Introduction to Luke

This year we move to Cycle C, the Year of Luke. In an introduction to the Year of Luke, the authors of Living Liturgy ‘04 write:

While we may not know a lot about Luke, most people know a good deal about his gospel. Some of the most cherished stories about Jesus are reported by Luke: the annunciation to Mary, the birth in a manger, the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Some of the New Testament’s most memorable characters are found in Luke: the diminutive but resourceful Zacchaeus, the aged and astonished Elizabeth and Zechariah, the hospitable Martha and the attentive Mary. Some of Jesus’ most beloved parables—brimming with poignancy and compassion, and universal in their broad religious and humanitarian appeal—are jewels of Luke’s gospel: the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the rich man and poor Lazarus, the Pharisee and the tax collector. The backbone of the Church’s daily prayer comes from Luke’s gospel: Zechariah’s Canticle at Morning Prayer, Mary’s Magnificat at evening prayer, and Simeon’s Canticle at night prayer.

His gospel is such a treasure trove of themes that it has invited numerous nicknames, such as The Gospel of Joy, The Gospel of the Holy Spirit, of Prayer, of the Poor, among others. Other obvious themes include warnings against wealth; frequent meals with sinners; inclusion of women; and concern for tax collectors, lepers, and outcasts. Luke’s portrait of Jesus is perhaps the most beloved and easily approachable of all the gospels. Luke’s Jesus is the embodiment of divine compassion. Indeed, Luke’s portrayal of Jesus is at the heart of his proclamation of the “good news.”

Environment note: If possible, during the Advent Season, set up an advent wreath on the center table covered with purple cloth. Light the wreath before you begin.

Opening prayer: Father in heaven, our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our Savior and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Sharing life: What do you enjoy most and least about this time of the year?

Facilitator reads focus statement: This weekend we begin a new liturgical year, Cycle C, the Year of Luke. Each year, the first Sunday of Advent focuses on the two major comings of Jesus – his first coming and his Second Coming. We can say Jeremiah and Paul set our Advent agenda, indeed our life’s “homework.” Between the Lord’s first coming and his glorious return, we must, as the prophet bids us, do what is right and just in the land, so that the community of Jesus’ disciples can, as Paul urges, increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

Consider reading the commentary on each reading at a time that works best for your group: either before or after reading the Scripture.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Commenting on this reading, the authors of Living the Word (2004) write:

When you hear a storyteller start out, “Once upon a time …” you realize that what follows is most likely a fictional account (even if, at times, the tale may be based on some historical realities). In much the same way, the Bible often has “code words” that signal what kind of passage we are dealing with. Today’s first reading from the prophet Jeremiah begins, “The days are coming, says the Lord…. “ For any student of the Bible, this phrase clearly signals that what follows is a messianic prophecy, a passage looking deep into the future, attempting to describe the indescribable: what it will be like when the Messiah finally comes and sets things right in the world. Originally spoken as words of consolation to exiles in Babylon, urging them not to give up hope in the restoration of the Davidic dynasty promised long ago, this passage assumed over time much larger proportions as a guarantee that Israel would never be abandoned completely by God, no matter what the
fortunes of its kings or other rulers might be at any
given time in its history.

Jerusalem, a city whose name means “foundation of
peace,” is given here a new name—“the Lord our
Justice.” Implied in this is the premise that the city
will have peace when justice is achieved. Recall the
famous words of Pope Paul VI: “If you want peace,
work for justice."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 25
In this psalm, we ask God to teach us his ways.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2
We have a “wish prayer” and an exhortation to a
community who believes that the Second Coming of
Christ is imminent. Paul prays that the Thessalonians
“grow in love” for each other in preparation for the
Second Coming or return of Jesus. He urges them to
“conduct themselves in a way pleasing to God.”

Chapter 21 in Luke’s Gospel speaks about the
destruction of the Temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and
the end of the world – all terrifying events.

