

# *Introductions for Reading Cumulatively through the Revised Common Lectionary*

## Table of Contents Year B

*(Move cursor to any heading in the Table of Contents and click on it to go to the text for that day.)*

### [Introduction for Liturgical Year B](#)

#### [ADVENT](#)

[First Sunday of Advent](#)  
[Second Sunday of Advent](#)  
[Third Sunday of Advent](#)  
[Fourth Sunday of Advent](#)

#### [CHRISTMAS](#)

[Christmas Eve](#)  
[Christmas Day](#)  
[Christmas Proper 1](#)  
[Christmas Proper 2](#)  
[Christmas Proper 3](#)  
[First Sunday after Christmas](#)  
[Second Sunday after Christmas](#)  
[Epiphany](#)

#### [SUNDAYS AFTER EPIPHANY](#)

[Baptism of the Lord](#)  
[Second Sunday after Epiphany](#)  
[Third Sunday after Epiphany](#)  
[Fourth Sunday after Epiphany](#)  
[Fifth Sunday after Epiphany](#)  
[Sixth Sunday after Epiphany \(Proper 1\)](#)  
[Seventh Sunday after Epiphany \(Proper 2\)](#)  
[Eighth Sunday after Epiphany \(Proper 3\)](#)  
[Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

#### [LENT](#)

[Ash Wednesday](#)  
[First Sunday in Lent](#)  
[Second Sunday in Lent](#)  
[Third Sunday in Lent](#)  
[Fourth Sunday in Lent](#)  
[Fifth Sunday in Lent](#)

#### [HOLY WEEK](#)

[Palm/Passion Sunday](#)  
[Holy Monday](#)  
[Holy Tuesday](#)  
[Holy Wednesday](#)  
[Holy Thursday](#)  
[Good Friday](#)  
[Holy Saturday](#)

### [EASTER](#)

[Easter Vigil](#)  
[Easter Sunday](#)  
[Easter Evening](#)  
[Second Sunday of Easter](#)  
[Third Sunday of Easter](#)  
[Fourth Sunday of Easter](#)  
[Fifth Sunday of Easter](#)  
[Sixth Sunday of Easter](#)  
[Ascension](#)  
[Seventh Sunday of Easter](#)  
[Pentecost](#)

### [ORDINARY TIME](#)

[Trinity Sunday](#)  
[Proper 4 \(May 29-June 4\)](#)  
[Proper 5 \(June 5-11\)](#)  
[Proper 6 \(June 12-18\)](#)  
[Proper 7 \(June 19-25\)](#)  
[Proper 8 \(June 26-July 2\)](#)  
[Proper 9 \(July 3-9\)](#)  
[Proper 10 \(July 10-16\)](#)  
[Proper 11 \(July 17-23\)](#)  
[Proper 12 \(July 24-30\)](#)  
[Proper 13 \(July 31-Aug. 6\)](#)  
[Proper 14 \(Aug. 7-13\)](#)  
[Proper 15 \(Aug. 14-20\)](#)  
[Proper 16 \(Aug. 21-27\)](#)  
[Proper 17 \(Aug. 28-Sept. 3\)](#)  
[Proper 18 \(Sept. 4-10\)](#)  
[Proper 19 \(Sept. 11-17\)](#)  
[Proper 20 \(Sept. 18-24\)](#)  
[Proper 21 \(Sept. 25-Oct. 1\)](#)  
[Proper 22 \(Oct. 2-8\)](#)  
[Proper 23 \(Oct. 9-15\)](#)  
[Proper 24 \(Oct. 16-22\)](#)  
[Proper 25 \(Oct. 23-29\)](#)  
[Proper 26 \(Oct. 30-Nov. 5\)](#)  
[All Saints](#)  
[Proper 27 \(Nov. 6-12\)](#)  
[Proper 28 \(Nov. 13-19\)](#)  
[Reign of Christ \(Proper 29: Nov. 20-26\)](#)

# Introduction for Liturgical Year B

There are many ways we humans mark time. We base a calendar year on the orbit of the earth around the sun. We have school years based on academic needs and fiscal years based on budgets. But the church bases its worship calendar, its sense of sacred time, on the remembering, retelling, and experience of the story of Christ.

