

## Cycle C – The Year of Luke

In our Liturgical Calendar, Cycle C is The Year of Luke. “The gospel according to Luke has been called the loveliest book in the world” (William Barclay).

Luke has the distinction of being the only New Testament writer who was not a Jew. Luke was also a medical doctor by profession (Colossians 4:14). Paul, who most likely converted Luke, called him ‘my dear and glorious physician’ – which became the title of a famous novel (on Luke) by Taylor Caldwell.

Luke wrote his gospel for a man called Theophilus – most likely a high official in the Roman government. He wrote his gospel to help Theophilus come to know Jesus.

Characteristics of Luke’s gospel.

- *A Gospel for all, especially for the Gentiles.* Luke, a Gentile, wrote primarily for Gentiles.
- *A Gospel of God’s Love and Mercy.* Luke’s gospel has several lovely stories about God’s love and mercy. For example, Jesus encounter with the sinful woman (7:36-50), the Parable of the Prodigal Son, more accurately called the Parable of the Merciful Father (15:11-24) and Jesus’ mercy for the repentant criminal (23:39-43).
- *A Gospel of the poor and the outcast.* Luke’s gospel has been called ‘the gospel of the underdog’ because of the great compassion Jesus shows for those on the edge of society.
- *A Gospel of women.* The infancy narrative is told from Mary’s point of view. Only Luke’s gospel features Elizabeth, Anna, the widow of Nain, and the Martha and Mary story. Women also bankrolled Jesus’ ministry (Lk 7:50).
- *A Gospel of Prayer.* At all the great moments of Jesus’s life, Luke show Jesus at prayer.

*Gospel stories only found in Luke.* Some of the best loved stories in all four gospels are only found in Luke, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth in the Manger, the Parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan and the Emmaus story.

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT C

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**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.*

**Response to last week's word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** The purpose of Advent is to prepare us to celebrate Jesus's birth. The first reading during the Advent Season takes us back to Old Testament times, when Israel looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is the one who fulfills all of the messianic prophecies. Today's first reading says that the longed-for Messiah will come from the stock of David. The focus of the Gospel is the Second Coming of Jesus. The early Christians believe that the Second Coming is near and will be preceded by cosmic signs. The disciples are urged to wait in prayer and vigilance. In the second reading, Paul shows his people how to prepare for Christ's Second Coming.

*Let us listen to God's word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

### FIRST READING: Jeremiah 33:14-16

In this reading, Jeremiah is reassuring his people that even though things look very bad around them (the Babylonians are threatening to destroy Jerusalem), God has not forgotten them. In his time, God will raise up a descendent of David who will bring justice and peace to the Land.

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 25

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

### SECOND READING: 1Thessalonians 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."

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

### GOSPEL: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

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. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. In the first reading Jeremiah offers a word of hope to his people in a time of darkness. What sustains you in time of darkness?
3. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about pretty awful signs that will occur prior to his return. What is currently going on in our world (or Church) that can cause you to be frightened?
4. What can cause you or us to become spiritually drowsy?
5. The weeks prior to Christmas can become very focused on shopping. What can help you to be spiritually vigilant and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus –“the reason for the season”?
6. What is the one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday’s Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act?

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to God’s word and to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *“Jesus, increase my love for you and for the people in my life, especially for the people I find it hard to like or love. “ “Jesus save me from all forms of spiritual drowsiness.”*

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestions: Commit to awakening from spiritual drowsiness by using an Advent devotional; work hard to not allow the material side of the season pull you away from the spiritual aspect.

### **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion:* Pray especially for the grace to “keep your eyes on Jesus” during this Advent season.

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Lord, awaken us to your love  
and grant us your salvation,  
so we might bring new life to our world  
by what we say and do.  
Bless this new year of grace,  
and may our call to holiness alert the  
world to your transforming power.  
In Jesus’ name.  
Amen*

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT C

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**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:** *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 and transform us in the true spirit of this season. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Response to last week's word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the 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.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

### **FIRST READING: Baruch 5:1-9**

The passage we read today from Baruch has been described by Scripture scholars as a kind of a "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."

### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 3:1-6**

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

### **GOSPEL: Luke 3:1-6**

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. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Have you ever worn a "robe of mourning" and what helped you to work through the pain and transform it into good?
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?
5. Name one or more voices that are crying out in the wilderness today—prophetic voices that are not being heard—and share how you can respond. Example: voices on protection of the environment and the life of the unborn child.
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/act on.

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to God's word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: *"Lord, I pray for all those wearing the sad clothes of mourning at this time."* *"Lord, help me to be like John the Baptist, someone who points others to Christ."*

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of Sunday's gospel. Suggestion: What could you do this Advent season to better "prepare the way of the Lord" in your heart and in our world?

### **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

*What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray?* Suggestion: Pray especially for a conversion of heart in yourself, your home, your parish.

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*God who comes,  
help us hear your call to prepare  
for you to come into our lives.  
May this holy season set our hearts afire  
with the desire to put on the garments of truth  
and loving kindness so your light and love  
may come more fully into our world.  
Amen*

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT C GAUDETE SUNDAY

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

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

**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.*

**Response to last week's word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the 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?"

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading pausing briefly after each one.

### 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.

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:

#### Luke 3:10-18

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

### 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. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. If you asked John the Baptist what *you* must do this Advent to become a better Christian, what might his answer be?
3. What gives you joy? What steals your joy?
4. 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.
5. What might help you to live a more (Christian) joyful life?
6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/act on.

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to God’s word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: “*Lord, I pray that I can always acknowledge your presence and in that find my joy.*” “*Lord, please show me what I should do to love you more.*”

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of Sunday’s readings. Suggestion: Paul prays “*that our love may increase.*” 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. See how your love can increase during this Advent season.

### **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

*What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion: 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.*

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*O God, who created all things  
and who sent Jesus to be with us until  
the end of our days,  
hear our prayer this day that we may  
know the joy of the risen Lord.  
Give us an awareness that the  
Lord is indeed near,  
and send the peace that surpasses all  
understanding into our hearts.*

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT C

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**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, 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.*

**Response to last week's word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the 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)

*Let us listen to God’s Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading pausing briefly after each one.

### 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.

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:

#### Luke 1:39-45

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

#### GOSPEL: Luke 1:39-45

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. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
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?
6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to God’s word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to*

*Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *“Lord, I lift up all women currently carrying a baby in their womb, especially women for whom the pregnancy is unexpected and difficult.”*

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of Sunday’s gospel. 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 THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

*What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion:* Pray for all travelers this season, for those separated from loved ones, for people who will have a painful Christmas, for expectant mothers.

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Beloved God and Father  
of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
help us in these final hours of Advent  
to set aside anything that prevents us  
from entering into the joy befitting  
the birth of your Son.  
Send us that same Spirit  
that came upon Elizabeth,  
filling her heart and soul  
with such great joy.*

## FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH C

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**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.*

**Response to last week's word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**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.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading pausing briefly after each one.

### **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.

### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 2:41-52**

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

## **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. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. The Second Reading speaks about our adoption into the family of God. What might this truth mean for us spiritually if fully internalized?
3. When Joseph and Mary find Jesus, she says to him: "Son, why have you done this to us. Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." The feeling of anxiety is not a pleasant one. What causes you anxiety these days? What helps you deal with anxiety?
4. The commentary speaks about Jesus as being obedient to both God and parents. What helps you to walk in obedience in God's Word?

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

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to God's word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: "Lord, please help me to see my family and all families—no matter their configuration—as holy." "Lord, help us to seek your will and be obedient in all things."

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of Sunday's gospel. 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 THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

*What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?* 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.

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Loving Father, you have created all who have ever lived in your image and likeness.  
Help us to recognize all others as our brothers and sisters and to honor, respect, forgive, and love them as your children.  
Together, enable us to bring your peace and justice, healing and reconciliation to our world.*

# EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

## ABC

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**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.*

**Response to last week's word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

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

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading pausing briefly after each one.

### 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.

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:

#### Matthew 2:1-12

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

#### 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 is writing his Gospel in 80 AD, his own people have almost totally *rejected* Jesus while large groups of Gentiles are *accepting* him. This rejection/acceptance dynamic is present in today's

Gospel. While 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 dynamic will be played out many times in Matthew's Gospel. While the Pharisees will close their hearts to Jesus, the Gentiles will open their hearts to him.

### FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
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. The Magi were on a journey searching for someone. Share something of your search for a deeper relationship with Christ and the Church?
4. Living the Epiphany event involves being a light for others. Who has been a big Light for you in your journey? What are ways you can be a Christ-Light for others?
5. In the Gospel, the Magi were on a search for the newborn King. At this time in your life, what are you searching for?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to God's word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: "Lord, this week give me many opportunities to share your light and help me to do it generously, eagerly and well."

### RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of Sunday's gospel. Suggestions: What is one thing you can do or change to be a brighter light for Christ? Name one person you can be the light of Christ for in word or deed.

### CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

*What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Suggestion: Pray for those who do not know Christ and that we who say we know him many follow his teachings more fully.*

### CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Lord Jesus, you continue to come into the world as light that pushes back the darkness. Continue to enlighten our minds and hearts, opening them to receive you in whatever way you come to us. Help us to find you in our daily lives by removing whatever prevents our seeing your light.*

### 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 C

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**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.*

**Response to last week's word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**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.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading pausing briefly after each one.

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

These verses are taken from the beginning of the second book of Isaiah (chapters 40-55), often called Deutero-Isaiah. In these chapters, the author is addressing the Israelite exiles towards the end of their time 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 obstacles 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.

### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM 104**

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

### **SECOND READING: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7**

This reading has two parts: 2:11-14 and 3:4-7.

In 2:11-14, Paul speaks about the grace of God that has come to us through the coming of Christ, a grace that enables us to reject pagan or ungodly ways and the grace to follow the ways of Jesus.

In 3:4-7, Paul reminds Titus and all Christians that their current status as a new people is totally the result of God's mercy and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22**

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

## **GOSPEL: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22**

Luke places Jesus' baptism before the start of his public ministry to identify Jesus as the chosen servant foretold by Isaiah (first reading).

Luke's account of Jesus' baptism is striking in that it underplays the actual water event at the hand of John. Instead, it highlights the prayer of Jesus, the descent of the Spirit, and the heavenly voice proclaiming Jesus as God's beloved Son.

The Gospel has two distinct but related events. In the *first*, John disavows that he is Christ. People may have thought that John was the Messiah because Jesus submitted to him for baptism. The *second* event reports the extraordinary circumstances that followed Jesus' own baptism by John. The two incidents are connected by reference to the Holy Spirit.

Luke always presents Jesus as praying before making major decisions. It's no surprise then that we find him praying during his baptism. In response to his prayer, the Holy Spirit descends on him in visible form (as a dove) at the beginning of his mission, just as the Spirit will come in visible form on the apostles at Pentecost at the beginning of their mission. The Father's voice puts the seal of divine approval on Jesus and on the mission he is about to begin.

This Spirit will empower Jesus (and his followers) to do the works of God, i.e., to preach with authority, heal the sick, cast out demons, and obey God to the point of death.

### **FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. The first reading begins with the words: "*Comfort, give comfort to my people.*" What comforts you in painful and difficult times? How can you be a comforting presence to others?
3. The second reading states that we are saved by the mercy of God. Since God is merciful, what does God ask of us?
4. In the Gospel, the "people were filled with expectation" of the Christ. What is an expectant faith and what are some steps we can take to acquire it?

5. All of the baptized have been baptized with the Holy Spirit at their Baptism. Some have received a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit through their involvement in the Charismatic Renewal. What role does the Holy Spirit play in your spiritual life?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to God's word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: "Lord, you know I need your comfort and mercy, please help me to experience it." "Lord, I pray for a fresh outpouring of your Holy Spirit. Please help me to be open and respond affirmatively."

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of Sunday's gospel. Suggestions: Name someone you can comfort and how. Commit to praying for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

### **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

*What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Suggestion: Pray for all preparing to receive the Sacrament of Baptism. Pray for the grace to have the courage to share our faith with others.*

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Breather in me, O Holy Spirit,  
that my thoughts may all be holy.  
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,  
that my work, too, may be holy.  
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,  
that I love but what is holy.  
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,  
to defend all that is holy.  
Guard me, than, O Holy Spirit,  
that I always may be holy. Amen.*

- St. Augustine