

ILLUSTRATED

Daily Homilies

YEARS I & II

Gospel

Mark Link, S.J.



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About the Homilies

*Don't believe anything
you can't put in colored pictures.*

G. K. Chesterton

Mark Link takes this great Catholic theologian and humorist seriously. He makes the story or "picture" the heart of his homiletic approach.

*Don't tell me what I should do;
show me what you did!*

A student

Again, the author takes this plea seriously. Instead of suggesting what might be done with the daily Scripture readings, he shows you what *he* did with them. His homilies sow the seeds from which your own creative thoughts will develop.

Illustrated Daily Homilies, Years I & II, Gospel, follows the sequence in the Lectionary. The movable days are included in the last section, "Proper of Saints."

About the Author

Mark Link, S.J., has taught at the high school, college, and seminary levels. He has written over twenty books, worked in television, and is currently involved in parish preaching.

ADVENT

	<i>Page</i>
1st Week of Advent	1
2nd Week of Advent	3
3rd Week of Advent	5
Weekdays of Advent	7

CHRISTMAS SEASON

Week after Christmas	11
Week of January 1	13
Week after Epiphany	15

Jesus heals an officer's servant

Monday

Matthew 8:5-11

"They will feast together."

Ancient Jews thought of the kingdom of God as a great banquet. But in their wildest dreams, they didn't expect to find Gentiles there.

Yet in today's reading, Jesus says this is what's going to happen.

Jesus makes it clear that membership in the kingdom of God isn't reserved for a privileged few. It's open to all, even outcasts and Gentiles. The invitation to the great banquet isn't a birth certificate showing Jewish ancestry. It's faith—the kind of faith the Roman centurion had.

Today's reading invites us to ask ourselves: How do we exercise and strengthen our faith?

Today's reading invites us to pray: "You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me; you welcome me as an honored guest and fill my cup to the brim." Psalm 23:5

Jesus talks of prophets and kings

Tuesday

Luke 10:21-24

"They longed to see what you see."

The great Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested, imprisoned, and eventually executed by the Nazis. Shortly before Christmas 1943, he wrote a letter to a loved one. A portion of it reads:

"Life in a prison cell reminds me a great deal of Advent. One waits and hopes and putters around. But in the end

what we do is of little consequence. The door is shut, and it can only be opened from the outside."

That's a good description of the human race before the coming of Jesus.

We were imprisoned by sin.

The door was shut and could not be opened, except from the outside.

That's what Jesus did; he opened the door.

How would our own personal life be different, had Jesus not opened the door?

Lord, thank you for letting us see the day that prophets and kings longed to see, but didn't.

Jesus feeds four thousand

Wednesday

Matthew 15:29-37

They ate until they were full.

Ancient Jews believed the Messiah's coming would usher in the Messianic Age.

The Messianic Age, in turn, would usher in the Messianic Banquet.

It would take place at the end of the world when God's people would sit down together in God's presence.

Jesus referred to this banquet image at the Last Supper.

He told his disciples that he would not sit down to eat the Passover meal with them again

"until it is given its full meaning in the Kingdom of God." Luke 22:16

The feeding of the 4,000

should be read against this rich background.

It should be read as a promise and anticipation of the heavenly banquet of God's elect at the end of the world.

Do we view

our own celebration of the Lord's Supper as an anticipation of the heavenly banquet?

Lord, help us make each Lord's Supper an anticipation of your final coming.

Jesus talks about God's will

Thursday

Matthew 7:21, 24-27

"Do God's will."

Hubert Courtney
appeared before a federal commissioner
on a charge of interstate auto theft.
To try to help his case,
Courtney removed his shirt
and showed the commissioner his chest.

There in the midst of a maze of tattoos
were the words "Crime does not pay."
The commissioner was unimpressed.

Knowing the truth and not doing it
is as foolish as buying a car and not driving it.
It's as senseless as writing a letter
and not mailing it.
It's as meaningless as looking up a number
in a phone book and not dialing it.

What actions in our own lives
are most inconsistent with our beliefs?

Lord, help us realize
that "it is not by hearing the Law
that people are put right with God,
but by doing what the Law commands."

Romans 2:13

Jesus heals two blind men

Friday

Matthew 9:27-31

They recovered their sight.

A *Peanuts* cartoon shows Linus
saying to Charlie Brown, "That's ridiculous!"
Charlie Brown answers, "Well, maybe so!"

