 313-314.

²³ Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 24.

²⁴ Margaret Barker, the Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 61.