To help interpret this movement of time, many congregations and denominations use a lectionary (a set of four biblical readings drawn from the First Testament, the Psalms, the Epistles, and the Gospels) for each Sunday and holy day over a three-year cycle. This year we will hear the story of Christ primarily offered in the voice of the Gospel of Mark. With Advent beginning, it is helpful to remind ourselves of the liturgical year as a whole that lies before us.

**Advent:** The four Sundays before Christmas focus on the theme of waiting for God to come to (ad = “to” + vent = “come”) us in Christ (not only in Christ’s birth, but in our present lives and in God’s future). Because Advent was originally similar in penitential tone and practice to Lent, the color for the season is purple, although some churches now use blue to distinguish the kind of preparation called for by Advent from the preparatory practices of Lent.

**Christmas:** The twelve days of Christmas begin, not end, with Christmas Day on December 25. White, the color used for the holiest of days and seasons of the Christian year, is displayed during this season to celebrate the nativity and childhood of Christ. The number of Sundays in this season varies depending on what day of the week Christmas falls and whether Epiphany is celebrated on January 6 or the Sunday preceding it.

**Sundays after Epiphany:** The day of Epiphany commemorates the epiphany (i.e., revelation or manifestation) of the Christ child to the magi. The “Sundays after Epiphany” continue highlighting God’s revelation in Christ’s ministry, marked with the bookend stories of Christ’s baptism and Christ’s transfiguration, both of which present a heavenly voice declaring Jesus to be God’s Child. This thematic season evolved from a tradition of considering the time between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday to be Ordinary Time (like the Season after Pentecost), and thus the color for the season is green (with white being used for Baptism of the Lord and Transfiguration Sunday).

**Lent:** The forty days of Lent begin with Ash Wednesday and extend through Holy Week, not including Sundays. The length of the season is rooted in the story of Jesus’ forty-day temptation before he began his ministry and reminds the church that Lent began as a season of testing and preparation for converts to Christianity who were to be baptized on Easter. Because the season focuses on penitence and fasting as well as on the passion of Christ, with all its tones of royalty, the color for the season is purple.

**Easter:** The season of Easter, following the chronology established by Luke in the beginning of the book of Acts, begins on Easter Sunday and extends for fifty days through Ascension (forty days after Easter Sunday) to Pentecost. Since Easter is the central liturgical season for the Christian year, its color is white (changing to red for the Day of Pentecost). Celebrating the resurrection and ascension of Christ and the gift of the Spirit to the church, this season draws the high liturgical seasons to a close.

**Sundays after Pentecost or Ordinary Time:** Commemorating the exaltation of Christ and the coming of the Spirit that gave birth to the post-resurrection church, the Day of Pentecost sets up liturgical practice to move into the season of the church, if you will. Although there are a few scattered thematically focused days during this season (for example, Trinity Sunday, All Saints’, and Reign of Christ), the approximately six-month season is primarily a time for building up of the church through the reading and preaching of scripture. Thus this season is called Ordinary Time.

# Advent

## Year B

### Introduction for Advent

The word *advent* means “to come to.” Advent, therefore, is the season in which the church looks forward to God’s coming to us in Christ—Emmanuel, God-with-us. The advent of God, however, involves much more than just the birth of Christ two thousand years ago. So while Advent prepares us for Christmas, the season includes the expectation that God is always in our future. This hope includes both the potential to come to us in the immediate future of our daily lives and in the culmination of time itself, often referred to as Christ’s Second Coming. The First Sunday of Advent always focuses on this apocalyptic return of the Son of man; the second and third Sundays focus on John the Baptist as the one who prepares for the ministry of the coming one; and the fourth focuses on the preparation for the birth of Christ.

