

A Year of Sundays

Gospel Reflections 2010

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Introduction

**As the deer longs for streams of water,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My being thirsts for God, the living God.
When can I go and see the face of God?**

(Ps 42:2-3)

On a recent trail walk through a wooded area, a friend and I heard a distinctive noise and discovered to our delight two young deer romping through a wetlands area on their way to the river's edge. They reveled in the cool morning air and the water around their bodies. They were present to that moment and that moment only. Such undivided attention led them more deeply into the woods and then out on the other side to the promise of the river's flowing water.

Just as the deer long for that water, so we long for God. Many saints in our sweeping history speak about a deep hunger, a certain restlessness, an awareness of longing for something that can't be defined fully. The Scriptures invite us to bring that yearning to a place where we can discover the face of the living God. The words that are proclaimed in our assemblies find a quiet home within us, a place where we can ponder the very presence of God, reveling in the moment of encounter. And then these words, filled with God's living presence, invite us to go out into a world that is also thirsty and longing to see God's face.

Just as the lapping of water on the shore will shape the land and even mold the stones in its path, God's word continues to shape us. The gospels in particular

have the power to quench our thirst and shape our lives so that others recognize in us the living Christ, and see in us an image of God's face.

This particular liturgical year is referred to as "Year C" and it focuses on the story of Jesus as found in the Gospel according to Luke. While there will be occasional readings from the other gospels, Luke provides the framework for this year. Beginning in Advent of 2009, and proceeding through the feast of Christ the King at the end of November in 2010, we will meet God present in the cool, healing waters of Luke's story.

Allow yourself to recognize your thirst for God, and then make your way to the streams where you will see God's face.

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. Please note that on some days the church allows different readings to be selected. These alternate readings may be found in the Lectionary for Mass.

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 29

First Sunday of Advent

Clifford M. Yeary

Lectionary 3C *Jer 33:14-16; Ps 25; 1 Thess 3:12-4:2*
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

“Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

We might shake our heads and wonder at those who carry doomsday placards on sidewalk corners. In recent times, however, we might even suspect that they are more than likely economists. And who among us does not know someone who is convinced that the end of all is near?

Jesus tells of great and terrible signs that will come as warnings that the entire earth is about to enter judgment. All the nations will be in dismay because of what these signs portend, but we are to stand erect and raise our heads. What others will fear as the end of all things is actually to be awaited with confidence that God is fulfilling the promise of our redemption.

The difference between those who quake in fear and those who hold up their heads in confidence is summed up in one word: vigilance. Those who know that the culmination of life, individually and collectively, is to find ourselves in the unblinker presence of God will hopefully live a life of vigilant, hopeful expectation. We might even become visible, hopeful signs to the world of the one whom we are awaiting.

If my life were a sign, what would it say to the world?

December 6

Second Sunday of Advent

Karen Wenzel

Lectionary 6C

Bar 5:1-9; Ps 126; Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

Luke 3:1-6

“Prepare the way of the Lord.”

Road construction is arduous, dirty work that inextricably alters the landscape. The result—a broad, smooth, straight highway—is a technological marvel of muscle and mighty machines that improves our quality of life.

Isaiah and John realistically tell us what we must do to see God. Like road construction, it’s arduous, dirty work: destroy bad habits, level pride, build up good works and kindnesses.

Happily, it’s not necessary to attempt this transformation single-handedly or all at once. God’s free gift of grace is a “mighty machine” that can help us change if we seek his help. If we are willing to do that, over time we’ll be fundamentally changed. We’ll find peace and salvation.

Eventually, though, roadbeds deteriorate and must be rebuilt. Similarly, our preparation—our life’s work—is never complete. We’ll sin and offend God again and again and need to rebuild our relationship with him. That’s why God’s supply of grace is inexhaustible.

Let's start today by filling one tiny pothole to smooth the way for Jesus to reach us—and for us to find our way to God.

Where is God's grace directing me to prepare the way for Christ to enter more fully into my life?

December 13

Third Sunday of Advent

Albert Schneider

Lectionary 9C
Luke 3:10-18

Zeph 3:14-18a; Isa 12; Phil 4:4-7

The crowds asked John the Baptist: "What should we do?"

Introverts don't like surprises. That's a nugget I learned from training on the Myers-Briggs Personality Test. John the Baptist's words and actions, precursors to those of Jesus, tell us we had better be prepared for surprises. The people he addresses are not respectable. Some are hated. They are the poor, or tax collectors and soldiers. When they ask, "What should we do?" what he tells them is even more surprising.