Jesus speaks about the coming of the Son of Man (at
the end of the world). Using apocalyptic (“veiled”)
language, Jesus presents images of both cosmic and
political upheaval (“seas and waves roaring,”
“nations in anguish”) to speak about this event. The
unrighteous will be terrified by these events, but
faithful disciples of Jesus need not fear, for the
coming of the Son of Man will signal their
deliverance and salvation.

Jesus exhorts his followers to “be on guard,” lest they
fall into self-indulgence and forget God and his
ways. There will be a day of reckoning for all people.
The Gospel ends with an exhortation to pray and
watch all that they say and do in the context of the
Gospel. In other words, “What would Jesus say or
do in this situation?” For the faithful disciple, the
coming of the Son of Man will not be a fearful event.
Rather, it will be a day of triumph and joy.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
1. What verse or image spoke to you? Why?
2. In the first reading, Jeremiah offers a word of
hope to his people in a time of darkness. What
sustains you in times of darkness?
3. In the second reading, Paul prays that God may
increase the Thessalonians’ love for each other.
Name one way you feel you have grown in love in
recent years (e.g., I have become more appreciative
of the differences among individuals or groups of
people).
4. What helps you keep your focus on Jesus during
the season when so much emphasis is on shopping
and parties?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD
Name one way you can act on these readings.
Suggestion: Name and act on one way you can allow
Jesus to live more fully in your life this Advent.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION
AND INTERCESSION
Pray especially for the grace to “keep your eyes on
Jesus” during this Advent Season. ☺

LET US PRAY
Lord, awaken my heart to your presence through
faith. Renew my spirit with the gift of hope. Enliven
my compassion by deepening my love. In Jesus’
name. Amen.
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 6, 2015 C

Opening prayer: God of mercy, we gather together as sons and daughters of your promise. You gave us the prophets to show us how to hope in days of mourning. You gave us John the Baptist as a signpost to Jesus. You gave us Jesus that all the peoples of the earth might see the salvation of God. As we gather today, open our hearts to hear your Word so that it can teach us the true spirit of this season. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first reading, Jerusalem is told to take off her “clothes of mourning” because God is coming to liberate her children from exile. In the second reading, Paul, writing from prison, expresses his gratitude to the Philippians for helping him to spread the message of Christ. In the Gospel, John the Baptist calls his hearers to repentance so that they can receive the gift of salvation offered by God through Jesus.

Consider reading the commentary on each reading at a time that works best for your group: either before or after reading the Scripture.

FIRST READING: Baruch 5:1-9

People sometimes ask: What is the difference between a Catholic bible and a Protestant bible? The main difference is that there are seven additional books in the Old Testament of the Catholic bible which are not found in the Protestant bible. Today’s first reading is taken from one of those books. Catholics have always followed the Greek version of the Old Testament which contains the extra books, while Protestants abide by the Hebrew version. Fortunately, none of the disputed books of the Bible contain anything radically different from what is found elsewhere in the 39 books that all Christians believe as inspired. A case in point is today’s first reading.

The passage we read today from Baruch has been described by Scripture scholars as a kind of “digest” of the second part of the Book of Isaiah. In the reading, God, through his prophet, speaks a comforting word to Jerusalem as she mourns for her children who have been taken into exile. Jerusalem, imaged as a grieving mother, is told to remove her “mourning clothes” and replace them with “happy clothes that speak of splendor and rejoicing.” She is exhorted “to stand up upon the heights” and prepare for the return of the exiles who will be led home by God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 126

These verses express very powerfully the joy of the returning exiles.

SECOND READING: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

Paul is writing from prison to a community that he loves very much. In his absence, they have done a fine job of promoting the Gospel. Paul prays that they may continue to grow in love and that they “may learn to value the things that really matter.”


Luke places John’s call in a historical context by naming certain places and personalities. Some of these personalities will oppose Jesus and his ministry.