## Introduction for Advent 1B

The First Sunday of Advent, which is the first Sunday of the liturgical year and thus a New Year's Day of sorts, always focuses on God's future. Specifically, each year the day is centered on Jesus' promise, just before his death, that the Son of man will come with power and glory.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 64:1–9***

Through most of the seasons of Advent and Christmas, the reading from the First Testament comes from the book of Isaiah. Our first such reading comes from the last few chapters of the book of Isaiah in the midst of oracles prophesying about the restoration of Judah after the Babylonian exile. Appropriate to Advent, this passage is a prayer for God to come with great signs in nature to bring redemption just as God had come to the people in the past.

#### ***Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19***

The theme of Psalm 80 is the same as that of our reading from Isaiah: the need for restoration of God's people. We read the opening and closing portions of this lament today.

#### ***1 Corinthians 1:3–9***

Today's Epistle reading comes from the opening verses of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. While Paul basically follows the standard form of address in ancient letter writing style, he also uses the address to introduce themes that he will raise in the body of the letter. One of those themes appropriate to Advent is the expectation of the coming day of the Lord.

#### ***Mark 13:24–37***

Each year of the three-year lectionary cycle is centered on Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Throughout the coming liturgical year, the Gospel reading for most Sundays will come from Mark. Every year the Gospel lection for the First Sunday of Advent comes from Jesus' speech that occurs just after he leaves the temple in Jerusalem for the last time. This takes place during the week of his passion. Taken from the latter part of the discourse, today's reading presents Jesus using language similar to our passage from Isaiah in claiming that cosmic signs will accompany the coming of the Son of man.

## Introduction for Advent 2B

On the First Sunday of Advent, the church looks forward to the coming of the Son of man in final victory. In contrast, the advent of God-in-Christ that is lifted up on the second and third Sundays of Advent is the ministry of Jesus as foreshadowed by the ministry of John the Baptist.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 40:1–11***

As with last week's reading from Isaiah, this week's First Testament lesson deals with the hope of Babylonian exiles returning to Jerusalem. Our reading is a vision of the heavenly court receiving instructions to prepare the way for the Lord to come and lead the exiles home. The early church, however, understood this passage to refer to John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus' ministry.

#### ***Psalms 85:1–2, 8–13***

Echoing the lection from Isaiah, our Psalter reading for today comes from portions of a prayer for the restoration of the community. It asks that as God forgave and restored Judah in the past, may God do so again.

#### ***2 Peter 3:8–15a***

Continuing last week's focus on the return of the Son of man, our reading from 2 Peter calls the readers to be patient in waiting for the day of the Lord. Christians should not give up hope simply because Christ has not yet come back. Our concept of time is not limiting to God.

#### ***Mark 1:1–8***

The Gospel lesson for the Second Sunday of Advent always comes from narratives describing the ministry of John the Baptist that preceded Jesus' ministry. Mark's Gospel, which has no story of Jesus' birth, begins with John's ministry. In today's reading we hear Mark interpret that ministry in light of Isaiah 40, and we hear John speak of the one who is to come as one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

## Introduction for Advent 3B

The advent of God that is lifted up on the Third Sunday of Advent, as with last Sunday, is the ministry of Jesus as foreshadowed by John the Baptist. Traditionally, this Sunday was called *Gaudete* (Latin for “rejoice”) Sunday, because the season of waiting and expectation was passing the halfway mark.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11***

As with the first two Sundays of Advent, today we read from the latter portions of the book of Isaiah. Today’s text is full of hope and joy as it speaks of God anointing the prophet to bring good news of justice, liberation, and restoration. This passage was a key prophecy for the Gospel of Luke shaping its understanding of the purpose of Jesus’ ministry.

