

# Table of Contents, Book A

## The Sundays of Advent and the Time of Christmas

<a href="#">1st Sunday of Advent</a> . . . . .	4
<a href="#">2nd Sunday of Advent</a> . . . . .	5
<a href="#">3rd Sunday of Advent</a> . . . . .	6
<a href="#">4th Sunday of Advent</a> . . . . .	7
<a href="#">Christmas</a> . . . . .	8
<a href="#">The Holy Family</a> . . . . .	9
<a href="#">Epiphany</a> . . . . .	10
<a href="#">The Baptism of the Lord</a> . . . . .	11

## The Sundays of Lent

<a href="#">1st Sunday of Lent</a> . . . . .	12
<a href="#">2nd Sunday of Lent</a> . . . . .	13
<a href="#">3rd Sunday of Lent</a> . . . . .	14
<a href="#">4th Sunday of Lent</a> . . . . .	15
<a href="#">5th Sunday of Lent</a> . . . . .	16
<a href="#">Passion Sunday</a> . . . . .	17

## The Sundays of Easter

<a href="#">Easter Sunday</a> . . . . .	18
<a href="#">2nd Sunday of Easter</a> . . . . .	19
<a href="#">3rd Sunday of Easter</a> . . . . .	20
<a href="#">4th Sunday of Easter</a> . . . . .	21
<a href="#">5th Sunday of Easter</a> . . . . .	22
<a href="#">6th Sunday of Easter</a> . . . . .	23
<a href="#">Ascension</a> . . . . .	24
<a href="#">Pentecost</a> . . . . .	25
<a href="#">Most Holy Trinity</a> . . . . .	26
<a href="#">The Body and Blood of Christ</a> . . . . .	27

# The Gospel Stories of Jesus

---

## The Sundays of Ordinary Time

<a href="#"><u>2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	28
<a href="#"><u>3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	29
<a href="#"><u>4th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	30
<a href="#"><u>5th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	31
<a href="#"><u>6th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	32
<a href="#"><u>7th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	33
<a href="#"><u>8th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	34
<a href="#"><u>9th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	35
<a href="#"><u>10th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	36
<a href="#"><u>11th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	37
<a href="#"><u>12th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	38
<a href="#"><u>13th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	39
<a href="#"><u>14th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	40
<a href="#"><u>15th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	41
<a href="#"><u>16th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	42
<a href="#"><u>17th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	43
<a href="#"><u>18th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	44
<a href="#"><u>19th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	45
<a href="#"><u>20th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	46
<a href="#"><u>21st Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	47
<a href="#"><u>22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	48
<a href="#"><u>23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	49
<a href="#"><u>24th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	50
<a href="#"><u>25th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	51
<a href="#"><u>26th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	52
<a href="#"><u>27th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	53
<a href="#"><u>28th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	54
<a href="#"><u>29th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	55
<a href="#"><u>30th Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	56
<a href="#"><u>31st Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	57
<a href="#"><u>32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	58
<a href="#"><u>33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time</u></a> . . . . .	59
<a href="#"><u>Christ the King Sunday</u></a> . . . . .	60

# The Son of Man is coming

When Jesus mentioned Noah and the great flood, Peter's brother Andrew pretended to be paddling a boat. John, who was sitting next to him, stifled a laugh and covered his eyes with his hand. Peter snapped a glance at the two trouble-makers and then focused his glare on his younger brother. Andrew covered his face to regain composure.

Jesus continued: "So it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken and one will be left."

Peter was momentarily tempted to point a finger at Andrew, indicating that if he wasn't careful he would be the one that would be left out in the field.

"The Son of Man is coming at the time you least expect," Jesus concluded.

Peter knew that he would be awake and alert, ready for the coming of the Son of Man. It might be any day now, he thought. But one example Jesus used had him concerned. Jesus said that Peter had to be prepared. Peter wasn't sure if he was properly prepared. One could stay awake and be alert, but why was one man left standing in the field while the other was taken. If the one that was left was unprepared in some way, then Peter had a problem. It was all pretty hard to understand and everyone was getting tired. The disciples had been listening to Jesus talk to them for most of the afternoon.

It had all begun earlier in Jerusalem when they had asked Jesus about the Great Temple. Philip wanted to know how such a magnificent structure could ever be destroyed. Jesus had told them that not one stone would be left upon the other. As they walked along the explanation led them to try to understand the end time and the coming of the Son of Man.

Now the disciples were gathered around Jesus looking out across the Kidron Valley from the Mount of Olives. The temple was prominent above the wall of the city. The sun was getting low in the sky and Jerusalem was turning



gold in the softer light.

Peter heard his stomach growl. The heady teachings of the afternoon were soon forgotten as his hunger took over and urgent plans for the evening meal were made.