Linus and Charlie then go into the living room.
There Snoopy is sitting on top of the TV set
with his ears pointed like an antenna.
Charlie says to Linus, "See for yourself.
When he sits on top of the TV set
with his ears pointed like that,
we get a better picture."

That cartoon illustrates what took place
when Jesus entered the world.
Before Jesus came into the world
our picture of God was fuzzy, at best.
Spiritually we were blind,
like the two men in today's reading.

One of the things Jesus did
was to give us a clearer picture of God.

What is one way
Jesus has given us a better picture of God?

Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me
has seen the Father." John 14:9

Jesus heals the people

Saturday

Matthew 9:35-10:1, 6-8

They filled Jesus with pity.

The movie *Lawrence of Arabia*
contains an unforgettable scene.
Lawrence and a party of Arabs
are crossing a desert in a blinding sandstorm.
Suddenly they discover someone is missing.

"It's the worthless Turk, Jasmin," an Arab says.
"Forget about him," says another.
"He's sick anyway; he's not worth looking for."

So the Arabs continue on.
But Lawrence refuses to abandon the sick Turk.
He goes back and risks his life to look for him.
He finds him and brings him back to safety.

Lawrence's concern for the Turk
is a good picture of Jesus' concern for us.
Jesus refuses to abandon us when we are lost.
He searches us out and brings us home.
Then he restores us to health,
just as he did the people in today's reading.

What kind of concern do we show for others,
especially the less fortunate among us?

"Lord, by your cross and resurrection
you have set us free.
You are the Savior of the world." Liturgy

Jesus heals the paralytic

Monday

Luke 5:17-26

"Your sins are forgiven."

A high school boy imagined himself to be the paralyzed man in today's reading. Here's how he reports his reaction to Jesus.

"Suddenly I began to feel badly about what I had done in my life. I had the feeling that this man knew everything about me. . . .

"His voice matched his eyes. It was a voice that could shake the foundations of a building, yet calm a frightened child.

"He told me my sins were forgiven. How could I not believe that voice and those eyes? I *knew* my sins were forgiven."

Today's reading invites us to ask ourselves: How convinced are we that Jesus has forgiven all of our sins? How forgiving are we to those who sin against us?

Today's reading invites us to reflect: "Those who forgive most will be most forgiven." John W. Bailey

Jesus talks about children

Tuesday

Matthew 18:12-14

"Let none of them be lost."

One day a partially deaf boy came home from school with a note. It suggested his parents take him out of school. He was "too stupid to learn."

When the boy's mother read the note, she said, "My son, Tom, isn't 'too stupid to learn.' I'll teach him myself."

When Tom died many years later, the people of our nation paid tribute to him

by turning off the nation's lights, which Tom had invented, for one minute at 9:59 E.S.T.

Thomas Edison invented not only the light bulb we read by but also the motion picture we watch and the record player we listen to. He has over 1,000 patents to his credit.

How many children, especially problem ones, have we, personally, helped in some way?

Lord, help us realize that love can work miracles, especially when it comes to problem children.

Jesus offers rest to the weary

Wednesday

Matthew 11:28-30

"My burden is light."

Roger Bolduc died in Waterville, Maine, after a long bout with cancer. Until the end, he regarded his illness as a gift from God. Shortly before dying, he wrote:

"Many things upon which I placed importance in the past seem so trivial now. . . . God has become so real. . . .

"I have always felt close to God, but I feel even closer now. I feel that he loves me more than ever. . . . I can feel his power—it's always there. I feel that God has answered my prayers. . . . I feel loved."

What is our attitude toward hardships? Recall a time when some hardship in our own life turned out to be a blessing.

"The LORD who created you says, 'Do not be afraid. . . . I have called you by name—you are mine. When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you.'" Isaiah 43:1-2

Jesus says John was Elijah

Thursday

Matthew 11:11-15

“John is greatest of all.”

A microphone can make a weak voice louder than the world’s strongest voice. A bicycle can make a slow person faster than the world’s fastest runner. In the same way, God’s kingdom can make an insignificant person greater than the world’s greatest person.

But it’s not enough to have a microphone; we must speak into it. It’s not enough to own a bicycle; we must ride it. It’s not enough to have the power of God’s kingdom available to us; we must use it to transform our world.

Today’s reading reminds us of the great power Jesus made available to us. It also reminds us of our responsibility to spread the kingdom throughout the world.

What are we, personally, doing to promote and to spread God’s kingdom wherever we are?