#### ***Psalms 126***

The Psalter reading is a communal prayer for divine help. As with Psalm 85, from which we read last week, this prayer begins with joyful expressions of God restoring Jerusalem in the past as the basis for the request for restoration now.

#### ***OR Luke 1:47–55***

Each year during Advent, the Magnificat, Mary’s prophetic and poetic speech offered in response to Elizabeth’s recognition that Mary will be the mother of the Lord, is put forward as an alternative to the Psalter reading. Mary’s speech is especially appropriate on Gaudete Sunday since it begins with the claim that her spirit rejoices in the One who reverses the fates of the powerful and weak, the rich and the poor.

#### ***1 Thessalonians 5:16–24***

Just before Advent the church read from Paul’s first letter to the church at Thessalonica and heard the apostle’s pastoral words concerning the coming day of the Lord. Our reading from 1 Thessalonians today comes from the closing words of the letter. Keeping with the theme of rejoicing that is typical of the Third Sunday of Advent, Paul calls the church to rejoice *always*.

#### ***John 1:6–8, 19–28***

In different ways, each of the Gospels subordinates John the Baptist to Jesus. The Fourth Gospel has John the Baptist do this himself. In today’s lection, which has been read on the Third Sunday of Advent for over 500 years, the Baptist clarifies for the religious authorities that he is not the Christ, but is the one about whom Isaiah 40 (from which we read last week) speaks as preparing a way for the coming of the Lord.

## Introduction for Advent 4B

As Advent draws to a close, the expectation of the coming of the Lord focuses specifically on the birth of the Christ child. Thus we begin to transition from the liturgical posture of waiting for God to come to us in Christ (in Advent) to the reception of Christ as Emmanuel, God-with-us (in Christmas).

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16***

In this First Testament story, King David wishes to build a temple for God, but God tells David this task is not his to do. Nevertheless, David's loyalty is rewarded with a covenant to establish David's descendants on the throne of Israel forever. As we shall hear in our Gospel reading in a few moments, the early church understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of this promise.

#### ***Luke 1:47–55***

Each year during Advent, the Magnificat, Mary's prophetic and poetic speech offered in response to Elizabeth's recognition that Mary is to be the mother of the Lord, is put forward as an alternative to the Psalter reading. Mary speaks of God reversing the fates of the powerful and weak, the rich and the poor, in the coming of her child.

#### ***OR Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26***

Echoing the reading from 2 Samuel and foreshadowing the Gospel reading, the Psalter reading for today is a celebration of the covenant that God established with David.

#### ***Romans 16:25–27***

Today we read the closing words of Paul's letter to the Romans. Unlike the other Epistles in the New Testament, Romans ends with a doxology. This doxology is fitting for the Sunday before Christmas because in it the author refers to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the revelation of a mystery kept secret for generations.

#### ***Luke 1:26–38***

Our Gospel lection for today is the story of the annunciation. The angel Gabriel comes to Mary to tell her that she will give birth to the Son of God, to whom will be given the throne of David. Mary's faithful acceptance of this news prepares us for the celebration of the nativity that draws near.

# Christmas

## Year B

### Introduction for Christmas

Although secular culture considers the season of Christmas to be the time preparing for Christmas Day (December 25), the church considers the four weeks leading up to Christmas to be the Season of Advent, in which we prepare not only for Christ's coming in his birth but also Christ's coming in our daily lives and "in final victory." The *Season* of Christmas actually begins on Christmas Eve or Day and proceeds to Epiphany (January 6). This is, of course, the season in which we celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. But it is more than that. Celebrating the birth story leads the church to ponder the significance of the Incarnation, of God becoming human, of Christ being fully human and fully divine—in other words, of God-with-us.

### Introduction for Christmas Eve

While in the modern world we think of each day beginning at sunrise, ancient Jews thought of sundown as the beginning of a new day. In addition, the ancient church prepared for many of its major feasts with a fast the day before. These two facts combine to explain why the modern church celebrates the first service of Christmas on Christmas Eve. On this day the church celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, child of Mary, Son of God. Every year on this day, we read the same scripture lessons.