John’s call comes to him in the desert, the place where God formed and purified Israel many centuries earlier. He then proclaims “a baptism of repentance” which will lead to forgiveness of sins. True repentance involves a complete change of heart, a turning away from sinful attitudes and behaviors and a turning toward God and his ways. This change of heart is symbolized by a ritual cleansing in the waters of the Jordan. The confession of sin leads to forgiveness of sin.

John uses the words of an earlier prophet, Isaiah, to challenge the people. Commenting on the words of Isaiah, Scripture scholar Patricia Sanchez says: “Mountains” of egoism should be leveled. “Hills” of preconceived ideas as to who and what the Savior should be and do must yield in order to welcome the unexpected surprises of God. “Crooked,” “winding,” and manipulating attitudes and behavior must bow to the truth of God’s ways.
FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you and why?

2. In the first reading, Baruch seeks to offer the exiles a message of hope. Try to imagine what it must be like to be driven from your homeland. In your opinion, what would be most difficult about that kind of experience?

3. In the second reading, Paul praises the Philippians for the way they helped him promote the Gospel of Christ. Name one concrete way that you can promote the message of Christ.

4. Who are the John the Baptists in our world or in your life today? Who are those people who point you by word or deed to Jesus and his ways?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestions: Include the poor in your Christmas shopping if you haven’t already done so. Promote the Gospel by praying for missionaries. Take off the “clothes of mourning” for a loss that happened some years ago.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray especially for a conversion of heart in yourself, your home and parish. ©
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 13, 2015 C

Opening prayer: Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ever faithful to your promises and ever close to our Church, the earth rejoices in hope of the Savior’s coming and looks forward with longing to his return at the end of time. Prepare our hearts and remove the sadness that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope which his presence will bestow. For he is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Traditionally, the third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete (“Let us rejoice!”) Sunday. We are rejoicing because our salvation is near at hand. A spirit of joy pervades the first and second readings as well as the psalm. In the Gospel, John responds very concretely to people who ask him: “What must we do?”

Consider reading the commentary on each reading at a time that works best for your group: either before or after reading the Scripture.

FIRST READING: Zephaniah 3:14-18

Zephaniah is a “gloom and doom” book addressed to all who are not attentive to God’s call. Today’s passage is an exception. It is addressed to a small group of Israelites who have remained loyal to their covenant with God in tough times. “Zion” is another name for Jerusalem who is called to “shout for joy.” God, their mighty Savior, is in their midst to deliver them from their misfortunes.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Isaiah 12:1-5

The psalm response continues the theme of joy. Because God is in Israel’s midst, there is nothing to fear.

SECOND READING: Philippians 4:4-7

Paul is in prison and is writing to a community with problems from within and without. Despite all this, he is joyful and he urges the Philippians to rejoice. The joy that Paul advocates is not superficial but one that flows from a life deeply rooted in Christ which cannot be taken away when earthly things are removed from our lives.

GOSPEL: Luke 3:10-18

In the verses prior to today’s Gospel, John has been issuing a strong call to repentance as the way to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Some in the crowds open their hearts to John’s message and ask him three times: “What must we do?” Although John himself lives an austere life removed from the ordinary pursuits of people, he does not ask his inquirers to dissociate themselves from their own lives or occupations. Rather, he challenges them to “bloom where they are planted,” carrying out their daily responsibilities with concern for others, and to live with honesty and integrity. All of the Baptist’s instructions are relational in nature. “Do what you can to relate to others in a fair and just way.” John is very concrete in his responses. He tells one group: “Share your extras.” He tells tax collectors: “Be just and fair.” He tells the soldiers: “Quit bullying people” and “Don’t give false witness.”

Part two of today’s Gospel seeks to clarify the confusion about John’s identity. John is not the Messiah. His role is to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. He is a signpost pointing people to Jesus. He seeks to help his listeners to convert their desires into appropriate and authentic words and works.