The poor should share what little they have with others. Tax collectors aren't supposed to quit their jobs, just stop taking graft. Soldiers, the enforcers of Roman oppression, aren't supposed to quit their jobs either. They should, however, treat everyone fairly and with respect.

We live in an imperfect world. Even if our government is flawed and our jobs are looked down on by others, we can proclaim God's justice and goodness by the way we treat others. If we are among the respectable, our challenge is to respect those who aren't and the way God chooses to work with them.

How am I responding to the surprises God is sending me?

December 20

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Rosa María Icaza, CCVI

Lectionary 12C
Luke 1:39-45

Mic 5:1-4a; Ps 80; Heb 10:5-10

"Blessed are you who believed."

In today's gospel Mary hears from the angel that her cousin Elizabeth, who is of advanced age, is with child. It's a simple statement, but Mary *hears* a call for help and responds: she went "in haste."

Mary herself was also with child, a difficult situation for a young woman, but she does not hesitate to respond in faith to the hidden invitation. Even during difficult situations, God asks us to forget our worries and concerns and to see how we can help others. How generous are we when someone asks for help? Do we need to be asked? Or are we attentive to the needs of others so we can respond without their asking?

As Mary enters the house, the baby in Elizabeth's womb "leaped for joy," and filled with the Spirit, Elizabeth greets Mary: "Blessed are you who believed," recognizing that Jesus is in Mary, "the mother of my Lord." At this moment, Elizabeth also believes and is able to forget herself and praise God for what has been done in Mary.

True joy is based on faith, and faith leads to hope and love. Advent is a time of joyful waiting.

Am I looking forward with faith, hope, and love to the coming of Jesus in a new way into my life this Christmas?

December 25

Nativity of the Lord

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor

Lectionary 16C
John 1:1-18

Isa 52:7-10; Ps 98; Heb 1:1-6

The light shines in the darkness, / and the darkness has not overcome it . . .

Fall is a season of increasing darkness. For six months the days have been getting shorter, but now on the third day following the winter solstice it is evident that the steady advance of darkness has finally been reversed. The days are lengthening again and the darkness is receding, at least for awhile.

Lent is a season of increasing spiritual darkness ending on Good Friday, the darkest day of the year

spiritually. The light kindled by Jesus' birth today seemed to have been extinguished, but three days later it was evident that evil did not have the final word. His light is stronger than the darkness.

During his public ministry Jesus says we are "the light of the world," and he insists: "your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Matt 5:14, 16). In this way, Jesus' light will continue to shine in the darkness also through us, the church, against which he assures us "the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail" (Matt 16:18). "The light shines in the darkness, / and the darkness has not overcome it . . ."

In this season, how can my life become a light for others in my workplace or neighborhood?

December 27

Feast of the Holy Family

Roy Goetz

Lectionary 17C

1 Sam 1:20-22, 24-28; Ps 84;

Luke 2:41-52

1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

The boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.

Try to imagine the noise, dust, and general hubbub that probably went along with traveling by caravan in the time of Jesus. Merchant caravans could include thousands of pack animals and as many people, but

smaller caravans of a few dozen pack animals and their drivers were more common. We can see how even in a smaller caravan it would have been understandable for Mary and Joseph to assume Jesus was safe with relatives or friends. For me, it brings to mind memories of family camping trips with all the packing, unpacking, and chaos that often went along with the trips.

Too often we may begin a new project or journey thinking that our own skills and resources will see us through. How often do we neglect to include Jesus in our plans for success? Our faith teaches us that Jesus is always with us, but we have to remind ourselves of that truth. When Mary and Joseph discovered Jesus' absence, they immediately looked for him. If we should find ourselves traveling without him, prayer, like Mary and Joseph's return to Jerusalem, not only sends us searching for him, it makes us actively present to him.

When have I lost track of Jesus in my daily routine? What am I willing to invest to find him again?

January 3

Epiphany of the Lord

Cackie Upchurch

Lectionary 20ABC
Matt 2:1-12

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

They were overjoyed at seeing the star.

Recently, while reading this passage, I heard something new or perhaps heard it in a new way. Matthew tells us that the magi were overjoyed not at seeing the child but at seeing the star. Of course, we understand that their joy was complete in the manger, prostrated and giving homage, but first they experienced the joy of a simple star. Why?