### Introduction for Christmas Day

Two major feast days, Christmas and Easter, anchor the Christian year. On this day the church celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, child of Mary, Son of God. Every year on this day, we read the same scripture lessons.



## Oral Introductions for Individual Lections for Christmas Eve/Day B

*[NOTE: Although most Protestant churches only use one set of lections for Christmas, the RCL assigns three propers for Christmas for those congregations that have multiple services, following the tradition of celebrating Christmas mass at night (Christmas Eve), dawn, and during the day. In the cumulative preaching strategies, only the first proper is considered. However, in years when Christmas Eve falls on a Saturday, churches that usually only have a Christmas Eve service will need a different set of readings for Christmas day. Therefore, we include introductions for all propers at this point.]*

### Christmas – Proper 1

#### ***Isaiah 9:2–7***

Our reading from Isaiah is an oracle concerning the coronation of a king who would restore the Davidic rule over Judah, replacing oppression with justice. The language of a son being born and the grand titles applied to him reflect the ancient understanding of divine adoption that occurred when each new king was crowned. The early church interpreted this coronation oracle in relation to the birth and ministry of Jesus.

#### ***Psalms 96***

Psalms 96 echoes the royal language of our Isaiah lesson, but here the language is applied to God instead of the Judean throne. Indeed, this hymn praises God as the ruler of the universe. Read today, the psalmist's call for the heavens to be glad and the earth to rejoice prepares us for the angels' song and the shepherds' praise at Jesus' birth.

#### ***Titus 2:11–14***

In the Pastoral letter to Titus, the writer grounds his moral exhortation with the passage we are about to read. It is a fitting text for Christmas because, while it carries forward the Advent theme of always waiting for the manifestation of Christ, it also opens with the claim, "The grace of God *has* appeared, bringing salvation to all."

#### ***Luke 2:1–14 (15–20)***

As Advent has leaned in toward this day, so our earlier lections bow down toward our Gospel reading. Of the four Gospels, only Luke and Matthew tell us of Jesus' birth. Matthew's version is brief, so we turn to Luke's longer story. We hear of the displacement of Joseph and Mary, the birth in a stable, and the revelation to poor shepherds.

## **Christmas – Proper 2**

### ***Isaiah 62:6–12***

In a moment we will listen as angels proclaim to the shepherds that a savior has arrived. First, however, we listen to the prophet proclaim to postexilic Jerusalem that salvation is arriving.

### ***Psalms 97***

Psalms 97 is an enthronement hymn celebrating God's rule over the earth. God's reign will establish righteousness and justice. We read this psalm today because of the traditional claim on Christmas that Christ is the newborn king.

### ***Titus 3:4–7***

Read on Christmas Day, our Epistle lection reminds us of the very reason Christ appeared—so that we might be saved according to God's mercy.

### ***Luke 2:(1–7) 8–20***

Every Christmas, we read Luke's version of the nativity. It is a familiar but powerful story. We hear of the displacement of Joseph and Mary, the birth in a stable, and the revelation of salvation to poor shepherds.

## **Christmas – Proper 3**

### ***Isaiah 52:7–10***

Because a common theme of Christmas is that Christ is born as a king, our First Testament lesson comes from a passage in Isaiah in which God is imagined as a victorious king returning to Jerusalem and bringing salvation to the destroyed city.

### ***Psalms 98***

Psalms 98 is a hymn celebrating God's reign that brings salvation to Israel. We read this psalm today because of the traditional claim on Christmas that Christ is the newborn king.

### ***Hebrews 1:1–4 (5–12)***

We read from the opening of Hebrews on Christmas Day, for the author sums up the significance of the Christ Event as God speaking to us through God's Son. The view of Christ in the passage celebrates the high status of Christ, as superior to angels. Indeed, like our Gospel reading, the passage speaks of the world being created through Christ.