“I can’t change the whole world, but I can change a small part of it.” Kay Florentino

Jesus talks about John’s rejection

Friday

Matthew 11:16-19

“You’re like stubborn children.”

A *Peanuts* cartoon shows Lucy and Linus staring at the sky. Lucy says to Linus, “Sometimes clouds form actual words.” Charlie Brown overhears her, looks up at the sky and says, “Those aren’t clouds! That’s sky-writing!”

Lucy glares at Charlie, turns back to Linus and says, “As I was saying, Linus, sometimes clouds form actual words.”

Charlie shakes his head in disbelief.

Many people in the time of Jesus and John were like Lucy.

They had their minds all made up about certain things.

There was nothing anyone could say or do to change them.

How open are we to truth?

What things do we tend to be close-minded about?

“They have stopped up their ears and closed their eyes.” Acts 28:27

Jesus explains John’s role

Saturday

Matthew 17:10-13

“Elijah has already come.”

The Academy Award film *Chariots of Fire* was about British Olympic runner Eric Liddell. The film took its title from the second chapter of the Second Book of Kings. There Elijah is described as being taken alive into heaven in a chariot of fire.

Symbolic or not, this event in the life of Elijah gave rise to the belief among Jews that Elijah would return one day to announce the coming of the Messiah.

Many Jews still reserve a place at Seder meals for Elijah, hoping he will pick this night to return and announce the Messiah’s coming.

Jesus tells his disciples in today’s reading that Elijah has already come in the person of John the Baptist.

How well are we heeding John’s instruction to repent our sins?

“Create a pure heart in me, O God. . . . Give me again the joy that comes from your salvation.” Psalms 51:10, 12

Jesus' authority is challenged

Monday*

Matthew 21:23-27

"Who gave you this authority?"

Jesus turned the tables
on the elders and the chief priests.
He put the ball back into their court, saying,
"Where did John's right to baptize
come from: was it from God or from man?"

At first the question caught them off guard.
Then they responded with the weakest
of all weak answers: "We don't know."

Jesus had them trapped, and they knew it.
If they said "from God,"
they'd alienate those who believed in John.
If they said "from man,"
they'd pass sentence on themselves
for having rejected John.
So they played it safe and said,
"We don't know."

Today's reading invites us to ask ourselves:
How straightforward are we in our affairs?

Today's reading invites us to take to heart
this promise of Jesus: "If anyone
declares publicly that he belongs to me,
I will do the same for him
before my Father in heaven." Matthew 10:32

Parable of the Two Sons

Tuesday*

Matthew 21:28-32

One promised, but the other went.

In *Table Talk*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge
makes an arresting statement. He says,
"If man is not rising upwards to be an angel,
depend on it,
he is sinking downwards to be a devil."

The point Coleridge is making
is that people rarely tread water.

*If today is December 17 or 18, omit these readings and use those for the Weekdays of Advent (pages 7-9).

They are constantly changing—
either for the better or for the worse.

Today's gospel is an example of this.
The older son refused to help his father,
then changed his mind and helped him.
The younger son promised to help his father,
then changed his mind and refused.

There's nothing more tragic than someone
who starts off well and ends up badly.
There's nothing more inspiring than someone
who starts off badly and ends up well.

Which way are we moving in our lives?
Up? Or down?

Lord, help us understand
that "the person who stops being better
stops being good." Oliver Cromwell

Are you the promised one?

Wednesday*

Luke 7:18-23

"The blind see; the lame walk."

The early Jewish historian Josephus says
that John the Baptist was taken to Machaerus
after his arrest by Herod. (Luke 3:20)

Machaerus was a prison
high up on the eastern cliffs of the Dead Sea.
From there John sent Jesus the message
found in today's reading.

Why did John send this message?
Was he beginning to have doubts about Jesus?
Some think this could have been the case.
We sometimes forget that John was human,
just as we are.

How do we handle faith problems
when they arise?

"I always think that the best way to know God
is to love many things.
Love a friend, a wife, something,
whatever you like. . . .
That man will know there is a God;
he will surely believe it." Vincent Van Gogh. Letters

Jesus talks about John

Thursday*

Luke 7:24-30

“The least in the kingdom is greater than John.”

The invention of the bicycle made it possible for the world’s slowest person to move faster than the world’s swiftest runner.

In a similar way, after Jesus entered our world, the world’s greatest sinner could become holier than the greatest saint in a world without Jesus.

This is the point of Jesus’ strange statement in today’s reading:

“John is greater than any man who has ever lived. But he who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John.”

