

## 4 Lent Readings and Commentary Year A

Summary by Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD:

The election of David as the anointed one of God together with the good shepherd psalm may at first seem like a strange reading to pair with the account of the man born blind. But the election of David has the prophet learning that the vision of God is not our vision, and God chooses people not by sight but by what it is in their hearts. In the account of the man born blind, Jesus affirms that this person was chosen for the same purposes that David was chosen, to be a surprising choice and to reveal God's glory. God, it seems, has a purpose in selecting the unexpected; in doing things that surprise us, we can be shaken from our ordinary life, from our ordinary expectations and so see things in a new light. The message of the second reading makes this abundantly clear. We can no longer sleep! We must awaken to the light of Christ. This applies not only to those who are coming to the faith in the RCIA but even to those who have been followers of Jesus for a lifetime. The alarm is sounding, wake up and see what God is doing even now!

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**First Reading** 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a \

*David is anointed as king of Israel.*

**A reading from the first Book of Samuel**

The LORD said to Samuel:

"Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way.  
I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem,  
for I have chosen my king from among his sons."

As Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice,  
Samuel looked at Eliab and thought,  
"Surely the LORD's anointed is here before him."

But the LORD said to Samuel:

"Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature,  
because I have rejected him."

Not as man sees does God see,  
because man sees the appearance  
but the LORD looks into the heart."  
In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel,  
but Samuel said to Jesse,  
"The LORD has not chosen any one of these."  
Then Samuel asked Jesse,  
"Are these all the sons you have?"  
Jesse replied,  
"There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep."  
Samuel said to Jesse,  
"Send for him;  
we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here."  
Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them.  
He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold  
and making a splendid appearance.  
The LORD said,  
"There—anoint him, for this is the one!"  
Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand,  
anointed David in the presence of his brothers;  
and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David.

## **The word of the Lord**

### **1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a Commentary by John Paul Heil**

Main Theme: God SEES beyond appearances and into the HEART. This account of Samuel's anointing of David as the next king of Israel centers around the theme of perceptive "seeing." When Samuel "looked" at Eliab with his lofty stature and impressive physical appearance, he thought surely Eliab was the one God had chosen to be anointed as king. But God rejected him and all seven of the sons Jesse presented to Samuel, because "not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart" (16:7). Contrary to normal expectations and the way we humans may think, God chose David as king, even though he was the youngest son and seemingly, from all appearances, least worthy and fit to be king. Once David was brought to them, however, "he was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance" (16:12). Nevertheless, despite this "splendid

appearance” by David, that is not why God chose him. God looked through the appearance and saw that David had the proper “heart” to be king.

This reading invites us to “see” the way that God “sees.” We are not to be overly concerned with external appearances, either our own or others’, but with the “heart,” the true inner person. Do we have and can we see in others the “heart” God is looking for to serve him?

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### **Responsorial Psalm Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6**

**℟(1)** The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;  
beside restful waters he leads me;  
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk in the dark valley  
I fear no evil; for you are at my side  
with your rod and your staff  
that give me courage.

You spread the table before me  
in the sight of my foes;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness follow me  
all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
for years to come.

## **Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 Commentary by Deacon Owen**

**Cummings:** This has to be the most popular, best known and best loved psalm in the Psalter. It is especially meaningful during Lent. As we are making our way towards the Easter Vigil, the psalm recapitulates the present reality and the hope of the elect. In terms of the present, the Lord is indeed the Shepherd of the elect, close to them, guiding them through these last weeks of preparation for initiation. Lent can be a difficult time for the elect, as they prepare to enter the Church. Sometimes this leads to difficulties with families, perhaps even periods of concern and even of doubt. That is why we have the Scrutinies, the prayer that every impediment, every demonic difficulty, may be removed from the path of the elect. The psalm provides exquisite reassurance: "Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage." God is there, side by side with the elect, and indeed with all of us, never absent. At the Easter Vigil, God's comforting presence reaches its climax as he invites and incorporates into his own life. He leads the elect to the restful waters of baptism in which they will be refreshed and renewed. They will be anointed with oil, with chrism, deepening the image of the Christ-Son in the newly baptized. The table of the Eucharist will be spread before them so that their incorporation will be complete. Fed with Christ's body the elect join us as Christ's Body, as we all struggle to give witness as Christ's Body.

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## **Second Reading Ephesians 5:8-14**

*Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.*

## **A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians**

Brothers and sisters:  
You were once darkness,  
but now you are light in the Lord.  
Live as children of light,  
for light produces every kind of goodness  
and righteousness and truth.

Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.  
Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness;  
rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention  
the things done by them in secret;  
but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,  
for everything that becomes visible is light.  
Therefore, it says:  
"Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will give you light."

## **The word of the Lord**

### **Ephesians 5:8-14 Commentary by John Paul Heil**

Main theme: CHRIST gives us the LIGHT to expose the world's works of darkness.