Jesus told the disciples that because Noah was prepared he was saved. The homeowner who was on watch for thieves was not robbed. But of the men and women in the field and grinding meal only two were saved. The other two were left behind. All four of these people may have expected the coming, but only two were truly prepared by doing and living out the will of God. As we move into the season of Advent we know that Christmas is coming. What remains for us is to truly prepare for it by doing and living out the will of God in our lives.



2nd Sunday of Advent - Matthew 3: 1-12.

## Vipers!

John the Baptist sat alone on the large boulder at the edge of the Jordan River. With his eyes closed his mind raced with thoughts and ideas which were his communion with God. In this busy contemplation his whole morning had rushed by with only the sound of the river current gurgling over rocky shallows.

The desert solitude ended abruptly with voices rising beyond the western bank. With serpentine grace, John slid from the boulder to the water, sinking up to his waist. Holding his arms up, like wings, he waded across to meet whoever was coming. In moments John was engulfed by a crowd of noisy men who had come down seeking his baptism.

Most seemed to be common workers from the villages and hills. Some may have come down from Jerusalem, especially the five well-dressed Sadducee priests. Walking near these priests were a few older men who probably were conservative Pharisees. John was disturbed by their presence. In their orthodoxy they refused to believe in the Messiah, living only the letter of the law but ignoring the spirit.

Looking like a madman, John stalked toward them through the knee-deep water. He jabbed his finger in their direction and erupted in a fierce voice: "You brood of

vipers!" Like a long whip, the words snapped over their heads, making them duck down for protection. John was out of the water and moving rapidly toward them as others backed away. "Who told you to flee from the wrath to come? Give some evidence that you mean to reform!"

"We are the sons of Abraham," one offered in defense.

John squatted down and picked a handful of small rocks from the river bed. One of the Pharisees, expecting a hail of stones, repositioned himself behind the others.

"Don't pride yourselves on the claim, 'Abraham is our father.' I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these very stones." John held out his hand and let the little rocks cascade to the ground.

Every eye was fixed on John. Captivated by his power, they were eager for the cool water that would wash them and cover them with the protective covenant of God.



The Gospel Story of John's riverside encounter with the Sadducees and Pharisees challenges us to examine our own level of faith. Do we just do enough to get by? Is our faith just a prayer shawl we "put on" for Sunday morning? Our call to fruitful Christian lives means we must carry our faith out of the front door of the church and into Monday, Tuesday and the rest of the week.

# A message for John

John the Baptist sat in the dim light staring at the metal bars of his prison cell. As the pungent odors trapped in the airless cellar burned in his nostrils, John closed his eyes and escaped to the sunlight of the desert where a clean, hot wind was blowing across his face.

High above John's prison cell, on the terraces of the castle, a cool breeze flowed through Salome's dark hair. It made her smile with pleasure. Her eyes darted briefly to meet a return glance from Herod Antipas, who sat clutching his wine goblet with one fat hand, the other sprawled on the thigh of his new wife, Herodias.

In the silence of his cell John continued to struggle with dark doubts about Jesus. Despite the unforgettable memories of their meeting—the baptism, the voice in the heavens—John still wondered. Who was this man? Perhaps one day his answer would come back from the messenger he had sent to see Jesus.

The clank of keys announced the approach of a prison guard. John stood and took two steps to the cell entrance and pressed his shaggy face against the bars. It was Aurius, the young guard who a week before had looked the other way when a visitor had managed to get to John.

"Someone's coming," Aurius said without breaking stride as he passed John's cell. In a moment the messenger was at John's door. "I saw Jesus," he reported.

"What did he say?" John urged.

"Jesus said to tell you what I hear and see:—that blind men see, cripples walk, lepers are made clean, the ears of the deaf are opened and dead men have been raised to life."

His messenger left quickly, leaving John with a smuggled piece of bread. As he chewed, the impact of the message wrenched tears from John's eyes. These were the words of the Prophet Isaiah, which Jesus knew John would recognize as a special sign. Suddenly all doubts flowed away, leaving the baptizer filled with a warm glow of peace. There was no question. Jesus really was the messiah, the one to come.

