

## THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST

Bacchus and his wanton companions; the slatternly Venus; Mars, lover of blood and gore; Juno, the shrew and Jupiter, a dirty old man.

Overseas Jewish businessmen had a great influence. They opened synagogues and set an example of devotion to God. Their God soared above and beyond the worst of human traits found in the gods of the pantheons said to live on Mount Olympus or in Valhalla. There were also dedicated Jewish missionaries, mostly of the Pharisees, who spread God's word throughout the Mediterranean world. They had great success and established convert communities in many cities. It was these overseas Jewish synagogues (most especially among the former gentiles) that St. Paul found a fertile and productive audience for the preaching of the Christ and bringing new souls into Christ's fellowship. He would come to a town, make a few converts, ordain one of two so the church would have the Eucharist, and then move on, writing letters to them that have come down to us. His *longest* stay seems to have been 18 months. That mission was in Corinth, the sin-city of the day. (Think of Vegas on steroids!) If the church could make it there, it could make it any where.

But, for the Jewish missionaries there was a problem to overcome with all of their gentile converts. We'll consider that problem next week in *Jewish Baptism, Part II*.

### The Advent Blessing

May Almighty God, by whose providence our Savior Jesus Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin.. *AMEN*.

May he whose second coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love. *AMEN*.

May you, who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life. *AMEN*.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. *AMEN*.

**Please prepare St. John 1:6-8, 19-28 for next Sunday.**

## The Second Sunday of Advent



### The Orthodox Baptistery, Ravenna, Italy

The *Battistero degli Ortodossi* (The Orthodox Baptistery) is the most ancient of Ravenna's monuments. It dates from the late 4th to the early 5th centuries. The dome of the baptistery has glorious mosaics depicting Christ being baptized by John the Baptist. On the right is a group who are preparing for baptism. All around are the blessed of the heavenly paradise. In addition to the mosaics, the building's interior holds a bronze cross dated 688, the original marble ambo [combination pulpit/reading desk] of the baptistery and a 5th century altar.

In 476 a conquering German, Odoacer, became Ravenna's king. He was a member of the heretical Arian sect that denied the full Divinity of Christ. Odoacer set up his own cathedral and baptistery which still exists. (It is now Roman Catholic.)

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Arianism was strong in Germany. The conquerors' heresy flourished until 554 when the kingdom was conquered by orthodox Christians under Emperor Justinian, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire at Constantinople. The former heretical cathedral is now called *Basilica di Sant' Apollinare Nuovo*.

Today's Gospel St. Mark 1:1-8 [Year B, Advent 2]

✠ THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,”’

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

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### A Bobble in the Lectionary?

Most of us began to hear our new lectionary, *The Revised Common Lectionary*, (RCL) in Advent 2007. It is a fine tuning of the lectionary that preceded it, the *Revised Lectionary* which was introduced nearly 40 years ago. Occasionally there seem to be some bobbles in the selections such as the Good Shepherd Sunday reading last Spring in Year

## The Second Sunday of Advent

A (John 10:1-10), which ended one verse before Jesus said in verse 11, *I am the Good Shepherd*.... Several other times the Year A selections ignored verses in the chapter just preceding which clarified the selected passage's meaning.

This year we are reading the second of the three cycles of Scripture with most of the Gospel lessons coming from St. Mark. We have a peculiar selection today, rather like a murder mystery whose last page is missing. We hear about John the Baptist, his dreadful clothing, his vegetarian<sup>1</sup> diet, his ministry to lead people to the waters of repentance, his announcement that *one who is more powerful than I is coming after me and I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit* but we stop just before the most important baptism John ever did. This is the great act which is depicted on the cover of this insert. Here are the verses: (Mark 1:9-11)

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

We'll hear these verses together with Chapter 1 verses 4-10<sup>2</sup> next year on the First Sunday of Epiphany when we recall Christ's Baptism. It should not be a surprise if some parish clergy act upon the Prayer Book's permission to add the three missing verses.

## Jewish Baptism

### First of 2 Parts

The Jews had a form of baptism that was necessary for the pagan converts to Judaism. Many gentile people of good will had become repulsed by the gods of the various pantheons. The gods mirrored the worst of human behavior. The drunken

<sup>1</sup> The *locusts* are large bean-like pods of the carob tree, *Ceratonia siliqua* nicknamed St. John's Bread.

<sup>2</sup> Other than on some festivals this is one of the few times that we repeat a reading in the three year cycle.