

THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

# bringing home the Gospel

A  
WEEKLY  
JOURNAL  
FOR  
CATHOLIC  
PARENTS

Judith Dunlap



**The Pastoral Center**

Scripture passages have been taken from *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright ©1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover and book design by Mark Sullivan.

ISBN 978-1-949628-22-7  
Copyright ©2019, 2007, Judith Dunlap.  
All rights reserved.

Published by The Pastoral Center  
PastoralCenter.com

Printed in the United States of America.

• C O N T E N T S •

**Introduction** ..... ix

**Journaling With the Scriptures** ..... 1

**Handing on the Faith** ..... 5

**Following the Church Year** ..... 11

**Liturgical Calendar: Year of Matthew** ..... 15

**Liturgical Journal**

Advent ..... 17

Christmastime ..... 25

Ordinary Time ..... 29

Lent ..... 91

Easter ..... 103

**Extra Journal Space** ..... 121

SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

## • INTRODUCTION •

Each of us has a sacred story. We live out each day not noticing that the weeks, months and years are turning into the chapters of our life. Few of us reach adulthood without experiencing enough comedy and tragedy to fill our own sacred book. What a shame if we never take the time to sit back and “reread” these pages that continue to shape our future.

The great philosopher Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” That’s a rather dramatic way of saying that life is short, and if we don’t stop once in a while to reflect on it, it will pass right by us.

How can we grow as persons unless we look back and learn from our past? How can we grow as Christians if we don’t look back on our lives with the eyes of faith to see where we have been and where we need to be?

If you aren’t already doing it, spend a few minutes once in a while, reflecting on where you are heading in the narrative you are living. You have to ask yourself where God is in this particular chapter of your life.

Take time to sit with your children and reminisce. Use pictures and mementos to make your story come to life. Help your children see you as the child you once were with your own fears and failings. Share your stories and your wisdom with them. Listen to their stories and teach them the life skill of reflecting on their own lives and seeing them as sacred stories, too.

We only have one life, one grand story to live. It is my hope that this weekly journal will help not only record the big events in life, but also everyday thoughts and actions. Remember it is in those everyday happenings that we find our incarnate God, the God of story.

SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

## • JOURNALING WITH THE SCRIPTURES •

This weekly journal is meant for busy folks who are trying to raise spiritually healthy and well-balanced children, while staying spiritually healthy and well-balanced themselves. It is for parents who don't have time for a daily journal, but would like to keep a personal diary as well as a family record of the year. Each week you will find a reflection based on a Sunday Gospel. The readings are primarily from the Gospel of Saint Matthew with a few from Saint John (Cycle A in the church's liturgical calendar).

This journal can be used in conjunction with the designated Sunday readings from the church calendar, or it can be picked up at any time during the year and used as a weekly journal. The Scripture passages follow the life of Jesus from his conception through his death and resurrection and are therefore easily adapted to your own schedule. However, if you would like to correlate your journal entries with the Gospels read at Sunday worship, make sure you read the "Following the Church Year" section beginning on page 11.

### **Using the Journal**

#### *Scripture Citation and Date*

At the top of each week's page is the title of the Scripture passage. You will also find the citation telling you where you can find the passage in the Bible. Below the citation is a place for you to write the date. Above the title you will find the Sunday of the church year when this Gospel is read.

#### *Scripture Reflection*

The Scripture reflections were written especially for you as a parent. They are not meant to be a theological exegesis. They are

intended to do what a Sunday homily is supposed to do, which is help you bring the Word of God home and apply it to your life. These reflections will help you grow in your relationship with God so that you can become all that God created you to be—including the best-ever parent.

### *Family Response*

The Family Response questions or suggestions are meant to give you an opportunity to talk with your children about God and the things that are important to your family. You are the person primarily responsible for the faith development of your child. If you want your child to believe in God and consider faith an important dimension of life, she needs to see that God is a reality in your life and that your faith is important to you.

