



Rossano Gospels, 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE, likely from Syria

### The Parables of Jesus and Interpreting “the Good Samaritan”

#### 1. What are Jesus’ parables?

Jesus had a *narrative theology*: to talk about God means to tell a story.

Short fictional stories,  
drawn from nature or everyday life, which  
express moral values and/or  
generate an experience for listeners that  
sparks active reflection about God and God’s will for humanity.

#### 2. Were they unique to Jesus?

#### 3. Where do you “read yourself in” to each parable?

#### 4. The Parable of the Sower and its allegorical interpretation

#### 5. The Parable of the Good Samaritan

a. Gospel of Luke

b. as interpreted by St. Augustine, North African bishop, 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. CE

c. as interpreted by Martin Luther King, Jr., April 3, 1968

### **The Sower (Matthew, Mark, and Luke)**

Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: *"Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."* And he said, *"Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"*

[ ... When he was alone with his disciples] he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

### **The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37)**

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?"

He said in reply, *"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*

He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus,

"And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, *"A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the*

*opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn, and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"*

He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

### **St. Augustine's allegorical interpretation: a parable of salvation history**

Traveler	=	Adam
Jerusalem	=	heavenly city (from which Adam fell)
Thieves	=	the devil and his angels

they strip the traveler of immortality, beat him to persuade him to sin, and leave him half-dead in his sinful state

Priest and Levite	=	the Old Testament (Law and Prophets)
Samaritan	=	the Lord Jesus Christ
Innkeeper	=	the apostle Paul

### **Martin Luther King's interpretation: a parable about race and fear today**

*April 3, 1968. Memphis, Tennessee. The audience was gathered in support of a strike for sanitation workers. It was his last speech.*

"Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness ..."

As you listen, consider:

- the choice of the parable: about "**a man of another race**"
- the engagement with the parable's **historical context**, and how that helps to generate a new meaning
- how **sympathetically reading oneself in** to the characters of the Priest and Levite affects the listener differently

25 Jan 2020  
Prof. Michael Peppard  
#2

## Reimagining Passover in Early Christianity

### Gospel of Mark 10:42-45

So Jesus called [his disciples] and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

### Gospel of John 1:29-31

The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."

### Gospel of John 8:31-36

Then Jesus said to those Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

### Gospel of Luke 22:14-23

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

*from the  
Greek which  
sounds like  
Pascha*

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.



25 Jan 2020  
PROF. JOSH  
#2

## Rabbis Reimagining Passover

Congregation Kol Ami  
White Plains, New York  
January 25, 2020

### The Mishnah (ca. 200 CE)

Rabban Gamaliel would say that anyone who does not mention these three things on Passover has not fulfilled their obligation: PESACH, MATZAH, and MAROR.

Pesach, because God passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt.

Matzah, because our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt.

Maror, because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt.

In every generation, a person must see themselves as if they came out of Egypt, as it says in Exodus 13:8, "you shall instruct your child that day, saying 'because God did this for me when I came out of Egypt.'..."

*Pesachim 10:5*

### Exodus 12:26-27

You shall observe [the Passover meal] as a law for you and your children for all time. When you enter the land that God, as God promised, will give to you, you shall observe this rite. When your children say to you, "why do you do this rite?" you shall say, "It is the Passover sacrifice to God because God passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when God struck down Egypt but saved our houses."

### The Babylonian Talmud (ca. 600 CE)

The rabbis taught: everyone is obligated to drink the four cups of wine—men, women, and children. Rabbi Judah said: Do children benefit from wine? Rather, we give them roasted grains and nuts on the day of the *seder* so they will stay awake to ask [questions]....

Rabbi Eliezer says: We snatch matzahs on the night of Passover so that children will not sleep....

It was taught that Rabbi Akiva never excused his students early from the study hall except on the afternoons before Passover and Yom Kippur. Before Passover so that children will not sleep [at the *seder*], before Yom Kippur so that his students would feed their children.