On a scale of one (not much) to ten (very much), what kind of an effort are we making to grow in the holiness that Jesus made possible by his coming into our world?

“The flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today.” Chinese proverb

Why did they bother going to the restaurant?
Why did they delight in the menu,
order their meals,
and then not stay to eat them?

Jesus makes a parallel point in today’s reading. In effect, he says:

“Many of you delighted in John’s testimony, which had one goal: to prepare the way for me. But now you turn away from my testimony.”

To what extent do we read the menu but not eat the meal, when it comes to Jesus and his message?

“He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him.” John 1:11

John was only a lamp

Friday*

John 5:33-36

“My testimony is greater than John’s.”

Imagine a family getting all dressed up and going to a fine restaurant to dine. They delight in the menu. Then after ordering their meals, the family gets up and leaves without eating.

It doesn’t make sense. Why did the family bother getting dressed up?

*If today is December 17 or 18, omit these readings and use those given for the Weekdays of Advent (pages 7-9).

Jesus' ancestors are listed

December 17

Matthew 1:1-17

This is the family record of Jesus.

Matthew groups the ancestors of Jesus according to three eras in Jewish history.

The first era—Abraham to David—recalls Israel's call to greatness.

The second era—David to Babylon—recalls Israel's fall from greatness.

The third era—Babylon to Jesus—recalls Israel's restoration to greatness.

God created Israel to be great.
But Israel sinned and fell from greatness.
God, however, didn't abandon Israel.
He restored them.

The spiritual history of Israel
is the spiritual history of each one of us.
God called us to be great.
We sinned, however, and fell from greatness.
But God didn't abandon us.
He restored us to greatness in Jesus.

What are we most proud of in our life?

"The LORD who created you says . . .
'I have called you by name. . . .
You are precious to me.'" Isaiah 43:1, 4

Jesus' birth is announced

December 18

Matthew 1:18-24

"He will be called Emmanuel."

Matthew goes out of his way to tell his readers the word *Emmanuel* means "God is with us." Matthew's reason for stressing this becomes clear when we note that he ends his Gospel by returning to this same theme. The last words of Jesus, in the last sentence of Matthew's Gospel, have Jesus say:

"I will be with you always,
to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20

By beginning and ending his Gospel with the same "with-you" note, Matthew stresses an overriding theme of his Gospel:

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to come and live among his people.
Jesus is the mighty Lord of the universe dressed in flesh. (Philippians 2:6-12)

Have we ever experienced Jesus' presence in our life in a special way?

"The LORD who created you says . . .
'Do not be afraid—I am with you!'" Isaiah 43:1, 5

John's birth is announced

December 19

Luke 1:5-25

When Herod was king of Judea . . .

History shows a remarkable thing. During the reigns of Augustus in Rome and Herod in Judea there developed among the people of both countries a feeling of expectancy.

"It was associated with the figure of a 'savior' or deliverer—a great man, perhaps a superman, with something of divinity about him." C. H. Dodd

Many Romans felt Augustus was this "savior." But Augustus died, leaving Romans puzzled. But the expectancy among the Jews didn't die. Unlike the Romans, the Jews could pinpoint the reason for their expectancy. It was the ancient prophecies about a Messiah.

It is against this background that we must read Luke's birth announcements of John and Jesus.

How eagerly do we look forward to Jesus' final coming at the end of history?

"The light of my glory will shine on you.
Your days of grief will come to an end." Isaiah 60:19-20

Jesus' birth is announced

December 20

Luke 1:26-38

"God's power will rest on you."

The word which we translate into English as "rest on" or "overshadow" is rare in the Bible. One place you find it is in the Book of Exodus. There it describes a strange cloud that overshadowed the tent when Israel placed in it the ark of the covenant, containing the tablets of the commandments. As soon as the cloud overshadowed the tent, "the LORD's presence filled it." Exodus 40:34

Luke's choice of the rare word *overshadow* is not accidental; it is deeply symbolic.

Mary's body (new tent)
houses her womb (new ark).
When the Holy Spirit overshadows Mary,
she is filled with the Lord's new presence,
Jesus.
God now lives among his people,
not just in the *symbol* of the tablets in the ark,
but in the *person* of Jesus in Mary's womb.

How aware are we of Jesus' presence?

"From now on all people will call me happy,
because of the great things the Mighty God
has done for me." Luke 1:48-49

Mary visits Elizabeth

December 21

Luke 1:39-45

Elizabeth's baby leaped within her.