If you are going to use the Family Response, I suggest you find a comfortable spot in your home and let that be your regular gathering space for this family activity. You might light a candle and begin with a short prayer. Read or retell the week's Scripture passage out loud in your own words. Ask youngsters what they think the passage means. Offer your own thoughts; feel free to adapt comments from the reflection for that reading. Finally, read the Family Response question or suggestion out loud. After everyone has had a chance to think about his or her answer, ask for responses. Make sure that you respond also. Consider ending with another short prayer.

You may, of course, make up your own Family Response, choose not to use the family piece every week or choose not to use it at all. Whatever the case, try to find time to read to your family from a good children's Bible, pray with them every day and, above all, talk to them about God. Let them know how much God loves them. Make sure they know that there is nothing they can do that would stop God from loving them.



### *Personal Response*

The personal questions following the reflection are only suggestions. Feel free to adapt them (or ignore them) and include your own. If you need more writing space, there are additional pages in the back of the book; just mark your entry with the page number on which you continue. This is your journal. If the Gospel reading or the reflection touches you in a particular way, or if something significant is happening in your life, feel free to use the page to record or reflect on what is important to you at that time.

### *Last Week and Next Week*

The last questions each week are always the same:

"What do you want to remember from last week?"

"What are you looking forward to next week?"

"What are your concerns?"

Use this space for the generalities of family life (*We had four soccer games and teacher conferences...*) or the specific details of a particular day or event (*Tuesday was horrendous. First, I...*). Write about your thoughts and feelings. I can pretty much assure you it will be these details you will most appreciate when you reread your journal years later.

### Example of a Ten-Year Lectionary Cycle (2019-2029)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Lectionary Cycle</b>
December 2019–November 2020	A (Matthew)
December 2020–November 2021	B (Mark)
December 2021–November 2022	C (Luke)
December 2022–November 2023	A (Matthew)
December 2023–November 2024	B (Mark)
December 2024–November 2025	C (Luke)
December 2025–November 2026	A (Matthew)
December 2026–November 2027	B (Mark)
December 2027–November 2028	C (Luke)
December 2028–November 2029	A (Matthew)

## LITURGICAL CALENDAR: YEAR OF MATTHEW

<b>Sunday or Feast Day</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2026</b>
First Sunday of Advent	12/01/19	11/27/22	11/30/25
Second Sunday of Advent	12/08/19	12/04/22	12/07/25
Third Sunday of Advent	12/15/19	12/11/22	12/14/25
Fourth Sunday of Advent	12/22/19	12/18/22	12/21/25
Christmas, December 25	Wed.	Thu.	Sun.
Holy Family	12/29/19	12/30/22	12/28/25
Epiphany	01/05/20	01/08/23	01/04/26
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time	1/19	1/15	1/18
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	1/26	1/22	1/25
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time	2/2	1/29	2/1
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time	2/9	2/5	2/8
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time	2/16	2/12	2/15
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	2/23	2/19	—
Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time	—	—	—
Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time	—	—	—
First Sunday in Lent	3/1	2/26	2/22
<i>Sundays in Lent follow in order</i>			
Easter Sunday	4/12	4/9	4/5
Second Sunday of Easter	4/19	4/16	4/12
<i>Third through Seventh Sundays of Easter follow in order</i>			
Pentecost	5/31	5/28	5/24
Trinity Sunday	6/7	6/4	5/31
Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)	6/14	6/11	6/7
Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time	—	—	—

BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

	2020	2023	2026
Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	—	—	—
Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	—	6/18	6/14
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time	6/21	6/25	6/21
Birth of John the Baptist	Wed.	Sat.	Wed.
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	6/28	7/2	6/28
<i>Fourteenth through Nineteenth Sundays in Ordinary Time follow in order</i>			
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time	8/16	8/20	8/16
<i>Twenty-first through Thirty-third Sundays in Ordinary Time follow in order</i>			
Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time	11/15	11/19	11/15
Christ the King	11/22	11/26	11/22

• LITURGICAL JOURNAL •



ADVENT

*Stay Awake*

Our first Scripture reading is the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent. Its purpose is to remind us that Christmas is not just the holy day on which we celebrate Jesus' birth: It is also a celebration of Jesus' Second Coming at the end times. Matthew is telling us how important it is to be watchful so that we are always ready to greet the Lord when he comes.