*Pesachim 109a*

We remove the table in front of the leader of the *seder* before eating the meal.... Why do we remove the table? The school of Rabbi Yannai said it was done so that children would notice and ask [questions]. When Abaye was young, he was sitting before Rabbah. He saw that they were removing his tray, so he said "we have not eaten yet, and you are taking away the trays?" Rabbah said: "Now we do not have to say *ma nishtana!*"

*Pesachim 115b*

### The Gospel of Mark (ca. 70 CE)

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

**Paul's first letter to the Corinthians 5:6-8 (very early Christian community in Greece)**

Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb (*pascha*), Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

*It isn't a rejection of Judaism  
& the start of a new religion*

**Melito of Sardis (modern day Turkey), ca. 180**

***On Pascha, one of the earliest extant Christian sermons***

- The "Quartodeciman" controversy (the "fourteen-ers," as in the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan)
- Melito's sermon as a Christian Passover sermon

The scripture of the exodus of the Hebrews has been read, and the words of the mystery declared; how the sheep was sacrificed, and how the people was saved, and how Pharaoh was flogged by the mystery. Therefore, well-beloved, understand how the mystery of the Pascha is both new and old, eternal and timely, perishable and imperishable, mortal and immortal. (1) ...

Many things were proclaimed by many prophets concerning the mystery of the Pascha, who is Christ ... This is the one who comes (*aphikomenos*) from heaven onto the earth by means of the suffering one (*ton paschonta*) ... he is the one led like a lamb and slaughtered like a sheep; he ransomed us from the worship of the world as from the land of Egypt, and he set us free from the slavery of the devil as from the hand of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls with his own Spirit, and the members of our body with his blood. (65-67)

[The Lord was] "killed at the great feast. And while you were rejoicing he was starving; you were drinking wine and eating bread; he had vinegar and gall. Your face was bright, while his was cast down. You were triumphant while he was afflicted. You were making music while he was being judged. You were proposing toasts; he was being nailed in place. You were dancing, he was buried. You were reclining on a cushioned couch, he in a tomb and coffin. (80)

***Exultet of the Roman Catholic Easter Vigil, origin 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. CE (excerpts)***

*Blessing of Paschal Candle*

Therefore, dearest friends,  
standing in the awesome glory of this holy light,  
invoke with me, I ask you,  
the mercy of God almighty,  
that he, who has been pleased to number me,  
though unworthy, among the Levites,  
may pour into me his light unshadowed,  
that I may sing this candle's perfect praises.

...

These, then, are the feasts of Passover,  
in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb,  
whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night, when once you led our forebears, Israel's children, from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night that with a pillar of fire banished the darkness of sin.

This is the night that even now, throughout the world, sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices and from the gloom of sin, leading them to grace and joining them to his holy ones.

This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld.

Our birth would have been no gain,  
had we not been redeemed.

O wonder of your humble care for us!

O love, O charity beyond all telling,  
to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!

O truly necessary sin of Adam,  
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!

O happy fault, that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!

...

This is the night of which it is written: The night shall be as bright as day, dazzling is the night for me, and full of gladness. The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty.

25 Jan 2020

Prof. Michael Peppard #3

## Early Christian Rituals of Initiation and Belonging

### Paul: Gentile expansion and becoming "Christian"

However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. (1 Corinthians 7:17-20)

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

In [Jesus] also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Colossians 2:11-17, attributed to Paul but contested)

### Aphrahat, "the Persian Sage" (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. CE), baptism and anointing as "circumcision"

Joshua (Jesus) our redeemer a second time circumcised the peoples who believed in him with the circumcision of the heart, and they were baptized and circumcised with the knife which is 'his word that is sharper than a two-edged sword' (New Testament, Hebrews 4:12). Joshua son of Nun led the people across to the land of promise; and Joshua (Jesus) our redeemer promised the land of the living to whoever passed through the true Jordan, believed, and circumcised the foreskin of his heart. ... Blessed are those whose hearts are circumcised from the foreskin and who are born through water, the second circumcision, for they are inheritors with Abraham.

- Demonstration 12.10

NOT CIRCUMCISION  
IS COMMANDED



### **What were the earliest Christian baptisms like?**

The word baptism means “immersion” or “dipping” or “dunking,” and so it stands to reason that the earliest baptisms were full-body immersions. A second-century source notes a preference for “running water” instead of “standing water” (*Didache* 7.1), which would both imitate the Jordan River and also provide the cleansing experience more effectively than stagnant water does.

But textual sources and archaeology do not offer many more specifics about procedures until the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. The oldest known baptistery, from a third-century house-church in Syria (see below), was probably not large enough for an adult to experience immersion baptism.