As you will see in his response, John, the fiery preacher, shows himself to be remarkably practical. He speaks of the “winnowing fan” (a tool for separating wheat from chaff) that Jesus will use to clear his threshing floor. The last verses are intended to scare the hardhearted who see no need for repentance. But for those who are making a reasonable effort to turn their lives entirely over to God (a lifetime task), there is no reason to fear.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you the most in the readings?
2. St. Thomas Aquinas once said: “No one can live without joy. That is why one deprived of spiritual joys must turn to carnal joys.” Comment.

3. What gives you the most joy? What steals your joy?

4. If you asked John the Baptist what you must do this Advent to become a better Christian, what might his answer be?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on this Sunday’s readings. Some suggestions: Work at naming the things that block you from enjoying life and try hard not to allow small things to rob you of joy. If you have not been to the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Advent, plan to go and begin to prepare by asking the Holy Spirit to show you where there is sin in your life.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for the Fruit of the Spirit called joy. Pray for the grace to be joyful even when things around us are not going well. ☪
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 20, 2015 C

Opening prayer: (Take a moment to become aware of God’s presence. Then together say the following prayer or some other prayer of your choice.) Father, your eternal Word took flesh on earth when Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Help us to open our whole being to you so that your Word may also take flesh in us. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing life: How did you experience God this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: “Elizabeth’s question ‘Who am I?’ underscores the surprising wisdom of God who seems to choose the least likely people (in the Gospel: Mary and Elizabeth), the least likely places (in the first reading: Bethlehem; in the second reading: human flesh) and the least likely methods (in the second reading: Jesus’ sacrifice) in order to give his people his saving presence.” (Patricia Sanchez)

Consider reading the commentary on each reading at a time that works best for your group: either before or after reading the Scripture.

FIRST READING: Micah 5:1-4

Speaking to a people who have turned away from God, Micah paints a hopeful picture of a future era when God will raise up a good and faithful King-Shepherd. Like his ancestor, David, he will come from humble origins – Bethlehem (also called Ephrathah). The Messiah King, empowered by God, will shepherd and lead his people in strength. Because of him, Israel’s time of suffering and separation from God will come to an end.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 80

This is the prayer of a beleaguered people asking for deliverance.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 10:5-10

We are reminded of the connection between Bethlehem and Golgotha, the connection between Jesus’ birth and his sacrificial death. The central passion of Jesus’ life is doing the will of his Father. In and through his obedience, we are saved and united with God.


Just as the small and otherwise obscure village of Bethlehem seems an unlikely place to host the promised Messiah, so also are Mary and Elizabeth unlikely candidates to witness his presence in such a special way. As women of poor means, their election by God would have been looked upon by people of that time as extraordinary and unusual.

Both Mary and Elizabeth experience miraculous conceptions. Mary conceives by the power of the Holy Spirit, and Elizabeth conceives in her old age. Thus, they have much to talk about. In their precious time together, they celebrate the awesome deeds of God in their lives.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth eulogizes Mary and her child. She calls Mary “blessed” for two reasons: she has been chosen to be the Mother of the Lord, and she has placed her trust in the Word of God. Elizabeth, like her son, humbles herself before her much younger cousin. Even before his birth, Jesus’ presence is “good news” and a cause for joy.

In its Advent context, the reading inspires awe for the mystery of Christ’s coming in the flesh. Who is this woman to be greeted in this way? Who is the child in her womb that even before his birth inspired prophetic utterances? Mary’s greatness is her fidelity to God’s Word and her cooperation with his plan.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you the most?

2. God asked a lot of Mary and Elizabeth. Can you give an example of where God asked a lot of you (or a member of your family)?

3. God made Elizabeth fruitful (meaning useful to God) in her old age. How might this speak to the older members of your parish?
4. 2000 years ago, God used an unlikely place (Bethlehem), unlikely people (poor women) and unlikely methods to carry forward his plan. Can you think of modern day examples?

