

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, December 6, 2009

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

### **The gift tag says, "TO: All the World."**

*This discussion is the opinion of Bert Cobb and is not necessarily the opinion of anyone else. Do not interpret these reflections to mean anything other than what Bert Cobb thinks and feels. They are for the exhortation, encouragement, and edification of the Saints and may be used freely for that purpose.*

### The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Malachi 3:1-4

Canticle 4 or 16

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

**"The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think."**

-Edwin Schlossberg

Another year has passed since we last discussed passages selected for the Season of Advent. Four years ago, we looked at these same, or similar, passages trying to make sense of their meaning and their usefulness in our lives. Each week, as I write these discussions, I think and write so that YOU and I can think together. I write down my thoughts so that you can use them as springboards to dive into your own pool of experience and questions. I dive into the "deep waters" and call to you, "Come on in. The water's fine." My thoughts and comments are, by no means, the only ideas about these or any other scriptures discussed in these pages. I only "plow the fertile fields" of the reader's mind so that some seed of understanding can be planted. Often, some time has to pass before the "fruits" of those seeds become visible and tangible. Please, look back over the past year of reading these discussions and discover how far we have come together in our journey toward understanding what is the place and usefulness of scripture in our lives. Has your study been productive? Have you seen yourself in the stories? What have you discovered about yourself and others by your study? In this coming year's discussions, I want to encourage each reader to expand their knowledge and to "strike out on their own" to seek their own special relationship with the Creator. IF we can accomplish this mission, God will be pleased and our study will be rewarded by greater FAITH, greater understanding and greater HOPE. As the world celebrates the Advent of the Christ Child, let us study to understand that the GIFT of Jesus was given with OUR names on the gift tag. It is as though God says, "This one's for you, Bert (or your name)" IF we understand the personal gift of His only Son to ME and YOU, then we can better understand the LOVE of God. Let us pray for the blessing; that God will reward our seeking God with our FINDING God. **JOY to the WORLD, the LORD IS COME!**

### **Malachi 3:1-4**

**See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the**

**Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight-- indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. 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; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.***

Is the writer prophesying about Jesus or about John, the Baptist? Are you sure? Can you “diagram” the first sentence? Was Jesus the “messenger” or the “Lord” who will suddenly come to his temple? Always parse a sentence looking for the “subject” and the “verb” and the “predicative nominatives” or you will be fooled. Since the collators of the Lectionary “thought” this passage is “about” the messenger AND the Lord, it makes more sense that they also used other scriptures to describe the mission of John, the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, and their relationship to each other.

## **Canticle 16**

### **The Song of Zechariah**

***Luke 1: 68-79***

***Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; \****

***he has come to his people and set them free.***

***He has raised up for us a mighty savior, \****

***born of the house of his servant David.***

***Through his holy prophets he promised of old,***

***that he would save us from our enemies, \****

***from the hands of all who hate us.***

***He promised to show mercy to our fathers \****

***and to remember his holy covenant.***

***This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, \****

***to set us free from the hands of our enemies,***

***Free to worship him without fear, \****

***holy and righteous in his sight***

***all the days of our life.***

***You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, \****

***for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,***

***To give people knowledge of salvation \****

***by the forgiveness of their sins.***

***In the tender compassion of our God \****

***the dawn from on high shall break upon us,***

***To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, \****

***and to guide our feet into the way of peace.***

***Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: \****

***as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.***

Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, was the “relative” of Mary, mother of Jesus, so Zechariah was the “uncle” of Jesus? Scripture is not clear as to the familial relationship between Elizabeth and Mary but they had a close relationship. IF Zechariah was the “uncle” of Jesus, John, the Baptist, Zechariah’s son, was the COUSIN of Jesus. Family relationships are ALWAYS hard to “figure out”. I am constantly amazed when I meet people in San Marcos to find out to which folks they are related, best friends, divorced from, former business partners, former prison mates, etc. Everyone is related to someone so be careful about whom you are critical...it will come home to bite you. Just run for office and, believe me, you will learn this. The family tree of Texas has few “forks” because Texas is really a “large small town”. We do allow Yankees to “marry in” but, only when necessary. A “white shotgun” is usually involved. So, about who is this “Song of Zechariah”? Is it about Jesus or John, the Baptist? Zechariah talks about both a “Jesus, the Savior, the Child of Promise” and his son, John, who would “prepare the way for Jesus”. Does Jesus KNOW how we feel about our families? Yes, he does because he also had an earthly father, a mother, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins. I believe that “A prophet is not without honor save in his own country” probably applied ESPECIALLY to the family of Jesus. Would any of your relatives have seen YOU as the Messiah? I can say with certainty that NO ONE in my family would have accepted ME as Messiah. Even Zechariah, the “uncle” of Jesus, knew of the fulfillment of prophecy that BOTH John and Jesus represented and HE was GRATEFUL and prayed a SONG of thanksgiving for the lives of BOTH children. An angel told Zechariah about the importance of the child he would father. Who told you about the birth of Jesus? Who told you about the importance of Jesus to YOU? Are you “grateful” and “joyous” about the birth of Jesus, the Advent of the Christ Child that is approaching? If not, is it because we have not fully appreciated the importance of the “gift”, the fulfillment of prophecy that His birth represents? Come on, GET HAPPY. Advent is here, Christ is “coming” as we remember His birth as a helpless child born into poverty to a teen-age mother. What, you were expecting someone else to save you? The “Son of God” is not “good enough” for you?