There is nothing unusual
about a baby moving in a mother's womb.
But in this case,
Luke intends the infant's movement
to be a dramatic response
to the presence of Jesus in Mary's womb.

The movement of John within Elizabeth's womb
gives us a preview of the powerful impact
Jesus will have on people in his future ministry.

Recall how Peter, James, and John
left everything to follow Jesus. (Luke 5:11)
Recall how the soldiers fell to the ground
when confronted by Jesus
in the garden of Gethsemane. (John 18:6)
Recall how Paul fell to the ground
at the sound of Jesus' voice
on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:4)

Do we ever feel the impact of Jesus on us,
personally, in a powerful way?

"I will proclaim your greatness,
my God and king. . . .
Every day I will thank you." Psalms 145:1-2

Mary sings for joy

December 22

Luke 1:46-56

"He remembered his lowly servant."

"When God delivered Israel out of Egypt,
he didn't send an army. . . .
He sent a man
who had been in the desert forty years,
and had an impediment in his speech.
It is weakness that God wants!
Nothing is small when God handles it."

Dwight L. Moody

Mary is another striking example of this.
Paul has this to say about the same point
in 1 Corinthians 1:27:

"God purposely chose
what the world considers nonsense
in order to shame the wise,
and he chose what the world considers weak
in order to shame the powerful."

How important do we see ourselves
in God's plan?

"My heart praises the Lord;
my soul is glad because of God my Savior,
for he has remembered me, his lowly servant!"

Luke 1:46-48

John is born

December 23

Luke 1:57-66

“What will this child be?”

William Barclay tells a provocative story about an old schoolteacher. Before every class he used to bow to his students. One day someone asked him why he did this. The old teacher replied, “Because I don’t know who one of these young people may turn out to be.”

As Barclay points out, every child is a bundle of possibilities.

Whether these possibilities are ever realized is largely determined by the people who surround the child in its early years.

What is true of children in general was true of John the Baptizer in particular. The unusual circumstances surrounding his birth made it clear that “the hand of the Lord was upon him.”

How respectful and supportive are we of other people, especially young people?

“Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with us.” Tagore

Luke’s technique stresses the close relationship between John and Jesus. John is God’s “advance man,” sent to prepare the world for Jesus. Jesus is God’s Son, sent to save the world from sin.

Every Christian is called to be another John. Every Christian is called to prepare the world they live in for Jesus.

What are we doing to prepare our world for Jesus?

Lord, don’t let us forget that Christianity begins with the word *come* and ends with the word *go*.

Zechariah speaks about John

December 24

Luke 1:67-79

“You will prepare the way for him.”

A popular technique in TV drama is to present several stories at the same time, switching back and forth between them. In other words, the stories are interlaced and flow along together.

Luke uses a similar technique in presenting the early life of Jesus. He interlaces it with stories from the early life of John the Baptizer.

Jesus talks of difficult times

December 26 (Stephen) Matthew 10:17-22

"You will suffer much."

The *London Times* carried this ad in 1900:
"Men wanted for hazardous journey.
Small wages, bitter cold,
long months of complete darkness,
constant danger, safe return doubtful.
Honor and recognition in case of success."

That brief ad drew over 5,000 applicants.
From these applicants
Sir Ernest Shackleton selected 27 men
to accompany him on a polar expedition.

Eventually all 28 men returned safely
to "honor and recognition."

Jesus knew the power of challenge, also.
Followers like Stephen rallied to his challenge.
With their blood, sweat, and tears
they watered the seed of the church.

What is the greatest suffering
we have endured for our faith?

"Christ himself suffered for you
and left you an example,
so that you would follow in his steps." 1 Peter 2:21

Jesus is risen

December 27 (John) John 20:2-8

He saw and believed.

A high school student wrote:

"It was Easter Sunday morning.
I had just finished my paper route.
As I passed St. Gall's church,
the sun was coming up.
I had no intention of going into the church,
because I was having problems with my faith.

"Then it happened.
I turned around just as the sun hit
the big silver cross in front of the church.

I couldn't help but stare at the fiery brightness.
I was overcome
by a sense of what the apostles must have felt
2,000 years ago on this same morning.

"Then, some force seemed to take hold of me
and direct my feet up the church steps.
I opened the door, went in, and knelt down.
For the first time in my life,
I understood what Easter is all about."

What does Jesus' resurrection mean to us?