5. How has your Advent been?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on this Sunday’s readings. Some suggestions: Help an elderly person to see how she, like Elizabeth, can be fruitful in her old age. Offer the second decade of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary, The Visitation, for pregnant women, especially those considering abortion, and for couples longing to have a child. Live the Christmas spirit by reaching out to someone in need.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for all travelers this season, for those separated from loved ones, for people who will have a painful Christmas, for expectant mothers. ©
FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH
December 27, 2015 C

Opening prayer: Father, help us to live as the Holy Family, united in respect and love. Bring us to the joy and peace of your eternal home. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Sharing life: What was it like growing up in your family?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Were we to forget its placement in the cycle of feasts that make up the Christmas season, the feast of the Holy Family could easily be looked upon as little more than a pious devotion focused on an unattainable ideal. Nevertheless, this feast is about the mystery of the Incarnation, the firm conviction we hold that Jesus is both Son of God, fully divine, and Son of Mary, fully human, and that mystery has saving implications for each of us. Today’s readings remind us of how fully human are the origins of that mystery, rooted in families willing to make God’s will first in their lives.

Consider reading the commentary on each reading at a time that works best for your group: either before or after reading the Scripture.

FIRST READING: 1Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

Commenting on this text, the authors of the Living Word (2004) write:

The author of the first Book of Samuel wanted to show his audience the many ways that God was guiding the fortunes of the Jewish people throughout their history. He also wished to show how important it was that the people be prepared to submit to the Lord’s will for them. In this particular cycle of stories, the figures of Hannah and her husband, Elkanah, are held up as exemplary because of their willingness to give to the Lord a child destined to be a chosen instrument of his. The piety of the couple is evident in the sacrifice they make: giving to the Lord’s service their longed-for child. Subsequent stories of the exploits of Samuel reveal just how significant their sacrifice was to be in God’s plan. This text is clearly in the background of Luke’s infancy narrative, in which he describes how the parents of Jesus have to make a similar sacrifice of their son in order for God’s plan to unfold in Jesus’ life. Like Hannah and Elkanah, Mary and Joseph cannot grasp the full significance of the role their son is destined to play in God’s plan. Nonetheless, their piety leads them to obedience, even though “they did not understand.” (Luke 2:50)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 84

This psalm speaks about the beauty of dwelling in the house of the Lord.

SECOND READING: 1John 3:1-2, 21-24

This reading speaks about our adoption into the household of God. As children of God, we are called to keep God’s commandments.

GOSPEL: Luke 2:41-52

The key element of this story is Jesus’ declaration that he must be in his “Father’s house.” When Mary and Joseph find their lost child, Mary questions Jesus why he has done this to them. Jesus’ response is one of surprise. Mary’s reference to Joseph as “your father” is paralleled with Jesus’ reference to God as “my Father, and therein lies the main point in this story—Jesus’ response signals:

- his single-minded devotion to his heavenly Father
- how his devotion to his heavenly Father will transcend his love and devotion to his earthly parents

Yet, in this story Jesus shows himself faithful to both. In doing what he did in the Temple, he was obeying God, but then we are told he goes home with his parents to Nazareth and is obedient to them. Obedience is in fact an underlying theme in this Gospel. Four times in this passage, Luke says that the actions of Mary, Joseph and Jesus are carried out in accord with the law.

On a lighter side, we can say that this story shows us that even in the best of families, things can go wrong.
Perhaps, we could say that Joseph and Mary should have been more vigilant of their young son, or that Jesus should have told his parents where he was.

**FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. What verse spoke to you and why?

2. For those of you who have children, what was it like giving birth to your first-born? What words of comfort would you offer to couples unable to have children?

3. The second reading speaks about our adoption into the family of God. What might this truth mean for us spiritually if fully internalized?

4. What are some ingredients of a holy family? What are blocks and obstacles to becoming a holy family?

**RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on this Sunday’s readings. Some suggestions: If there is a family member with whom you are distant, call or write to him/her. Pray often for your family if you don’t already do so. Reach out to a neighbor who lives alone and has very few friends.

