

YOU ARE MY SON, THE BELOVED

meaning. Bible scholars suggest that the seeds he ate are those of the carob. The kernels, while still enclosed in their long pods, are known as “St. John’s Bread” (see picture, below). They look rather like the pods of the black locust which grow widely in the Midwest. St. John’s Bread was once available in some Chicago Italian restaurants and can be bought on the NET. Carob, ground as fine as flour, is sold in health food stores as a substitute for chocolate. It is important for Bible readers to know that there are two forms of carob. The first is the above mentioned tree, *Ceratonia siliqua*, that has been cultivated for thousands of years. It is eaten in some parts of the Near East. But there is also a second form, a wild and uncultivated plant. In the Near East it is locally called the *thorny carob*. It’s a shrub that grows about 18 inches tall and is listed in Arab pharmacology as one of the ingredients for making poisons.

Normally thorny carob is gathered for firewood and its fruit used for animal food. The thorny carob’s fruit is so bitter that it is not eaten by humans except as a last resort during famines. It bears the “husks” we associate with the starving Prodigal Son, he who, as the wonderful phrasing of the King James Bible puts it, *would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat*.

The Prodigal Son, arguably our Lord’s best parable will be read next year on the fourth Sunday of Lent.

Please prepare John 1:43-51 for next Sunday.

Epiphany Seasonal Blessing

May Almighty God, who led the Wise Men by the shining of a star to find the Christ, the Light from Light, lead you also, in your pilgrimage, to find the Lord. Amen.

May God, who sent the Holy Spirit to rest upon the Only-begotten at his baptism in the Jordan River, pour out that Spirit on you who have come to the waters of new birth. Amen.

May God, by the power that turned water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana, transform your lives and make glad your hearts. 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.

“St. John’s Bread”

Ceratonia siliqua



FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY



The Baptism of Christ

Nuremberg Chronicle (a Medieval World History)

Printed 1493

By Hartmann Schedel (1440 -1514), of Nuremberg

Morse Library, Beloit College, Wisconsin

Today’s Gospel St. Mark 1:4-11 [Year B, Epiphany 1]

✠ 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**

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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.” 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.” [© NRSV]

Serving Christ Like John the Baptist

There was a time when John the Baptist was, if this is the right term, a “popular” saint. He is universally pictured in classical painting such as those below ¹ and it was all because of his message. Maybe we have forgotten his message? Remember it?

He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3.30)

John saw his role as the man who was to prepare the way for his cousin Jesus, the Messiah.² He went into the wilderness. He ate like the most strict of vegetarians, (*see below*) he proclaimed that Jews must repent to prepare for the Messiah, he baptized, including the baptism of Jesus, he protested Herod Antipas’



illicit Marriage,³ and he died by the wish Heriodas,

¹ Left, by Leonardo; right by Michelangelo. Here both John and Jesus are the children.

² *Jesus* and *Messiah* mean, (together) *Salvation, the Anointed one [of God]*

³ Early in his reign, Antipas had married the daughter of King Aretas IV of

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mother of the Princess Royal, whose step-father, Herod Antipas, liked the young girl’s dancing.

Why not think of John’s message as our message? ***He must increase, but I must decrease.***

In 1835 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church voted that every member of the church was, by act of Baptism, a member of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Episcopal Church. We’ve been so ever since. In our Baptismal formularies we are asked:

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God’s help.

At Confirmation we are again asked:

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God’s help

And every time we renew our Baptismal promises, we are asked:

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God’s help.

Are we fulfilling our vows? Are we bringing people to Jesus? Are we serving the Christ like John the Baptist?

John the Baptist

We love to shudder over John’s diet: Locusts and wild honey! *Sugar and bugs!* Oh yuck! Are they found in the best of food groups? Our statues and pictures of him show an extreme ascetic, barely clothed, and as gaunt as an anorexic.

John was no fashion plate and he certainly was strange, but not *that* strange. In all probability his locusts were seeds of the locust ***tree***, not locust ***insects***. The word *locust*, like our word “bark” - *sound made by a dog, the covering of a tree, or a kind of sailing vessel* -, has more than one

Nabatea. While staying in Rome with his half-brother Herod (son of Herod the Great and Mariamne II), he fell in love with his host’s wife Herodias (granddaughter of Herod the Great and Mariamne I). Antipas and Herodias agreed to divorce their previous spouses in order to marry each other.