When Aurius and other guards came for him a few moments later, John was smiling. Even as he bowed before

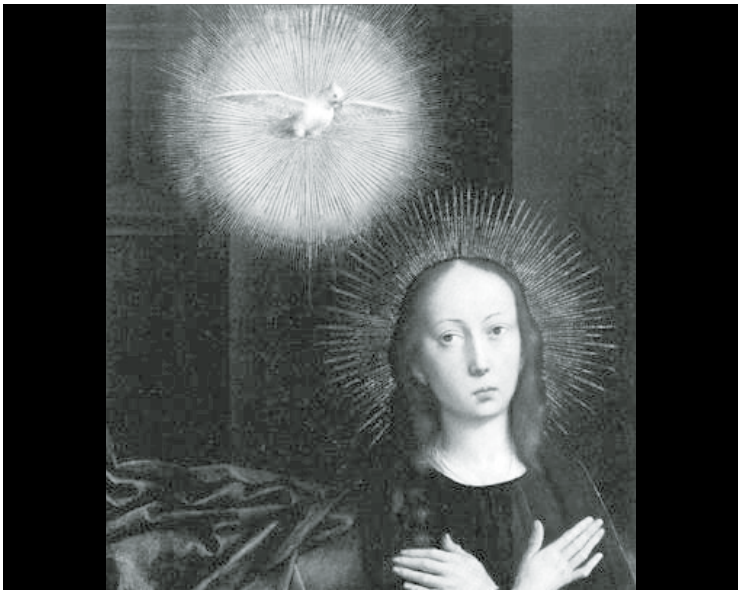


the headsman, his heart still sang in the peace of Christ. John had been privileged to be the herald in the desert—the first to call Jesus 'The Lamb of God.'

Later, on the terrace, Herodias thought the expression on John's face was a grimace. She could never know that it was John's triumphant smile.



Like John the Baptist, we are all subject to dark nights of doubt. But, like the dawn, Jesus sends the bright message that calms our hearts. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus is born again each day in the hearts of those who love him.



4th Sunday of Advent - Matthew 1: 18-24

## And you shall name him Jesus

The sullen skies darkened over the town of Nazareth and it looked like a morning rain was coming. Joseph peered up at the clouds and ducked inside his little shop.

He opened the shutters and soft light spilled over his familiar tools and tables. There was a feeling of peacefulness and safety in his predictable routine. Here he could try to make some sense of all that was happening to him. In his shop Joseph could lose himself in work and not have to face the realities of Mary and last night's frightening visions.

Joseph picked up a timber he was shaping and locked it in place with wedges. He began to chop and scrape against the wood with his sharp adze. Shavings of wood sliced away and dropped in curls at his feet.

The news that Mary was pregnant had crushed Joseph. As he cut, he raged over the insult and humiliation that Mary had been intimate with someone else while betrothed to him. Thoughts of writing a divorce paper would mean confronting the embarrassing family arrangements, both financial and emotional. Joseph's honor and life were ruined. What had once been his love for Mary was changing into hatred.

In addition to his heartache over Mary, Joseph now faced the enormous problem of last night's visions. He'd awakened to a room filled with light. Thinking it was

morning, Joseph tried to get out of bed and came face to face with someone floating in front of him. The bright figure was in the air, smiling down at him. Joseph stared in disbelief.

Then the angel figure's unspoken words sprang clearly into Joseph's ears: "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived."

Like a madman, terror went crashing through Joseph's mind. He tried to flee, thrashing in his blankets as the angel figure continued to smile.

The angel's eyes spoke again: "She will have a son and you will name him Jesus—because he will save his people from their sins."

This time Joseph lurched to his feet, his blankets falling away as the strange light dissolved into darkness. Breathing hard, Joseph groped his way outside and stood under the starless sky. It had all been too real to be a dream.

Joseph was cutting too deeply into the timber. He stopped. Mary's sweet face rose in his memory and Joseph realized she could never have dishonored him. The message from the angel must be true!

Putting his adze aside, he dropped the window shutter on his shop and stepped outside into the light rain. He began to walk in the direction of Mary's house.

As he went, Joseph bolstered his resolve, "I will believe that it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. I place myself in Yahweh's care." Eagerly, he hurried to her. The rain was coming harder.

Mary was standing in her doorway when she saw him. With a soaring heart she ran up the rocky path. They embraced, standing a long time in the rain. A roll of thunder sounded in the mountains.

Little Mary looked up at Joseph and whispered, "You will name him Jesus." It was Joseph's final assurance that the dream was real. Mary's face was all wet and between them they were holding God in their love. Overwhelmed, Joseph's tears ran unnoticed with the rain.



The test of our faith comes when, like Joseph, we are able to follow God against all earthly reasons. By taking Mary, Joseph faced ridicule from his family, friends and neighbors. Only his faith in God could give him assurance that Mary was a virgin. It is an inspiring image of strength and faith as we see the future earthly father of Jesus choose to follow God despite everything.



Christmas - Luke 2: 15-20

## The happiest night of the world

When the night sky began to streak with light, nine-year old Aachim scrambled on his hands and knees toward his sleeping flock. In the growing light the terrified shepherd boy huddled next to *Old Moto* as if his favorite sheep could protect him.