Over the third and fourth centuries, other rituals began to accompany baptism. Christians introduced preparatory fasting and instruction, an emphasis on anointing with oil, laying on of hands, renunciation of sin and the devil, lighting of fire, new garments, and more. Baptism became an important part of larger, composite rites of initiation.

### **And what were the main meanings of these initiatory rituals?**

Early Christians ascribed a wide diversity of meanings to these rituals (see below), which varied according to geographical region, time period, and theological orientation. In the New Testament, the baptismal experience was tied to:

- repentance and forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4),
- the descent of the Holy Spirit (John 1:33),
- the Trinity (Matt 28:19),
- rebirth (John 3:5),
- adoption into a new kinship (Gal 3:17-4:7),
- marriage (Eph 5:25-27),
- illumination (Heb 6:1-8), and
- imitation of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6:3-4).

All of these images were carried forward, and the third and fourth centuries added other metaphors of incorporation into a community, especially of shepherds and sheep, fish and fishermen, athletes and soldiers.

### **Case study: the earliest extant Christian baptistery, 3<sup>rd</sup>-c. Syria**

What rituals comprised\* early Christian initiation?

- catechesis (before)
- fasting (before)
  - disrobing
  - exorcism
- renunciation of the devil
- profession of faith
  - firelight
- blessing of water
- use of water (immersion or affusion)
  - anointing
  - new clothing
  - milk and honey
- prayers and psalms
- meal of bread / wine or bread / water
- sign of cross on forehead
- laying on of hands
- breathing on the candidate
  - kiss

What might these rituals have meant?

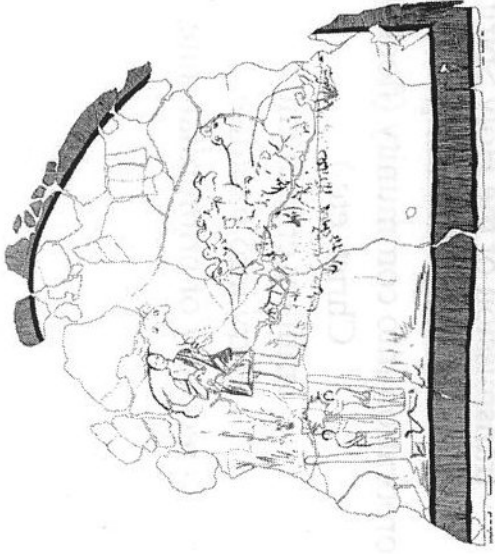
- cleansing of sin
- rejection of power of evil
- spiritual marriage
  - pregnancy
  - new birth
  - adoption
  - death
- resurrection
- illumination
  - healing
- nourishment
- empowerment
- transmission of the Holy Spirit
- sealing / branding
- incorporation into community (flock, body of Christ, etc.)
  - military enlistment
  - entry into paradise
  - recovery of primordial state

