

Be Patient

Third Week of Advent

The Doubts of John the Baptist

Sometimes people think that having 'faith' means believing without evidence at all. Some wits have even suggested that 'faith' is believing something that you actually know is not true. Some think 'faith' means having no doubts and not asking questions. The Scriptures do not support any of these views. We are given many examples of faith in the Scriptures, including Abraham and Job (Heb. 11, James 5:11) but when we look at their lives we see that they had very hard questions for God.

So, when John the Baptist sends his followers to ask Jesus if he was really the Messiah, we should not be surprised that Jesus does not rebuke John but points

him to evidences: The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear. John was in prison because he had criticized King Herod and even though it had been John that had been the first to announce that Jesus was the Christ (Luke 3), apparently even he was having doubts.

The faithlessness that God seems to reject is when the goodness of God and God's own faithfulness to mankind is known and understood, but rejected anyway. For example, the Pharisees knew they were confronted with the Power of God and attributed it to demons (Matt 12:22-37). Their questioning was different than Job's: they already knew the 'answer' and they didn't like it and refused to abide by it.

Justin the Martyr Responding to Trypho the Jew

Written About 155 AD, Quoting Isaiah 35

"Be well assured, then, Trypho, that I am established in the knowledge Of and faith in the Scriptures by those counterfeits which he who is called the devil is said to have performed among the Greeks; ... For when they tell that Bacchus, ... being torn in pieces, and having died, he rose again, and ascended to heaven; ... do I not perceive that [the devil] has imitated the prophecy announced by the patriarch Jacob[?]"

... [But *you* will understand]: 'Rejoice, thirsty wilderness: let the wilderness be glad, and blossom as the lily: the deserts of the Jordan shall both blossom and be glad: and the **glory of Lebanon** was given to it, and the honor of Carmel. And my people shall see the exaltation of the Lord, and the glory of God" ... *The spring of living water which gushed forth from God ... was this Christ*, [who] healed those who were maimed, and deaf, and lame in body from their birth, causing them to leap, to hear, and to see, by His word.

And having raised the dead, and causing them to live, by His deeds He compelled the men who lived at that time to recognize Him. But though they saw such works, they asserted it was magical art. For they dared to call Him a magician, and a deceiver of the people. Yet He [*did*] wrought such works..." Dialog With Trypho, Chapter LXIX, by Justin the Martyr.

THE FACTS OF THE FAITH

Selected readings
this week:

Old Testament: Isaiah
35:1-10, Psalm 146:5-10

Epistle: James 5:7-10

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11,
Luke 1:47-55

What is a 'crocus' ? (Isaiah 35:1)

The 'crocus' is a flower that is known as being among the first to bloom in the Spring.

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Going deeper



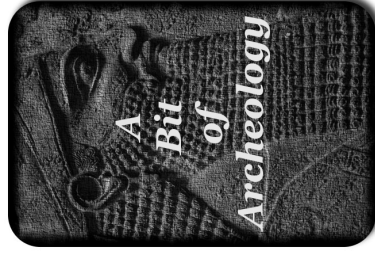
In the readings for this week some comparisons are made to the seasonal changes that the Jews were familiar with. In the Spring they saw flowers bloom and farmers planted their crop and then they had to wait for the right time when they could harvest the crop. Not many of us are as in tune with the changes of seasons as those in previous generations. We can have fresh fruit and grains all year long, so long as we're willing to pay for them. It is hard to complain, but one could argue that this immediate gratification has robbed us from our ability to live a life of deeply entrenched patience.

By the time Jesus arrived, the Jews were growing *very* impatient. There had also been many people claiming to be the Messiah. These had always been crushed. Patience was called for, but once Jesus arrived it should have been evident by his deeds that the time had come. Isaiah 35 and Psalm 146 both argue that the blind would see... and it would be God himself that performed the deeds. Today, we have the benefit of hindsight and know that Jesus rose from the dead, giving us the Sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:38-45). Now, it is our turn to wait.

James writes us in today's readings to persevere and think like the farmer. The farmer not only knows what it is to wait, but also that before you can harvest, you must plant. God has planted, now we look for the harvest. And God is faithful: it will come.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and Isaiah

Many Advent readings come from the book of Isaiah. Many skeptics have argued that we can't be sure any of our texts can be trusted, but the story of Isaiah proves otherwise. Around the 1950s a cave was found that had in it many jars containing the writings of what is believed to be a Jewish sect of the first century called the Essenes. The Isaiah scroll found in the caves has been carbon dated to between 300 and 100 BC. Prior to this discovery, our oldest copy of Isaiah was from c. 1,000 AD. When you compare the two, if the skeptics are right, you would expect there to be so many errors that you can't possibly trust the Isaiah. In fact most errors were simple typos that are easily corrected by competent scholars. Source: Probe Ministries.



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