The apocalyptic-eschatological background of this reading divides the world into a strict dualism of "light" and "darkness." "Light" symbolizes everything that is positive, good, moral, life-giving, and of God, whereas "darkness" symbolizes the opposite--everything that is negative, bad, immoral, deadly, and of the Devil or power of evil. Now that we have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, we can "awake" from our former "sleep" within the realm of "darkness" and live in the "light" the risen Christ provides. With the "light" of Christ not only are we enabled to produce "every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth" (5:9), but also to expose the works of "darkness" in our world so that their wickedness and fruitlessness becomes visible to all. Once they have been exposed they can be transformed into "light"--"everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light" (5:13-14).

Are we living in the "light" our baptism into the risen Christ gives us? As children of the "light" do we have the courage and willingness to expose the "fruitless works of darkness" within the culture of death that we live in and thus awaken others to live in the "light" of the risen Christ?

## **Gospel Acclamation John 8:12**

I am the light of the world, says the Lord;  
whoever follows me will have the light of life.

## **Gospel (longer form) John 9:1-41**

*The man who was blind went off and washed himself and came back able to see.*

## **A reading from the holy Gospel according to John**

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth.  
His disciples asked him,  
"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents,  
that he was born blind?"  
Jesus answered,  
"Neither he nor his parents sinned;  
it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.  
We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day.  
Night is coming when no one can work.  
While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."  
When he had said this, he spat on the ground  
and made clay with the saliva,  
and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him,  
"Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" —which means Sent—.  
So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said,  
"Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?"  
Some said, "It is,"  
but others said, "No, he just looks like him."  
He said, "I am."  
So they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?"  
He replied,  
"The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes  
and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.'  
So I went there and washed and was able to see."

And they said to him, "Where is he?"  
He said, "I don't know."

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees.  
Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath.  
So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see.  
He said to them,

"He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see."

So some of the Pharisees said,

"This man is not from God,  
because he does not keep the sabbath."

But others said,

"How can a sinful man do such signs?"

And there was a division among them.

So they said to the blind man again,

"What do you have to say about him,  
since he opened your eyes?"

He said, "He is a prophet."

Now the Jews did not believe

that he had been blind and gained his sight  
until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his  
sight.

They asked them,

"Is this your son, who you say was born blind?"

How does he now see?"

His parents answered and said,

"We know that this is our son and that he was born blind.

We do not know how he sees now,

nor do we know who opened his eyes.

Ask him, he is of age;

he can speak for himself."

His parents said this because they were afraid

of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed  
that if anyone acknowledged him as the Christ,  
he would be expelled from the synagogue.

For this reason his parents said,

"He is of age; question him."

So a second time they called the man who had been blind  
and said to him, "Give God the praise!  
We know that this man is a sinner."  
He replied,  
"If he is a sinner, I do not know.  
One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see."  
So they said to him,  
"What did he do to you?  
How did he open your eyes?"  
He answered them,  
"I told you already and you did not listen.  
Why do you want to hear it again?  
Do you want to become his disciples, too?"  
They ridiculed him and said,  
"You are that man's disciple;  
we are disciples of Moses!  
We know that God spoke to Moses,  
but we do not know where this one is from."  
The man answered and said to them,  
"This is what is so amazing,  
that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes.  
We know that God does not listen to sinners,  
but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him.  
It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born  
blind.  
If this man were not from God,  
he would not be able to do anything."  
They answered and said to him,  
"You were born totally in sin,  
and are you trying to teach us?"  
Then they threw him out.

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out,  
he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"  
He answered and said,  
"Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"  
Jesus said to him,  
"You have seen him,  
and the one speaking with you is he."  
He said,

"I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.  
Then Jesus said,  
"I came into this world for judgment,  
so that those who do not see might see,  
and those who do see might become blind."

Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this  
and said to him, "Surely we are not also blind, are we?"  
Jesus said to them,  
"If you were blind, you would have no sin;  
but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains."

### The Gospel of the Lord

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transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any  
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**John 9:1-41 Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings:** There is a wonderful line in Isaiah 60.1, where the speaker addresses Zion: "Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you." This line could stand as inspired commentary on our gospel reading. The man born blind is faced with the Light-come, the Glory of the Lord in the person of Jesus. He rises up in splendor, for now he can see. This story from St. John was read in the early Church during Lent, as part of the elect's preparation for Easter. We know, for example, that the elect in Milan at the time of St. Ambrose in the 4th century heard the story of the Samaritan Woman (John 4) and the Man Born Blind (John 9) during Lent, as types of what was to happen to them. Since they also appear in second century frescoes in the catacombs in Rome as baptismal symbols, it may be that the baptismal connection is as early as the second century. Thus, in this miracle of the "Man Born Blind" we have an image of baptism. Jesus tells us close to the beginning, "I am the light of the world." The Light touches the man's eyes and he is told by the Light to wash in a pool, the pool of Siloam. As the blind man receives his sight through the water of Siloam, so the candidate for baptism receives in the water of baptism 'enlightenment' through Christ the Light. It is no accident that baptism came to be known as "enlightenment" in early Christian circles.