### **Philippians 1:3-11**

***I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced***

**the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.**

Last week it was the Church at Thessalonica. This week Paul is writing a “love note” to the Philippians. Are there those who we “remember” with JOY? Do we pray with “joy” for them in every one of our prayers? There is great HOPE in the sentence Paul wrote to these Philippians: ***“I am confident of this, that the ONE who began a GOOD WORK among you will bring it to COMPLETION by the day of Jesus Christ.”*** Now, THAT is hope and optimism in a nutshell. We begin a “good work” and expect immediate results and praise for our “hard work”. IF God begins the work IN US, Paul says that he is CONFIDENT that God will bring it to completion EVENTUALLY. The point is to be striving toward accomplishing a “good work”? Paul prays that their ***“love may overflow more and more with KNOWLEDGE and FULL INSIGHT to HELP you DETERMINE what is BEST,..”*** This “good work” produces a ***“harvest of righteousness that comes THROUGH JESUS CHRIST for the GLORY and PRAISE of GOD.”*** It is reflexive of ***“Let your light so shine that men may SEE your GOOD WORKS and GLORIFY the FATHER who is in HEAVEN.”*** WE live for a PURPOSE; to bring praise and glory to our LORD as “willing slaves” paid for with the Blood of the Lamb. “We are bought with a price.” How much is my salvation “worth”? How much is the “gift” of Jesus “worth”? How much is the love, mercy and grace of God “worth”? Don’t worry about the price, as the hymn so eloquently says, ***“Jesus PAID IT ALL. All to HIM I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow.”*** The “gift of Jesus, born in a stable to a poor teen-age mother” was only the beginning of the story that would result in OUR salvation. Celebrate Advent, celebrate Christmas but, don’t MISS the GIFT OF JESUS. JESUS is the REASON for the SEASON and the “gift” has our names on the gift tag.

**Luke 3:1-6**

***In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,***

***“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:***

***‘Prepare the way of the Lord,***  
***make his paths straight.***

***Every valley shall be filled,***  
***and every mountain and hill shall be made low,***  
***and the crooked shall be made straight,***  
***and the rough ways made smooth;***  
***and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”***

Luke, the author of the Book of Luke, was a “Greek-trained” physician who used language with clarity and alacrity. He addresses his book to “Theophilus” which is translated “lover of God”. So, if we love God, the book has our names on it. He was not present at the time of the events of the life of Jesus but, rather, he interviewed those who were and wrote down THEIR stories. He was seeking the “truth” as best he could so that he could “explain it” to others, like you and me, who were not a party to the events of the life of Christ. (Read Luke 1:1-4) His dating of the birth of John, the Baptist, is very meticulous as it lists many of the major “power figures” who held office at the time of the birth of John the Baptist. Later, calendars were changed to adjust to certain “dates of importance” to align the birth of Jesus accordingly. Note that the “month of John’s birth” was not described in this narrative. All of the “dates” for the birth of Christ are merely “estimates” and they are most definitely wrong. It is not important WHEN Jesus was born. What is important is that JESUS WAS BORN. (Put on your “thinking caps”.) So, now, tell me what the difference is between “the baptism of John” and the “baptism of Jesus”? John’s baptism was for repentance FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. Was the “baptism” for the forgiveness of sins OR was the “repentance” for the forgiveness of sins? It does make a difference, doesn’t it? Is the “forgiveness of sins” tantamount or “equivalent” to “salvation”? Is it necessary for our “sins to be forgiven” separate from our “baptism” and our “salvation” or are they merely “steps towards salvation”? Why was John not seen as the “Messiah”? What was John’s relationship with his younger “cousin”, Jesus? If He was “without sin”, why did Jesus submit to the “Baptism of John” which was FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS? Read the quotation from Isaiah AGAIN and you will find the answer: John’s mission was to “prepare the way of THE LORD” who would allow ALL FLESH to SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD. John spoke about the “mission” of Jesus. When Jesus went to John to be baptized, John said “It is I who needs to be baptized by YOU.” (Read Matthew 3:13) When asked by his followers, “Are you the ONE or should we seek another?” John’s answer, “There is ONE coming after me who I am not worthy to loose his sandals.” (Read Luke 3: 15-17 and John 1:19-27) John even told a crowd as he called out about Jesus “Behold, the Lamb of God WHO TAKES AWAY THE SINS OF THE WORLD.” (Read John 1:29-34) Again, the difference between the “baptism of John” and the “baptism of Jesus” is JESUS and the SACRIFICE He made for the SINS OF THE WORLD. Jesus, as the Son of God, could grant not only “forgiveness of sins” but, resurrection as SALVATION i.e. ETERNAL LIFE. John could not even save himself from the executioner’s blade. Jesus WILLINGLY gave up his LIFE as a SACRIFICE by being crucified. If the story ended with Christ’s death, there would be scant HOPE for you and me. The FACT of his RESURRECTION as God kept His promise to Jesus made the difference. We SERVE a RISEN SAVIOR who can give HOPE of ETERNAL SALVATION to ALL who FOLLOW HIM in obeying the WILL OF THE FATHER. ***“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.***” Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world. We were already condemned by our disobedience to God and had no way of escape from judgment and spiritual death. Jesus came into the world to SAVE THE WORLD by SHOWING US the HOPE that comes from relying on the PROMISE OF GOD to SAVE YOU and ME. If we understand this, Advent will be much richer and more meaningful for us. Advent is about “preparing” our hearts, plowing and weeding our hearts to receive the “good news” of Jesus. Advent is here. The “gift” of Christ is COMING. Are we ready to receive Him?