What a sober beginning for a weekly journal. Yet Matthew's advice to be ready for anything is certainly valid today. Somehow we have to balance living in the present with a healthy concern for tomorrow. We need to concentrate on living one day at a time—fix breakfast, go to work, plan for that special vacation, always aware that no plans are set in concrete. We are never quite in control.

I may wake up in the morning to discover there's no milk. Be late for work because I had to run to the store before making breakfast. Worse yet, I get to work and find out the company is cutting back and I'm going to be laid off—so much for that hoped-for vacation. We can plan for all contingencies, but we cannot control what curveballs life will throw at us.

I used to think that God was testing me, but now I realize God doesn't play that way. We are a

***First Sunday of Advent***

***Matthew 24:37–44***

***date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_***

***“Keep awake  
therefore, for you  
do not know on  
what day your Lord  
is coming” (v. 42).***

New Testament people, and we believe in a God of abundant love who doesn't test his children to see how they respond. What I do know is that God is with us in every step and misstep. Indeed, Jesus tells us that he is not just with us but in us.

So we plan and replan and count on God to be at every crossroads. We grieve over our losses, but find strength in knowing we have Jesus' endurance and courage to call on. We stay alert for what may come, but find God in the present. If we remember Jesus is always with us, as close as our next breath, we will have no problem staying alert and recognizing Jesus when he comes again.

**Family Response:** Together draw up a list of ways each family member can show his or her love for each other in the new year. Post the list on the refrigerator.

**Personal Response:** As you begin this journal, what are your hopes and concerns for the year ahead?

---

---

---

---

What were the highlights from last year?

---

---

---

---

What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

---

---

---

---



### *Produce Good Fruit*

John the Baptist let his followers know that he was baptizing with water, but the one who was coming after him, Jesus, would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist reminds us that it is not enough to just be sorry for our sins or shake our heads helplessly over the wrongs of the world. We must be people of action and do something to change things.

John's baptism was a turning away from sin. The baptism Jesus offers not only turns us away from sin; it propels us into loving action. Our baptism into the Body of Christ empowers us to carry Christ's love to the world. If it doesn't do that then we are like the chaffs of wheat, the useless husk covering the seed that John the Baptist talks about in this reading.

Our baptism marks us as children of God, a people of love. Not just the hearts and flowers love that songsters sing about. Or even the platonic love between really good friends. As a matter of fact, we don't even have to like someone in order to love him or her in Christian love.

The love we share as God's children is more like a bond. It is the God-glue that links us to one another, binding us in a relationship closer than brothers and sisters or husband and wife. It makes all people, all creation one with each other and with God.

This is the love God wants us to share with our children. It may not have the same euphoric feeling as that unfathomable paternal love we have for them, but it is no less honest or deep. Somehow

***Second Sunday in Advent***

***Matthew 3:1-12***

***date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_***

***"Bear fruit worthy of repentance" (v. 8).***

in those first few years of their lives we have to help our youngsters carry the familial love they learned at home to the whole family of God.

We do this by introducing them early to the community of faith. Bring them to Mass as babies (mindful of not disturbing others). Enroll them in the parish preschool program. Take them with you as they grow older to serve at the soup kitchen or sort food for the Thanksgiving baskets. If we get involved in our parish community, our children can meet and interact with their peers as well as adults and experience the love that binds God's community. Healthy seeds can be planted to bear all sorts of good fruit in their futures.

**Family Response:** Talk about how brothers and sisters should treat each other. Come up with a list of ten things they should expect from each other. Make sure standing up for each other and protecting each other is on the list.

**Personal Response:** How can people tell that you are a Christian?

---

---

---

---

What do you want to remember from last week?

