

Remember that December 24th is a day of Fast and complete Abstinence, and that December 25th is a Holy Day of Obligation.

Saint_Thomas_explains_the_Gospel_for_the_4th_Sunday_of_Advent

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and Philip his brother tetrarch of Iturea, and the country of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilina; Under the high priests Annas and Caiphas; the word of the Lord was made unto John, the son of Zachary, in the desert. And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins; As it was written in the book of the sayings of Isaias the prophet: A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled; and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight; and the rough ways plain; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

GREG. The time at which the forerunner of the Savior received the word of preaching, is marked by the names of the Roman sovereign and of the princes of Judea, as it follows: Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, &c. For because John came to preach Him who was to redeem some from among the Jews, and many among the Gentiles, therefore the time of his preaching is marked out by making mention of the king of the Gentiles and the rulers of the Jews. But because all nations were to be gathered together in one, one man is described as ruling over the Roman state, as it is said, The reign of Tiberius Caesar.

GREEK EX. For the emperor Augustus being dead, from whom the Roman sovereigns obtained the name of "Augustus," Tiberius being his successor in the monarchy, was now in the 15th year of his receiving the reins of government.

ORIGEN; In the word of prophecy, spoken to the Jews alone, the Jewish kingdom only is mentioned, as, The vision of Esaias, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. But in the Gospel which was to be proclaimed to the whole world, the empire of Tiberius Caesar is mentioned, who seemed the lord of the whole world. But if the Gentiles only were to be saved, it were sufficient to make mention only of Tiberius, but because the Jews s also must believe, the Jewish kingdom therefore, or Tetrarchies, are also introduced, as it follows, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod tetrarch, &c.

GREG. Because the Jews were to be scattered for their crime of treachery, the Jewish kingdom was shut up into parts under several governors According to that saying, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation.

THEOPHYL; Pilate was sent in the twelfth year of Tiberius to take the government of the Jewish nation, and remained there for ten successive years, almost until the death of Tiberius. But Herod, and Philip, and Lysanias, were the sons of that Herod in whose reign

our Lord was born. Between these and Herod himself Archelaus their brother reigned ten years. He was accused by the Jews before Augustus, and perished in exile at Vienne. But in order to reduce the Jewish kingdom to greater weakness, Augustus divided it into Tetrarchies.

GREG. Because John preached Him who was to be at the same time both King and Priest, Luke the Evangelist has marked the time of that preaching by the mention not only of Kings, but also of Priests. As it follows, Under the High Priests Annas and Caiaphas.

THEOPHYL; Both Annas and Caiaphas, when John began his preaching, were the High Priests, but Annas held the office that year, Caiaphas the same year in which our Lord suffered on the cross. Three others had held the office in the intervening time, but these two, as having particular reference to our Lord's Passion, are mentioned by the Evangelist. For at that time of violence and intrigue, the commands of the Law being no longer in force, the honor of the High Priest's office was never given to merit or high birth, but the whole affairs of the Priesthood were managed by the Roman power. For Josephus relates, that Valerius Gratus, when Annas was thrust out of the Priesthood, appointed Ismael High Priest, the son of Baphas; but not long after casting him off, he put in his place Eleazar the son of the High Priest Ananias. After the space of one year, he expelled him also from the office, and delivered the government of the High Priesthood to a certain Simon, son of Caiaphas, who holding it not longer than a year, had Joseph, whose name also was Caiaphas, for his successor; so that the whole time during which our Lord is related to have taught is included in the space of four years.

AMBROSE; The Son of God being about to gather together the Church, commences His work in His servant. And so it is well said, The word, of the Lord came to John, that the Church should begin not from man, but from the Word. But Luke, in order to declare that John was a prophet, rightly used these few words, The word of the Lord came to him. He adds nothing else, for they need not their own judgment who are filled with the Word of God. By saying this one thing, he has therefore declared all. But Matthew and Mark desired to show him to be a prophet, by his raiment, his girdle, and his food.