"The Gospels do not explain the resurrection;
the resurrection explains the Gospels." J. S. Whale

Herod tries to kill Jesus

December 28 Matthew 2:13-18
(Holy Innocents)

Herod ordered a massacre.

The slaying of infants
reflects the pathological state of Herod's mind
during the last years of his life.
He put to death members of his own family,
yet scrupulously kept Jewish dietary laws,
such as not eating pork.
This provoked Emperor Augustus of Rome
to joke:
"I'd rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son."

In the final weeks of Herod's life,
when he knew he was dying,
he ordered hundreds of leading citizens
from the towns of the nation
to be locked up in the hippodrome at Jericho.
Herod gave the order that when he died,
they should be executed.
His sick mind reasoned that their deaths
would counteract any joy in Judea
over his own death.
The order was never carried out.

How do we reconcile God's goodness in allowing
evil rulers to inflict pain on so many people?

"My thoughts are not like yours,
and my ways are different from yours." Isaiah 55:8

Jesus is presented in the Temple

December 29

Luke 2:22-35

They took Jesus to Jerusalem.

In his book *Roots*, Alex Haley tells how his African ancestors named their children. Eight days after the child's birth, the father took the child into his arms and whispered its name into its ear. That night the father completed the ceremony. Carrying the child out under the stars, alone, he lifted the baby up to the sky and said, "Behold the only thing greater than yourself."

This naming rite helps us appreciate better the two rites that surrounded the birth of Jesus: circumcision and presentation. Circumcision initiated Jesus into the community of God's chosen people. Presentation consecrated Jesus to God.

Today's reading invites us to ask ourselves: What was the meaning of our own baptism?

Today's reading invites us to pray: "O LORD . . . when I look at the sky, which you have made . . . what is man, that you think of him; mere man, that you care for him?" Psalm 8:1-4

Anna speaks about Jesus

December 30

Luke 2:36-40

She was eighty-four years old.

John Powers wrote a book called *The Unoriginal Sinner and the Ice Cream God*. In it a boy named Conroy writes God a letter. He complains about the fact that people have to grow old.

Speaking for God, an adult friend writes a letter back to Conroy, saying: "I often find your way of thinking quite puzzling. For me, the most beautiful moment on earth

is in old people. They are my human sunsets."

The widow Anna was a human sunset. She never stopped praying. She never stopped worshiping. She never stopped trusting.

In the end, God rewarded Anna by letting her see the long-awaited Messiah.

How are we growing old?

Lord, help us understand that age is a matter of mind. If we don't mind, it doesn't matter.

The Word brought light

December 31

John 1:1-18

The light shines in the darkness.

A book called *Night Flight* deals with the early years of aviation. It describes the hair-raising adventures of those pilots who used to fly at night without the aid of radar or radio.

The book is not only a fascinating story about night pilots, but also a kind of parable of our own situation before the birth of Jesus.

We lived in a universe that was a mystery to us. Worse yet, we were a mystery to ourselves. Many of us didn't know where we came from or where we were going. We were like "night flyers" in a strange land.

Into this night-flying world Jesus came. Jesus did not take away the night. He taught us how to fly in the night. We were no longer alone and lost. We had a copilot.

How closely do we follow Jesus in our lives?

"'I am the light of the world,' Jesus said. 'Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness.'" John 8:12

John baptizes at the Jordan

January 2

John 1:19-28

"I baptize with water."

John's baptism
was totally different from Jesus' baptism.
John explained the difference this way:

"I baptize you with water
to show that you have repented,
but the one who will come after me
will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Matthew 3:11

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.
It was only a sign.
It signified the rejection of one's former life.

Jesus' baptism, on the other hand,
is a baptism of rebirth.
It goes far beyond John's baptism.
It initiates one into a new life,
the life of the risen Jesus.

How seriously do we try to live the new life
we received in baptism?

"Wake up, sleeper, and rise from death,
and Christ will shine on you." Ephesians 5:14

In countries where Epiphany is celebrated on the Sunday between January 2 and January 8, the readings assigned to the days January 7 to January 12 are used after Epiphany and the following readings are omitted.

John points out Jesus

January 3

John 1:29-34

"There is the Lamb of God."

We celebrate Jesus' birth on December 25.
But we don't know when he was born.
Some scholars think it was in the spring,
during lambing season. Why?

Shepherds usually kept their sheep in caves
at night.
But they departed from this practice
during lambing season.
Crowded caves made poor birthing places.

This would explain why the shepherds
were spending the night in the fields.
It would also explain why Joseph and Mary
might seek shelter in a cave.
They knew it would be empty at this time.