\* not all rituals were used in all times and places

**3rd c. Christian house-church with room for initiation  
Dura-Europos, Syria**

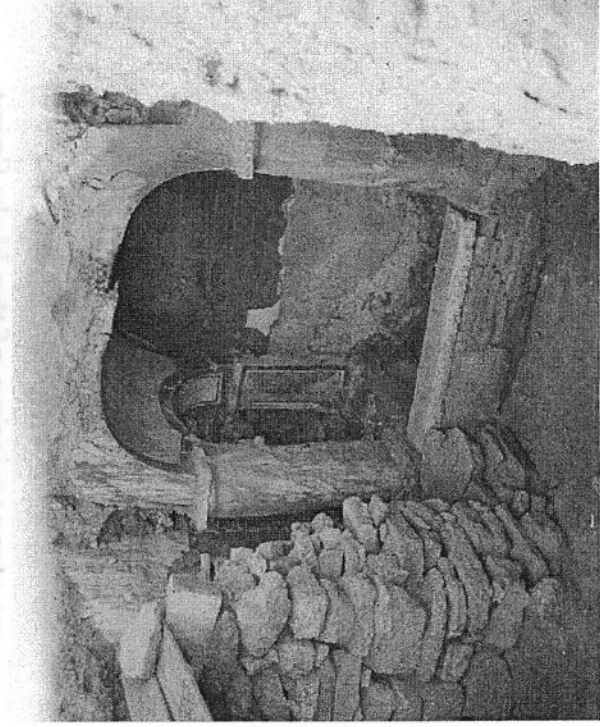
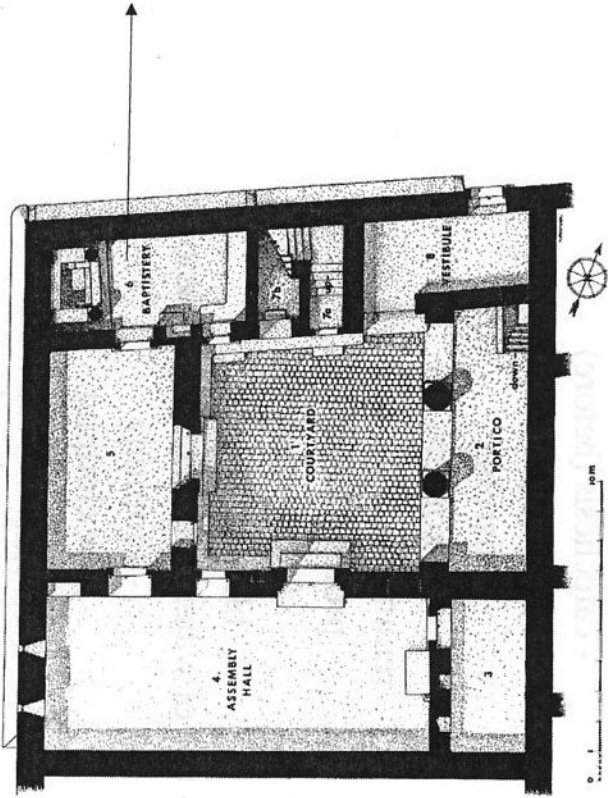
Michael Peppard, *The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria* (Yale Univ Press, 2016)

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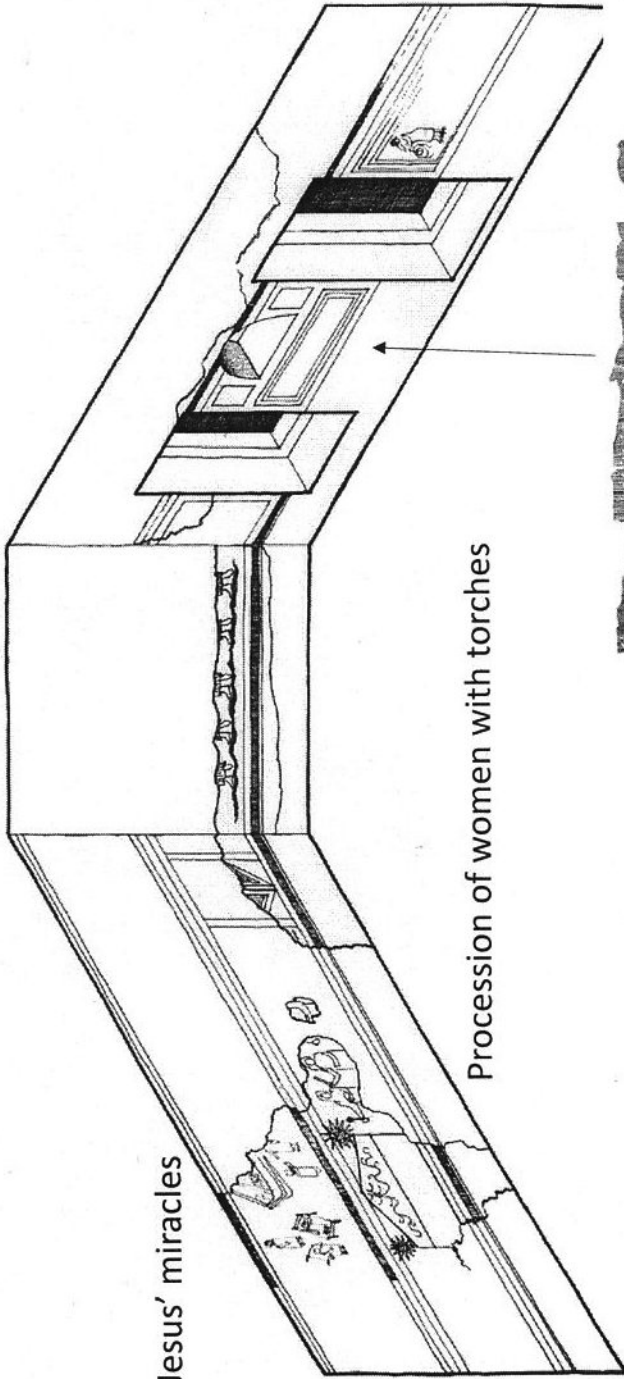


