

A Year of Sundays

Gospel Reflections 2009

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Introduction

**“The eyes of all look hopefully to you;
you give them their food in due season.”**

(Ps 145:15)

Who hasn't marveled at nature and found in the changing seasons some wisdom from the Creator and Sustainer of all that is good? Many parts of the world experience definite seasons. Winter displays the bare bones of God's creation, stripping the world in a way that makes us anticipate some new life that will no doubt come in with the winds of spring. The green softness of spring gives way to the brilliance of summer light, and in just a few months we ready ourselves for the relief of autumn. As the air cools and leaves fall we slip into a kind of reflective quiet as the earth prepares to make the cycle again.

The church too provides a cycle that can be seen as seasons. We begin in Advent, journey through Christmas, enter into Lent and then Easter. And in between, our year is punctuated by ordered (or ordinary) time. We celebrate great feasts after weeks of preparation. We journey through God's Word by focusing on Old and New Testament readings, and by focusing generally on readings from one central gospel each year.

This particular year is referred to as "Year B," and it focuses on the story of Jesus as found in the Gospel according

to Mark. While there will be occasional readings from the other gospels, Mark provides the framework for this year. Beginning in Advent of 2008, and proceeding through the feast of Christ the King at the end of November in 2009, we will encounter Jesus as seen through the lens of Mark and the community to whom he originally wrote.

Allow yourself to enter into the seasons of the church year and to find in them opportunities to feast on the fruits of those seasons. In the order of creation we see that life springs forth, and in the order of the church year, we can expect life to emerge in us as well.

The Lord Jesus will give us food in due season, but we have to come into the fields ready to reap the harvest of his Word whatever the season.

How to Use This Book

The gospel for each Sunday, as well as Christmas Day, Ash Wednesday, and the Triduum, is listed at the top of the page for that day. You will find the other readings listed there also.

Each week, read the gospel passage before you leave home, or even earlier in the week. Each reflection in this book focuses on a single phrase from the assigned gospel. Use these reflections as part of your preparation and as a way of extending the gospel message throughout the week. The simple question at the end of each reflection provides a springboard for prayer and application.

Some have found that they read in a quiet setting before attending Eucharist. Others tell us that they keep this book in the car and take time waiting in traffic to focus on the phrase or the question for each week, returning to it throughout the week. Still others find that they use these reflections and questions as part of prayer before parish meetings in any given week.

The Word of God is proclaimed in our churches each time we gather for Eucharist. Allowing the gospel to re-sound in our ears and minds and hearts throughout the week will help it take root in our lives.

November 30

First Sunday of Advent

Jerome Kodell, OSB

Lectionary 2B
Mark 13:33-37

Isa 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7; Ps 80; 1 Cor 1:3-9

“You do not know when the lord of the house is coming.”

This passage is the culmination of a short series of sayings and parables about the coming of the Son of Man in glory at the end. In the preceding sections we are told to watch for the signs, but here the message is to be vigilant at all times because, in fact, the signs that are mentioned (disturbance in the heavens) occur periodically, not only once at the end of history.

Watching for the coming of the Son of Man is not something to be worked into the schedule. It is the schedule. So it must become part of what we are doing all the time every day, in other words, living in expectancy of the imminent return of Christ in glory.

According to Cardinal Newman, this is the recipe for becoming a saint. Being holy, he says, is not so much a matter of doing this and not doing that, but having a grace-formed “frame of mind,” a main ingredient of which is “living habitually in the light of the world to come.” God is coming to us every day, and if we are always alert to welcome him, we will be ready when he comes now and at the end.

Is Advent a season on my schedule, or a reminder of a year-round way of living in expectation?

December 7

Second Sunday of Advent

Cackie Upchurch

Lectionary 5B

Isa 40:1-5, 9-11; Ps 85; 2 Pet 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist appeared in the desert.

In the pages of our Bibles it always seems to be the desert where God is made manifest: Moses encountered God in a burning bush and on a high desert mountain; those enslaved in Egypt passed through waters into a more desolate place before entering Canaan; Jacob camped by a desert spring to prepare himself to reconcile with Esau and in the night had a life-changing encounter with a divine presence. Even Jesus himself went to the desert to pray, and in facing Satan he experienced ministering angels.

In desert areas, every drop of water is essential. For John the Baptist, the Jordan River is God's own meeting place and all who come can be assured of an encounter with the divine. John is merely the servant who invites the guests, washes them clean, and announces the kingdom.

