

“You should be baptizing me...”

Second Week of Advent

The Root of Jesse

It may be recalled that the Jews during Jesus' time were aware of certain prophetic clues that would help them understand who the promised Messiah was and when he would arrive. That the Messiah would come from the root, or 'stump of Jesse,' is one such example.

Jesse was the father of King David (Ruth 4:22, 1 Sam. 16). God promised a savior as early as Genesis 3:15. Later, the promise was refined and of the 12 tribes of Israel, Judah was selected (Gen. 49:10). This prophecy in Isaiah narrows it further, to one family within the line of Judah: Jesse's. And Jesse's line was no ordinary line. His was a royal line, the line of David.

By the first century, Jews were on the lookout for signs of the Messiah, and it was emphasized that Jesus met the requirements. For example, the importance of Jesus' lineage and birthplace are given positions of prominence in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1-2).

In 70 AD Jerusalem and its temple was destroyed and there followed a great dispersion of the Jews. In a Divine Irony, this monumental event wiped out many of the ways the Jewish people could have recognized the Messiah. One wouldn't be able to verify that someone was in the line of Judah, or from Bethlehem, etc. There can be no other candidates for the Messiah because their credentials can't be tested. If it is not Jesus, it is no one.

Many Jews today no longer look for a warrior-king, but have different ideas. For example, some suggest that the state of Israel itself could be the Messiah.



Thomas Aquinas on the Objection that John the Baptist Ought Not to Have Baptized.

I answer that, it was fitting for John to baptize, for four reasons:

first, it was necessary for Christ to be baptized by John, in order that He might sanctify baptism; as Augustine observes. Secondly, that Christ might be manifested. Whence John himself says "That He," i.e. Christ, "may be made manifest in Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water." For [as Chrysostom observes] he announced Christ to the crowds that gathered around him ...

Thirdly, that by his baptism he might accustom men to the baptism of Christ; ... Fourthly, that by persuading men to do penance, he might prepare men to receive worthily the baptism of Christ... (Aquinas, Summa Part 3, Q38).

Written c. 1270 AD. Source: NewAdvent.com

THE FACTS OF THE FAITH

Selected readings
this week:

Old Testament:

Isaiah 11:1-10,

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19

Epistle: Romans 15:4-13

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

Have we found John the Baptist's Home in the Desert?

Probably not. However, the cave, announced in 2004 to the world as possibly being used by John the Baptist, still helps us understand how ritual immersion was performed in ancient Judea. As an explicit corroboration of a Biblical person or event, there is little to go on in this case to be too certain. Research continues, and new discoveries have tended to support the accuracy of our Scriptures. Our faith is well founded.

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The River Jordan

The river Jordan played an important role in the events of the Bible and is still important in the region today. In fact, water in general shaped and continues to shape events in the region.

The Jordan river connects the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, separated by about 65 airline miles, but the river itself makes the journey over 200 miles. The river descends to the lowest point on earth, dropping at about 40 feet per mile, making it an extremely fast flowing river. The Sea of Galilee is a fresh water lake but its waters, by the time they get to the Dead Sea, become the most 'salty' lake on the planet. The oceans have a salinity of 3.5%, and the Great Salt Lake in Utah is 18%. The Dead Sea is 26-35%.

One begins to see the symbolism involved in being baptized in the Jordan. The rushing waters tear away at you, scouring away your dirt, depositing it into the Dead Sea. Today, the river is much slower because of water management projects. Its value as symbolism has diminished, but it still retains its importance as the countries of Syria, Israel, and Jordan all rely on it.

Primary Sources: The Moody Atlas of the Bible.

From an Ancient Author

Jewish historian Josephus, writing in 93 AD, describes the death of Herod and John the Baptist, thus corroborating the New Testament accounts in many respects.

“Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against **John, that was called the Baptist:** for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; ... Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had, ... thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, ... and was ... put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him.” (Josephus, Antiquities Bk. 18) [See Matt 14:1-12, Mark 6:14-29, Acts 12:19-22]

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