Shepherd & flock

Adam & Eve

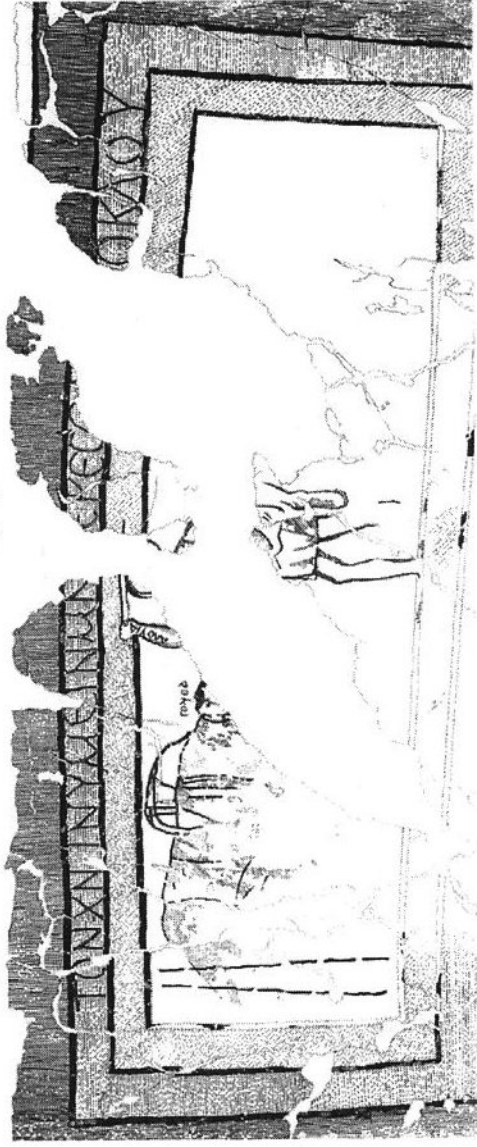


Jesus' miracles



Procession of women with torches

Woman at a well



David & Goliath

25 JAN 2020  
#3

## Rabbis Reinforcing Circumcision

Congregation Kol Ami  
White Plains, New York  
January 25, 2020

### 1 Maccabees 1:11-15

In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us." This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil. (NRSV)

Short, satirical  
poem

### Epigrams of Martial 7:82

So large a *fibula* covers Menophilus' penis  
That it would be enough by itself for all our comic actors.

I had supposed (we often bathe together)

That he was anxious to spare his voice, Flaccus.

But while he was in a game in the middle of the sportsground with everybody watching,  
the *fibula* slipped off the poor soul; he was circumcised (*verpus*)!

### The Tosefta

One who has drawn forward his foreskin must be circumcised. R. Judah says: one who has drawn forward his foreskin need not be circumcised because it is dangerous. The rabbis responded: Many men were circumcised in the days of the Bar Kochba rebellion and they went on to have children and did not die.

Shabbat 16:6

### The Mishnah

One performs all the requirements of circumcision [even] on Shabbat. One may circumcise, perform *periah*, suck, and apply a bandage and cumin to the wound.

Shabbat 19:2

These are the remnants of flesh that invalidate a circumcision: flesh that covers the majority of the glans.... A portly fellow should fix his circumcision for the sake of appearances. If a man were circumcised, but *periah* was not performed, it is as though he was not circumcised.

Shabbat 19:6

### The Babylonian Talmud

Avodah Zarah 27a

אלמא אף על גב דמהילי כמאן דלא מהילי דמו

...Even though [circumcised Gentiles] are circumcised, they are considered uncircumcised.

אלמא אע"ג דלא מהילי כמאן דמהילי דמו

...Even though [uncircumcised Jews] are uncircumcised, they are considered circumcised.

אשה כמאן דמהילא דמיא!

A Jewish woman is considered circumcised, so can be a *mohel*.

Rabbis make  
circ. an important  
part of Judaism by  
making women  
remotely  
circumcised even  
though they are not