Centuries before John the Baptist, Hosea the prophet spoke God's words about Israel saying, "I will allure her; / I will lead her into the desert / and speak to her heart" (Hos 2:16). Advent is the time when God courts us by inviting us into the desert. It remains a fundamentally perfect place to hear a voice directing us to God's very presence and desires for us.

Where are the streams where I am being invited to encounter God even when life seems dry and barren?

December 14

Third Sunday of Advent

Clifford M. Yeary

Lectionary 8B

Isa 61:1-2a, 10-11; Luke 1:46f; 1 Thess 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

"Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?"

Do any of us really know who we are? Wouldn't that suggest knowing exactly what we were put here to do? John, it seems, was pretty certain of who he wasn't. He also knew that his whole life's mission was about preparing a way for that one for whom everyone should be waiting. If only we could be so certain about our mission in life. Wouldn't it be something to know for sure? And yet John shows us what it is, doesn't

he? It's about preparing a way, a way for Jesus to enter our lives.

How does Jesus find a way to reach us? The way to my heart could be a pretty cumbersome journey—lots of rocks and not much of a trail at all. That's why John is such a powerful example. John shouts and the people listen. The time is at hand, get ready for the one who is to come! No dilly-dallying, no lollygagging! And yet John seems to know that all the preparation in the world doesn't bring the one who is to come. He comes of his own will; he comes because he wants to find us. Come, Lord Jesus. We await you in joyful hope.

If someone demanded to know who you were, would your answer send them looking for the Christ?

December 21

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Monsignor J. Gaston Hebert

Lectionary 11B 2 Sam 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Ps 89; Rom 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

“Nothing will be impossible for God.”

Don't you just hate it when something upsets your plans? Mary's parents had carefully arranged this wedding. Mary

and Joseph had doubtlessly been dreaming of their impending marriage. A visit from an angel changed everything.

We never really know what God has in mind. We can only be sure that it is far more glorious than anything we have planned. “May it be done to me according to your word” tends to stick in the throat when God’s plans vary from our own. God often chooses the unexpected as an avenue to enter our lives and to evoke greatness from us that we never knew existed. Our Father wants each of his children to reach his or her potential.

A pregnancy prior to marriage would obviously have been difficult for Mary to explain both to her parents and to Joseph. This wasn’t in Mary’s plans. Questions are asked of the angel, answers given and accepted. Mary’s plans changed in her humble acceptance of God’s will rather than her own. She had no way of knowing how this humble flexibility would affect salvation history.

Challenges, crosses, problems will come to us all. They may well be gifts from God to enable us to achieve the greatness he always envisioned for us.

When have I recognized God equipping me for a task or situation that would normally be beyond my capacity or outside of my plans?

December 25

Nativity of the Lord

Judy Hoelzeman

Lectionary 15ABC
Luke 2:15-20

Isa 62:11-12; Ps 97; Titus 3:4-7

“Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place.”

Luke’s gospel draws a calming, idyllic scene: a star-filled night with angel song, first-time parents adoring their beautiful baby boy, and local shepherds sharing the joy.

In contrast, the hectic days that lead up to Christmas are jarring for many. Years ago I heard a story about a little girl on Christmas Eve. The Christmas rush was on and the little girl was brimming over with excitement. Her mother was frantically running from task to task. Her father was resentful, being ordered back and forth to various stores for last-minute needs. The little girl seemed to be in everyone’s way. Her mother ignored her interruptions, her father had no time for her questions, and her older brother just shooed her away.

By bedtime, the little five-year old was thoroughly disappointed and unnerved. When she knelt down to pray the Lord’s Prayer, this is what came out: “Forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us.”

Before this day gets too far gone, make it a point to ask forgiveness for your “Christmases” and forgive those who

have “Christmased” against you. You’ll have a holier, merrier day.

How can I help to make Christmas a true celebration of joy and goodness for those around me?

December 28

Feast of the Holy Family

Roy Goetz

Lectionary 17A
Luke 2:22-40

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Ps 128; Col 3:12-21

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

For much of the world, Christmas is over. One of the complaints we often hear the day or two after Christmas is, “It sure was an awful lot of trouble for just a few minutes of tearing packages open.” Some people feel a great letdown the day after Christmas. For us as Catholics, the Christmas season has just begun and doesn’t end until we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord.