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

Pray for all families, including your parish family and all the Small Christian Communities. Pray for families who are hurting for whatever reason. Pray for elderly parents who are abandoned by their children. ©
**EPIPHANY OF THE LORD**  
January 3, 2016 A, B, C

**Opening prayer:** O Light of Lights, you showed forth the light of God’s love to all nations. In your coming, God’s saving love is revealed from east to west. You have made us co-heirs and sharers in the promise of salvation. Illuminate our minds and hearts with your love. May we, like the Magi, always seek and search for you. Enlighten us as we contemplate your Word today. We pray in your light and in your love. Amen.

**Sharing life:** Do you have any special hopes or dreams for 2016?

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** Epiphany means manifestation. On this Sunday, the Church invites us to celebrate God’s universal plan to save all people—Jews as well as Gentiles.

Consider reading the commentary on each reading at a time that works best for your group: either before or after reading the Scripture.

**FIRST READING:** Isaiah 60:1-6

Jerusalem’s days of darkness are over (a reference to Israel’s time in exile). God is about to bring a New Dawn to Israel. So great will this new light be that all the Nations (a reference to the Gentiles) will be drawn to the city bearing all kinds of gifts. This prophecy will be fulfilled when Jesus invites all people to come into his light. The Magi are the first Gentiles to respond to Jesus’ invitation.

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM 72**

“Lord, every nation on earth will adore you” speaks of God’s universal plan to save all people thereby connecting this psalm to the overall theme of this Sunday’s readings.

**SECOND READING:** Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Paul’s message about his special mission to bring the Good News to the Gentiles connects this reading with the general theme of the day. Jesus reveals to Paul and the Apostles that the total equality of Jews and Gentiles figures in God’s plan of salvation.

**GOSPEL:** Matthew 2:1-12

The Gospel is the fulfillment of the first reading, which speaks of all the nations streaming to Jerusalem bearing gifts for the new King. The Magi represent the non-Jewish world who are seekers of God in their own way. The Magi’s journey to Bethlehem in search of the new King is symbolic of the journey all seekers must take. Thus Epiphany is not only a feast on which we celebrate God’s manifestation of himself to the Gentile world, but also our movement toward God.

When Matthew was writing his Gospel in 80AD, his own people had almost totally rejected Jesus while large groups of Gentiles were accepting him. This rejection/acceptance dynamic is present in today’s Gospel. Whilst Herod’s plot to kill Jesus symbolizes Israel’s rejection of Jesus, the Magi’s acceptance of Jesus symbolizes the Gentiles’ movement toward Jesus. This rejection/acceptance will be played out many times in Matthew’s Gospel. The Pharisees will close their hearts to Jesus, and the Gentiles will open their hearts to him.

**FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?

2. In the first reading, we hear these words: “See, darkness covers the earth.” What forms of darkness cover the earth today? What can we do to combat them?

3. In the second reading, Paul speaks about the “stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for your benefit.” How can we share God’s goodness and grace with others?

4. In the Gospel, the Magi are on a search for the newborn King. At this time in your life, what are you searching for?

5. Did God give you any special opportunities to share your faith this past week?
RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on this Sunday’s readings. Suggestions: Infuse light into places of darkness. Be a more conscious steward of God’s blessings. Be more aware of what you are searching for.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for those who do not know Christ, and that we who say we know him may follow his teachings more fully. ©

REFLECTION

When the song
of the angels is stilled
When the star
in the sky is gone
When the kings and princes
are home
When shepherds are back
with their flocks
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost
To heal the broken
To feed the hungry
To release the captives
To rebuild nations
To bring peace among peoples
To make music in the heart.

-Howard Thurman
BAPTISM OF THE LORD
January 10, 2016C

Opening prayer: God our Creator, you offered your servant Jesus as Savior to all humankind. His coming among us opened our eyes to the light of justice, peace and salvation. By the River Jordan you anointed Jesus to carry out his mission. Anoint us now with your Holy Spirit so that we can hear the Word you are speaking to us. This we pray through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Sharing life: Who were/are your godparents? Did/do you have a special or spiritual relationship with them? Are you a godparent? If so, have you been able to share your faith with your godchild?