---

---

---

---

What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

---

---

---

---





### *Are You the One?*

John the Baptist sends his messengers to ask Jesus if he is the promised Messiah. Jesus answers by telling him how he has fulfilled the words of Isaiah regarding the Messiah. He has healed the lame and given sight to the blind. Jesus does not say directly that he is the Messiah, but he was answering his question.

The Jews believe that the Messiah was the anointed one, the promised king of a new Israel. Jesus answers John's questions by talking about his relationship to the people he encounters. He lets John know that he fulfills Isaiah's messianic prophecies, but his kingdom is of a different sort. He is a healer, a reconciler. He brings good news to the poor.

The kingdom, in which Jesus rules as the anointed one, is not a set place or a particular country. The kingdom of God is wherever God's rule of love reigns. It is where greed and prejudice, self-absorption and pettiness are not welcomed. Some find the kingdom in fleeting moments of quiet peace, others in the joyful celebration of life. For too many suffering people, the kingdom is a distant dream. However, one thing is certain; we know the kingdom can be found almost anywhere.

Wherever there is healing or reconciliation, wherever the good news is proclaimed in word or action, we will find the kingdom of God. It can be shared around the kitchen table when we say a prayer before meals and really listen to what each

***Third Sunday of Advent***

***Matthew 11:2-11***

***date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_***

***"Are you the one  
who is to come, or  
are we to wait for  
another?" (v. 3).***

person has to say. It can be found as we bandage the scraped knee of a wounded youngster and listen to the story of how they have been wounded.

The kingdom of God is not just in some far-off heaven of an afterlife. It is also found in the present, in the here and now. We are called to be kingdom builders—to create a safe environment for our children where they can feel loved and valued and where they can learn to love and value others.

**Family Response:** Ask family members to talk about a person who makes them feel good about themselves. Send a note or phone the person to let him or her know he or she is appreciated.

**Personal Response:** When and how have you experienced the kingdom of God?

---

---

---

---

---

What do you want to remember from last week?

---

---

---

---

---

What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

---

---

---

---

---



### *God Is With Us*

Matthew's account of Jesus' birth doesn't mention a stable or shepherd. There is no trip to Bethlehem. An angel comes to Joseph in a dream and tells him that Mary, the woman he is betrothed to, is about to have a child. This child will fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah that a virgin would bear a son.

An infant is born, helpless and vulnerable. Mary and Joseph take turns holding this tiny swaddled mystery from God. He has captured their hearts. He is special and marvelous, and they would have known this even if an angel hadn't told them so. But there must have come a point in all that joy and happiness when Mary and Joseph realized what an incredible responsibility they had been given.

Sometimes I get so wrapped up with Mary and Joseph's holiness that I forget they were ordinary people. They couldn't see the future, and while the baby was certainly a wonder to the new parents, not in their wildest dreams could they have imagined how this precious child would change the world.

It was only decades later, after he had died, that his followers realized how well the name Emmanuel fit Jesus. As Jews they were familiar with the covenant between God and Abraham. They understood that God was a God of action; a God who was always with them. After they had a chance to look back on their walks and talks with Jesus, they realized that he himself was "God with us." Emmanuel.

***Fourth Sunday in Advent***

***Matthew 1:18–24***

***date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_***

***"[T]hey shall name  
him Emmanuel,  
which means,  
'God is with us'  
(v. 23).***

Later they would understand that Jesus had come to make a new covenant with us. God was not just with us; God was in us: "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you" (John 14:20).

Like Mary and Joseph we have held our own swaddled infants. They, too, captured our hearts, and we marveled at how special they were. Like Jesus' parents we were probably scared of the overwhelming responsibility we had been handed. It's good to remember the gift of the new covenant: God is with us and in us, and nothing can overcome or overpower us.

**Family Response:** Find an early baby picture of your child. Talk about the day your child was born.

**Personal Response:** What do you want more than anything for your child? How can you help him or her obtain it? What do you want most for yourself? How can you get it?

---

---

---

---

What do you want to remember from last week?

---

---

---

---

What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

---

---

---

---