It would be fitting for Jesus to be born
at the same time that lambs
destined for sacrifice in the Temple were born.
Jesus himself was destined to be
the sacrificial "Lamb of God."

What place does sacrifice have in our life?

"Like a lamb . . . he was put to death
for the sins of our people." Isaiah 53: 7-8

Andrew and Peter follow Jesus

January 4

John 1:35-42

Andrew introduced Peter to Jesus.

Andrew is mentioned three times in John's Gospel.
Each time he is described
as introducing someone to Jesus.

In today's reading,
he introduces his brother Peter to Jesus.
Jesus eventually chooses Peter to be the rock
upon which he builds his church. (Matthew 16:18)

In the second case, Andrew introduces a boy
with five loaves and two fish to Jesus. (John 6:8-9)
Jesus uses the loaves and fish
to feed a hungry crowd of thousands.

In the final instance,
Andrew brings some Greeks to Jesus.
Jesus uses the occasion
to teach the crowds that he will be with them
only a short while longer. (John 12:35)

Who have we introduced to Jesus?

Lord, help us imitate Andrew
and share our blessing of meeting you
with our brothers and sisters.

Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael

January 5

John 1:43-51

"I saw you under a fig tree."

Bible readers ask,
"What was Nathanael doing under the fig tree?"
Most people think he was praying.

Fig trees are extremely leafy.
They afford excellent shade
and make good places to sit and pray.

Possibly, Nathanael was meditating
on the prophecies about the Messiah.
Possibly, he was praying
that he might be given the grace
to see the Messiah before he died.
Possibly, he was given assurance from God
that he would indeed see the Messiah
in his own lifetime.

How frequently do we sit and meditate
on God's word?

"I will remember your great deeds, LORD;
I will recall the wonders you did in the past.
I will think about all that you have done;
I will meditate on all your mighty acts."

Psalm 77:11-12

John talks about Jesus

January 6*

Mark 1:7-11

"I'm not fit to untie his sandals."

The Stone Carvers won the Academy Award
in 1985 for the best film documentary
on a short subject.

It dealt with the small group of craftsmen
who have spent their lives
adorning the Washington Cathedral
with stone carvings and statues.

Art historians are fond of reminding us
that unlike artists of later times,

*In countries where Epiphany is celebrated on January 7 or January 8.

the great stone carvers of early times
rarely signed their works.
They preferred to work
for the honor and glory of God rather than
for the honor and glory of themselves.

John the Baptist
had a similar feeling about himself.
Although Jesus called John
the greatest person who ever lived (Luke 7:28),
John considered himself to be unfit
to perform the most menial task for Jesus.

Do we solicit recognition for what we do?

Humility is not thinking less of one's self;
it is not thinking of one's self at all.

Jesus responds to Mary's request

January 7*

John 2:1-12

"Woman, how does this involve me?" (NAB)

Some people are shocked to hear Jesus
call his mother "woman" in today's reading.
Jesus uses the same title, again, on the cross
when he commends Mary to John's care.

(John 19:26, NAB)

The word *woman* sounds
impersonal, rude, and terribly discourteous.
Actually, the word had a different connotation
for ancients.

Commenting on this, William Barclay says:

"In Homer it is the title by which Odysseus
addressed Penelope, his well-loved wife.
It is the title by which Augustus,
the Roman Emperor, addressed Cleopatra,
the famous Egyptian queen." The Gospel of John (page 98)

Perhaps the best way to think of the title
is to think of it the way the British do
when they address a woman of nobility as *Lady*.

How respectful are we to loved ones?

"Clothe yourselves with . . . gentleness."

Colossians 3:12

The readings assigned from January 7 to January 12 are used on the days which follow Epiphany, even if this is transferred to Sunday, up to the following Saturday. Nevertheless on Monday after the Sunday on which the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated (i.e., the Sunday after January 6), the readings of the season of the year begin, and any readings left over from those assigned for January 7 to January 12 are omitted.

Jesus begins his ministry

January 7 Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25
or Monday after Epiphany

Jesus moved to Capernaum.

Some Bible readers ask, "Why did Jesus leave Nazareth and go to Capernaum in Galilee?"

Matthew says it was "to make come true what the prophet Isaiah had said."

But there was another reason.

Nazareth was an out-of-the-way hill town.

No one bothered to visit it. (John 1:46)

Capernaum, on the other hand, lay on the busy shores of the Sea of Galilee. Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, says Capernaum was one of 204 towns that circled the shores of the large sea.