The dome of night looked like a pitcher of goatsmilk was being poured into its bowl. The whiteness spread like wispy clouds driven on strong wind. The pale light thickened and began forming into the shape of a woman with outstretched arms. Suddenly the milk-light snapped to life and an angel floated above Aachim. Her brilliant white robes billowed about her.

Aachim pressed harder against *Old Moto*, his eyes fixed on the vision above him. The angel was young and her face was beautiful. Her eyes brightened when she

smiled at him. In that moment Aachim realized there were now hundreds of angels filling the sky. Softly at first, but growing louder, their voices began to sing out “Glory to God.” The chorus filled the sky and poured over the hills like soft rain.

The angel spoke to Aachim, saying, “You have nothing to fear. I come to proclaim good news to you! I am bringing you tidings of great joy to be shared by the whole people. This day in David’s City a savior has been born to you, the Messiah, and Lord. Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.”

In the light from the skies Aachim could see all the way down the hills toward Beth Lehem where the tent of his family was pitched. Leaving the sheep behind he ran, almost stumbling, down to his tent. By the time he reached the tent the angels had dissolved back into the starry night sky. Aachim’s mother and father were already up, standing in front of the tent looking up at the stars. One star burned as bright as the moon and together the little family walked in its direction.

A crowd of shepherds had already gathered at the entrance to the animal manger behind Beth Lehem’s inn. Aachim and his parents worked their way to the front of the crowd to see. Just as the angel had said, there was a woman holding a newborn baby. Their faces were golden in the flickering torch light. Aachim heard one of the shepherds share what he had learned. “They are Joseph and Mary from Nazareth. The child’s name is Jesus.”

They all stood staring at the scene. It was just as the angel had told them. Aachim wondered what the angel’s strange words meant when she said this child was to be a savior, a messiah?

Aachim felt his mother’s hands gently rest upon his shoulders. He looked up into her brimming eyes and saw the forming tears. A warm breeze caressed them as they stood helplessly in awe and wonder.



Each Christmas the world stands helplessly in awe and wonder among the shepherds who came to the manger on that first night. To wonder at the ways of God who chooses to be born unto us as a little baby. To marvel that God loves us enough to live and walk among us—a God who would die for us.

In this child is the great gift of eternal life. What more could we ask? It truly is the “Happiest Night of the World!”

# The flight into Egypt

Joseph lay awake, staring out at the starry night sky. The days he'd just experienced had been overwhelming. First, finding a place in Bethlehem, then the birth of Jesus. All day the crowds of shepherds and villagers had come to see the newborn child. Then, just hours ago, the three great kings who had brought gifts for Jesus.

Joseph reached out to make sure the heavy bag of coins was still safe beside him. It was more gold than he had ever seen. Little corners of anxiety began to worry him and Joseph knew he must be very strong to protect Mary and Jesus and all these valuable gifts. Many men had seen the gifts and knew he now had them. In the morning they would leave quietly and start back for Nazareth. Joseph nodded and fell into a fitful sleep.

Mary woke when Joseph's arm came crashing down on her shoulder. Joseph was dreaming and was shielding his eyes against the bright light. Squinting he saw that the light was resolving itself into the form of an angel. She was stunning—clear and pure and beautiful. The words she spoke came like music, swelling in ever louder waves and sounding within him.

"Get up," the music words commanded, "take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you otherwise. Herod is searching for the child to destroy him."

Joseph was sitting upright when he opened his eyes to the dark of the stable. The angel was gone. The vision and the music left him trembling.

"I must be strong," he told himself, getting his feet beneath him. Joseph placed his hand gently on Mary's shoulder. She awoke immediately.

"What?" she asked.

"Come," Joseph said, "we must leave for Egypt!"

"Now, in the middle of the night?" Mary asked.

"Yes, the Angel said that Herod was trying to destroy Jesus."

"What Angel?" she asked, brushing her hair away from her young face.

"Mary, we must hurry, I'll tell you about it on the way."

Without a word, Mary gathered her things into the



bag and took Jesus gently into her arms. She moved to the entrance of the stable and looked fearfully out at the dark hills. A chill of cold ran through her and she adjusted the blankets around Jesus to make sure he would be warm enough.

Joseph led the donkey out and tied their belongings down to the straps girding the animal.

"Do you want to ride?" Joseph asked.

"No," Mary said, "we'll walk awhile. Which way is it to Egypt?"

"South. We will find safety in the south." Joseph declared, his eyes full of courage and love.



Sometimes in our lives the angel of invitation may appear, calling us to get up and go in an unexpected direction. Joseph's great faith enabled him to take his family and leave immediately for a place he'd never been. Jesus invited his future disciples to interrupt their lives and leave immediately. In the same way he comes in today's Gospel and he invites us to get up and follow him.