The readings for this season call our attention to truths that extend well beyond singular events. We hear that Mary and Joseph present Jesus at the Temple, but the end of today’s passage draws us into what will be in the life of the

Holy Family. Within the love of his family, the Christ child grows and becomes strong and wise. He is favored by God.

If we are tempted to be a little down following the singular event of Christmas morning, perhaps we can enter more into the “what will be.” Within the love of our families and friends, we too are called to grow and become wise and to seek favor with God.

What can I do to grow in strength and wisdom?

January 4

Epiphany of Our Lord

Gregory C. Wolfe

Lectionary 20ABC
Matt 2:1-12

Isa 60:1-6; Ps 72; Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6

. . . behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews?”

Encouragement sometimes comes from unexpected places. In the Gospel of Matthew, the magi surprise all of Jerusalem when they arrive from the east looking for the newborn king. Exactly who the magi were, we do not know; but it would seem they did not share the Jewish faith. Instead they appear to be followers of astrology, studying the heavens to find

understanding and guidance for their lives. How wonderful that they who did not share the faith of the Hebrews would be led by nature to seek and eventually find the Messiah.

In our own time, I am reminded of a number of physicists who have journeyed through atheism to arrive at a belief in God, and in some cases, have even found Christ. They have studied both the tiniest world of the atom and the greatest expanses of the universe. After searching, they found a surprise at the end of their intellectual journey.

To complete the tale of the magi, there is a legend that years later St. Thomas traveled east and found the magi still living. Hearing of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, they were overjoyed and were baptized as Christians. Such possibilities I find encouraging.

When has my own searching led me to unexpected treasures that enrich my faith?

January 11

Baptism of the Lord

Clifford M. Yeary

Lectionary 21B
Mark 1:7-11

Isa 42:1-4, 6-7; Ps 29; Acts 10:34-38

“I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.”

Loosening the thongs of sandals was the job of a servant, most commonly a slave. Keep in mind that this claim of unworthiness comes from John, the guy who shouted out the sins of kings to shame them in public (Matt 14:3-4). John has humility. He does know his place: he has come on the scene to call all Israel to repentance through baptism, from highest nobility to humblest urchin. So why does he baptize Jesus, if John is so unworthy to be in his presence? Why would Jesus submit to a baptism of repentance?

When people came out of the Jordan after being baptized by John, they were part of a new Israel, an Israel that was now offering itself as a pure and obedient servant of God. This was to be the Israel God would once again call, “my son” (see Hos 11:1). Jesus’ baptism unites him with God’s people in a special way. He is the one to whom God says, “You are my beloved Son.” Because he is the Son, when we are baptized in him, we share in his Spirit, and we too are told, “You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”

Am I aware of my special relationship to God as a beloved child?

January 18

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Susan McCarthy, RDC

Lectionary 65B

1 Sam 3:3b-10; Ps 40; 1 Cor 6:13c-15a, 17-20

John 1:35-42

“What are you looking for?”

One way a spiritual director tries to learn how God is acting in our lives is by asking us what we are looking for, what we are seeking. What we are looking for on a retreat or at a particular time in our lives may be an indication of what God is trying to speak to our hearts.

The more we can clearly know and express what we are seeking the better able a director is to help us find our way.

Unfortunately, it is not always clear to us what we are looking for. Most often, I think, we are looking for peace, for joy, and perhaps for authenticity. We are looking for those qualities that lead us closer to God.

The founder of my religious congregation, Mary Caroline Dannat Starr, was not even aware she was looking for something when she was drawn as a young girl into a church in lower Manhattan by the sound of an organ playing. In re-

sponding to the call to go into the church, she began a life-long love affair with God.

So what is it I am looking for in my life?

January 25

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Monsignor David LeSieur

Lectionary 68B
Mark 1:14-20

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Ps 25; 1 Cor 7:29-31

They abandoned their nets and followed him.

Jesus' first demand in Mark's gospel is "Repent, and believe in the gospel." This is a radical demand because repentance implies abandoning one's former ways of living and making decisions.

Jesus next tells Simon, Andrew, James, and John, all fishermen, to be his disciples. "They abandoned their nets and followed him . . . they left their father . . . and followed him." We can admire such willingness on the part of these disciples to leave their familiar ways and cast their lot with an itinerant preacher.

But have they really accepted the good news of the kingdom? Have they changed? Not necessarily. The remainder of Mark's gospel will show just how difficult it is for the