Facilitator reads focus statement: This feast celebrates Jesus as the anointed servant of God, the One who comforts people and proclaims God’s Word (first reading), the One who came to save us out of mercy. This feast is a bridge between the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time.

Consider studying the commentary on each reading at a time that works best for your group: either before or after reading the Scripture.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

These verses are taken from the beginning of the second book of Isaiah (chapters 40-52), often called Deutero-Isaiah. In these chapters, the author is addressing the Israelite exiles towards the end of their story in Babylon.

The reading begins with words of comfort and tenderness for a people who spent 70 years in exile from their homeland. The exiles are directed to act out their deliverance even before they see evidence of it. They are to image a great highway on which they will travel home and to remove any obstacle that might block God’s coming.

In verses 9-11, a second directive is given to the people living in Jerusalem. Their city is broken and depleted, and they are told to announce to the other vanquished cities of Judah that a new time is coming when God, like a good shepherd, is going to show a new concern for his flock.

RESPONSORIALPSALM 104

This psalm is a hymn of praise to God the Creator whose power and wisdom are manifested in the visible universe.

SECOND READING: 1Cor 12:4-11

Paul addresses the difficulties that have arisen in the community over the exercise of charismatic gifts. Arrogance and competition over the gifts are threatening to divide the community. Paul reminds his readers of two important facts concerning these wonderful gifts of the Spirit. First, all these gifts are graces from God. The people have done nothing to earn or deserve them. Second, the gifts are not given so that individuals may think that they are superior to others, but so that the community will be blessed.

GOSPEL: John 2:1-11

In John’s Gospel, miracles are signs intended to manifest the glory of God through Jesus and to lead the people to faith. Toward the end of the Gospel, we read the words: “Thus did he reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him.” Jesus uses a simple wedding occasion to reveal himself as the bridegroom Israel has been waiting for hundreds of years. He is sent by God to woo and wed a new bride, a new Israel, joining Jews and Gentiles into one body.

A central theme in John’s Gospel is what scholars call replacement theology. John presents Jesus as the One who replaces Jewish customs, rituals and feasts with himself. Previously used as a means to holiness, these customs and rituals are now replaced by Jesus himself whose teaching, death and Resurrection saved us and offer us new life.

“My hour has not yet come” is a reference to Jesus’ death and Resurrection. The “abundance of wine” is a reference to the abundance of new life that Jesus brings, and the wine of the Eucharist which symbolizes the new covenant.

Also in his Gospel, John shows Mary as involved at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and again at the end of it when she is present at the foot of the cross.
Notice how Mary, at the wedding at Cana, does not draw attention to herself. Rather, she tells the waiters to “do whatever Jesus tells you to do.” The essence of faithful discipleship is doing whatever Jesus tells us to do. When it comes to faithful discipleship, Mary is our model.

In calling Mary “woman,” Jesus is not showing disrespect to his mother. The title “woman” is identical to our word “madam” or “ma’am.”

**FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?

2. The second reading speaks of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. What gift has the Holy Spirit given you to build up the Body of Christ: service, hospitality, teaching, other? What gift don’t you have that you wish you did?

3. In the Gospel. Jesus manifests himself at the wedding of a young couple. a) If married, are you able to pray together as a couple? If not, what blocks that from happening? b) If single, do you experience any sense of Jesus’ presence in your relationships?

4. Jesus’ baptism was the beginning of his public ministry? Why are so many Catholics private about their faith? How private or public are you about your faith? If you have grown in this area, what has helped you to be more public and expressive with your faith?

**RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on this Sunday’s readings.

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION©**

Pray especially for parents with young unbaptized children, that they will be moved to have their children baptized. Pray for married couples.