But there is still another reason.

Galileans were known

for their openness and for their courage.

Josephus says that Galileans were "by nature disposed to change" and "full of courage."

Capernaum was an ideal place for Jesus to begin his ministry.

Today's reading invites us to ask ourselves: How open are we to truth?

Today's reading invites us to pray:

Lord, give us open minds and courageous hearts.

Jesus feeds five thousand

January 8 Mark 6:34-44
or Tuesday after Epiphany

"Give them something to eat."

A middle-aged woman walked into the slums of a large city. She had two dollars in her pocket, no income, and no place to stay. All she had was the conviction

that God wanted her to help the poor. That was about 35 years ago.

Today, Mother Teresa has 80 schools, 70 leprosy clinics, 30 homes for the dying, 30 homes for abandoned children, 300 mobile dispensary units, and 40,000 volunteer workers the world over.

Mother Teresa gave her five loaves and two fish to Jesus, and he used them to feed millions.

What loaves and fishes do we possess?

"Lord, teach me to be generous.

Teach me to serve you as you deserve;

to give and not to count the cost." Ignatius of Loyola

Jesus walks on water

January 9 Mark 6:45-52
or Wednesday after Epiphany

He was going to pass them by.

The remark "He was going to pass them by" baffles many readers.

It doesn't mean Jesus is out for a night stroll and doesn't want to be bothered.

The Old Testament uses the words *pass by* to indicate an occasion

when God manifested himself to someone.

God "passed by" Moses. (Exodus 33:19)

God "passed by" Elijah. (1 Kings 19:11)

We should understand today's reading in this same way.

Jesus intends his action to be a manifestation of himself as the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)

But the disciples are like Job, who said,

"God passes by, but I cannot see him." Job 9:11

The disciples miss the point of this miracle, just as they missed the point

of the "loaves" miracle. (John 6:26)

Do we recognize Jesus when he "passes by" us in some form of sickness or trial?

Lord of Signs and Wonders, "pass by" us when we are in danger of faltering or failing.

Jesus preaches at Nazareth

January 10

Luke 4:14-22

or Thursday after Epiphany

"I announce a year of favor." (NAB)

The expression "year of favor" is also translated "Year of Restoration." It had a special meaning for ancient Jews. The Book of Leviticus refers to it in this law:

"If a fellow Israelite living near you becomes so poor that he sells himself to you as a slave . . . he shall stay with you . . . until the next Year of Restoration. At that time he and his children shall leave you and return to his family." Leviticus 25:39-41

Likewise, a poor man who had to sell his land in order to buy food got it back at the Year of Restoration. (Leviticus 25:23-28) Thus the Year of Restoration was a time when debts of poor people were cancelled.

The Messianic Age is like that. It is a Year of Restoration in which God cancels Israel's debts (sins).

Do we forgive as generously as God does?

Lord, you have given us so much. Give us one thing more—a forgiving heart.

Jesus heals a leper

January 11

Luke 5:12-16

or Friday after Epiphany

"Be clean!"

The leper was a tragic figure in ancient times. The Book of Leviticus says of him: He "must wear torn clothes, leave his hair uncombed, cover the lower part of his face, and call out, 'Unclean, unclean!' He . . . must live outside the camp, away from others." Leviticus 13:45-46

Ancient peoples didn't go near the leper. They were deathly afraid

they would get his disease.

The leper's life was a kind of living hell. People hated him.

And, in turn, he hated himself.

Even today, some lepers resort to suicide as a way out of their tragic situation.

It was to such a man that Jesus reached out a hand and healed him.

How compassionate are we toward the sick and the afflicted in our midst?

Lord, stretch out your hand and heal our indifference toward our afflicted brothers and sisters.

John talks about Jesus

January 12

John 3:22-30

or Saturday after Epiphany

"I become less important."

The "best man" played an important role in ancient weddings.

He supervised all wedding arrangements.

He was in charge of all wedding invitations.

He presided over the wedding celebration.

His final job

was to stand watch at the bridal chamber while the bride waited within for the groom.

When the groom arrived at the bridal chamber, the best man withdrew.

His job was over.

John's job was like a best man's job.

He was in charge of bringing Israel and Jesus together as bride and groom.

John took care of all the arrangements.

When his job was finished, John withdrew.

Do we find it hard to step down and let others enjoy the spotlight?

Jesus said:

"The Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people." Mark 10:45