In this case, the star was symbolic of all they hoped to find. They noticed its rising, followed its light, paid attention when it “stopped over the place,” and then they knew they were in the presence of the holy. Matthew tells us these Eastern travelers were astrologers, so the star was a tool of their trade. But more than a tool, it signified the holy, and invited them to enter into mystery in a way they could not have known had they not followed.

Even the signs of God’s presence can give us joy . . . a child’s embrace, the progress of a friend through an illness, the offer of comfort when a family member dies, the gathering of God’s people for Eucharist. We only have to pay attention and be ready to follow these signs that will lead us to God’s presence.

What signs of God’s presence do I recognize at this time in my life, and am I willing to follow where they lead? Do I experience the joy of the journey?

January 10

Baptism of the Lord

David LeSieur

Lectionary 21C

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

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

All were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ.

On this observance of the baptism of the Lord, we read in Luke that a heavenly voice tells Jesus: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Though his disciples will later identify Jesus as the Messiah, a title fraught with political as well as religious meaning, the voice at his baptism identifies him in relational terms—“You are my Son.” In the genealogy that follows, Jesus’ human heritage is traced through Joseph all the way back to Adam, “the son of God.”

As he begins his public ministry, Jesus is assured of his status and identity. Ironically, two of the devil’s temptations to Jesus begin with the words, “If you are the Son of God . . .” as if to cast doubt in Jesus’ mind about who he really is. But he has no doubt. Later, at the transfiguration, the same heavenly voice will tell Peter, James, and John who Jesus is.

The knowledge that Jesus received at his baptism is to be shared. He is more than a Messiah whose mission has political or even religious implications. He is the beloved Son of God who shares his eternal heritage with all who believe in him and act in his name.

How does a sense of God's intimate relationship with Jesus affect my own relationship with the Lord?

January 17

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mary Lou Stubbs, DC

Lectionary 66C
John 2:1-11

Isa 62:1-5; Ps 96; 1 Cor 12:4-11

"Do whatever he tells you."

It is amazing how we can move our gifts from potentiality to reality when someone believes in us and encourages us!

In today's reading, Jesus and some of his followers went to a wedding that his mother had been invited to. When in her kindness she wanted to spare the family embarrassment, she informed her son that they were running out of wine. His response was essentially, "Leave me alone! I'm not ready!"

Can't you see her quiet smile when she tells the servers in total trust to "do whatever he tells you"? Can't you almost hear his sigh of resignation when he tells them to fill the jars with water?

Jesus "knew" what to do and had been teaching the way of the Lord, but it was trusting encouragement that helped him step into action with the gifts that revealed his glory to those around him, "and his disciples began to believe in him." This first sign of

his divine nature was a decisive step into the reality that he was called to live. It could not have been easy to move from his comfort zone, but he did so, and the world was changed.

Who has changed my life with their trusting encouragement? And to whom have I given such encouragement?

January 24

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gregory C. Wolfe

Lectionary 69C *Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; Ps 19; 1 Cor 12:12-30*
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

And news of him spread . . .

Centuries before he was born, word of a savior was uttered by the prophets of Israel. Preserved in written scrolls, prophecies like those in the book of Isaiah would regularly be heard by the Jewish faithful in synagogues all over Israel and around the world. For centuries, word of him spread.

In his own time, news of Jesus spread. Miraculous healings, teachings with authority, a growing group of disciples, a palpable sense of mystery—all contributed to his widening reputation. By the end of his earthly ministry, his accusers in Jerusalem would say, “He is inciting the people with his teaching through-

out all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here" (Luke 23:5).

After his resurrection, eyewitnesses—those who had seen and heard—were the first to spread the good news about Jesus. Followed by other ministers of the word, the stories and teachings of Jesus would be memorized, put into song, handed down, and treasured. Some, like Luke, would compile the narratives into collections so that the news could be spread into the future.

Through time and throughout every language and nation, news of Jesus continues to spread. New generations are offered the news—good news, hopeful news, saving news.

What is the news about Jesus that spreads through my witness?

January 31

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mary J. Glynn, SJC

Lectionary 72C *Jer 1:4-5, 17-19; Ps 71; 1 Cor 12:31–13:13*
Luke 4:21-30

"Isn't this the son of Joseph?"

During Advent throughout our diocese we discussed a pastoral letter issued by our bishop on the rights and responsibilities of immigrants. Some folks were