

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THE FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD, YEAR B

First Reading Isaiah 55: 1–11

Today's reading is concerned with the exiles' return to Jerusalem. It is an invitation to grace. God is faithful and generous and nourishes his people, body and soul.



Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty ...

God, through the prophet, urges the exiles to return to Jerusalem. God offers them life-giving food and drink through the covenant he made with them.

This covenant will make *God's glory shine through them.* (vv.3b–5)

Why spend money on what is not bread ...?

This may refer to actual expenditure on other religious resources such as the making of images, but it is not clear.

Seek the Lord while he is still to be found ...

Isaiah calls the exiles to take the first steps back to Jerusalem where the Lord can be found. The desert that stands between Babylon and Judah has been stripped of its power to interfere with their return home.

Let the wicked one abandon their way ... for my ways are not your ways ...

Those who accept God's invitation to the banquet – here a metaphor for God's presence in Jerusalem – must change their ways as they come into the presence of a forgiving God, whose thoughts are far removed from theirs.

For other images of banquets linked to the presence of God with his people, see the covenant banquet in Exodus 24: 9–11, and Wisdom's banquet in Proverbs 9: 1–6.

Gospel Mark 1: 7–11

Today's scripture is taken from the beginning of Mark's Gospel, which gives an account of the preparation for Jesus's public ministry. Mark shows us the appearance of John the Baptist, the Baptism of Jesus (celebrated today), and also the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

'Someone is following me ... who is more powerful than I am'

In Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist prepares us for the arrival of Jesus: someone whose ministry is superior to his own. He prepares us for the reality that Jesus comes in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was baptised in the Jordan by John ...

Ceremonial purification by water has its roots in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 7: 6) but it can also be linked with the Qumran community, an early Christian community living an ascetic life in the hills overlooking the Dead Sea near Jericho. They practised daily rites of purification with water, which they saw as symbolic of their interior cleansing.



... the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descended on him.

This is a sign of divine intervention in fulfilment of a promise. Here the descent of the Spirit on Jesus indicates an anointing of his ministry. See Isaiah 11: 2; 42: 1; 61: 1; 63: 9.

'You are my Son, the Beloved ...'

God acknowledges Jesus as his Son. His approval of Jesus is the assurance that Jesus will fulfil his Messianic mission of salvation.