CHRYS. The word of God here mentioned was a commandment, for the son of Zacharias came not of himself, but God moved him.

THEOPHYL. Through the whole of the time until his showing himself he was hid in the wilderness, that no suspicion might arise in men's minds, that from his relation to Christ, and from his intercourse with Him from a child, he would testify such things of Him; and hence he said, He knew him not.

GREG. NYSS. Who also entered this life at once in the spirit and power of Elias, removed from the society of men, in uninterrupted contemplation of invisible things, that he might not, by becoming accustomed to the false notions forced upon us by our senses, fall into mistakes and errors in the discernment of good men. And to such a height of divine grace was he raised, that more favor was bestowed upon him than the Prophets, for from the beginning even to the end, he ever presented his heart before God pure and free from every natural passion.

AMBROSE; Again, the wilderness is the Church itself, for the barren has more children than she who has an husband. The word of the Lord came, that the earth which was before barren might bring forth fruit unto us.

AMBROSE; The Word came, and the voice followed. For the Word first works inward, then follows the office of the voice, as it is said, And he went into all the country about Jordan.

ORIGEN; Jordan is the same as descending, for there descends from God a river of healing water. But what parts would John be traversing but the country lying about Jordan, that the penitent sinner might soon arrive at the flowing stream, humbling himself to receive the baptism of repentance. For it is added, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

GREG. It is plain to every reader that John not only preached the baptism of repentance, but to some also he gave it, yet his own baptism he could not give for the remission of sins.

CHRYS. For as the sacrifice had not yet been offered up, nor had the holy Spirit descended, how could remission of sins be given? What is it then that St. Luke means by the words, for the remission of sins, seeing the Jews were ignorant, and knew not the weight of their sins? Because this was the cause of their evils, in order that they might be convinced of their sins and seek a Redeemer, John came exhorting them to repentance, that being thereby made better and sorrowful for their sins, they might be ready to receive pardon. Rightly then after saying, that he came preaching the baptism of repentance, he adds, for the remission of sins. As if he should say, The reason by which he persuaded them to repent was, as, that thereby they would the more easily obtain despair. For the hill produces no fruit.

ORIGEN; Or you may understand the mountains and hills to be the hostile powers, which have been overthrown by the coming of Christ.

BASIL; But as the hills differ from mountains in respect of height, in other things are the same, so also the adverse powers agree indeed in purpose, but are distinguished from one another in the enormity of their offenses.

GREG. Or, the valley when filled increases, but the mountains and hills when brought low decrease, because the Gentiles by faith in Christ receive fullness of grace, but the Jews by their sin of treachery have lost that wherein they boasted. For the humble receive a gift because the hearts of the proud they keep afar off.

CHRYS. Or by these words he declares the difficulties of the law to be turned into the easiness of faith; as if he said, No more toils and labors await us, but grace and remission of sins make an easy way to salvation.

GREG. NYSS. Or, He orders the valleys to be filled, the mountains and hills to be cast down, to show that the rule of virtue neither fails from want of good, nor transgresses from excess.

GREG. But the crooked places are become straight, when the hearts of the wicked, perverted by a course of injustice, are directed to the rule of justice. But the rough ways are

changed to smooth, when fierce and savage dispositions by the influence of Divine grace return to gentleness and meekness.

CHRYSS. He then adds the cause of these things, saying, And all flesh shall see, &c. showing that the virtue and knowledge of the Gospel shall be extended even to the end of the world, turning mankind from savage manners and perverse wills to meekness and gentleness. Not only Jewish converts but all mankind shall see the salvation of God.

CYRIL; That is, of the Father, who sent His Son as our Savior. But the flesh is here taken for the whole man.

GREG. Or else, All flesh, i.e. Every man can not see the salvation of God in Christ in this life. The Prophet therefore stretches his eye beyond to the last day of judgment, when all men both the elect and the reprobate shall equally see Him.

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