### ***John 1:1–14***

While the Gospels of Matthew and Luke narrate for us the details of the story of Jesus' birth, John theologizes poetically and philosophically about the Incarnation of the Word of God, through which the world was created. The paradoxical language John uses of the Word being *with* God and *being* God has long shaped the church's understanding of Christ as God-with-us.

## Introduction for Christmas 1B

The First Sunday after Christmas focuses on a story from Jesus' childhood. This means that the time from the celebration of the nativity to the celebration of the revelation of the Christ child to the magi on Epiphany on January 6 is structured liturgically, not chronologically. This year the First Sunday of Christmas focuses on Luke's story of the presentation of Jesus in the temple when he was little over a month old.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Isaiah 61:10—62:3***

Throughout Advent, our readings from Isaiah focused on the hope that God would restore Judah after the exile. Today that hope gives way to celebration in a manner appropriate to Advent giving way to Christmastide.

#### ***Psalms 148***

While the other three lections for the First Sunday after Christmas change each year, the Psalter reading is always 148. Appropriate to the celebratory themes of the Christmas season, this psalm (like all of the Psalter readings during the season of Christmas) is a hymn of praise. The psalmist calls the entire cosmos, all of heaven and earth, to join in a chorus of praise.

#### ***Galatians 4:4–7***

In this short passage from the letter to the Galatians, Paul connects our being adopted as God's children to Christ's being born of a woman.

#### ***Luke 2:22–40***

According to Luke, eight days after being born, Jesus was circumcised in accordance with Torah. Now, about a month later, Jesus is presented in the temple. While there, the prophets Simeon and Anna recognize that he is God's salvation for God's people.

---

<sup>1</sup>In congregations that celebrate Epiphany Sunday on the Sunday before January 6 when the 6<sup>th</sup> falls on a day other than Sunday, there will never be a Second Sunday after Christmas. (In fact, if the 6<sup>th</sup> falls on a Friday or Saturday, there will be no first Sunday after Christmas.)

The earlier *Common Lectionary* recommended that if the second alternate set of lections for Christmas (Christmas Proper 3) were not used on Christmas Eve or Day, they should be used later during the Christmas season due to the importance of John's prologue for the New Testament understanding of the Incarnation. The other option is to substitute the readings for Christmas 2 (which includes John 1:[1–9] 10–18) for Christmas 1 in (some) years where there is only one Sunday after Christmas.

## **Introduction for Christmas 2B<sup>2</sup>**

The readings for the Second Sunday after Christmas are the same every year. They focus our attention on the meaning of the Incarnation in terms of God's providential salvation. The first three readings all invite celebratory praise for God's good gifts and self-revelation as well as refer to the word of God in a way that foreshadows our reading of the prologue to the Gospel of John.

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Jeremiah 31:7–14***

As with some of our readings from Jeremiah during the fall, this passage envisions a return from the Babylonian exile that evokes great celebration and praise. The word of the Lord declares salvation in that a remnant of Israel shall gather and sing praises in Zion.

#### ***Psalms 147:12–20***

Psalms 147 is actually composed of three hymns pasted together. The first two celebrate God as ruler of history and of nature. Echoing our reading from Jeremiah, which celebrates the return to the promised land, the third hymn, which we read today, rejoices in the God of Zion, Jerusalem, from whence God's word comes forth.

#### ***Ephesians 1:3–14***

Following the standard greeting of an ancient letter, Ephesians opens with a doxology, praising God for what God has done in Christ. The author celebrates that the salvation and revelation God effected through the word of truth of Christ was willed by God before the foundation of the world.

#### ***John 1:(1–9) 10–18***

While the Gospels of Matthew and Luke narrate for us the details of the story of Jesus' birth, John theologizes poetically and philosophically about the Incarnation of the Word of God, through which the world was created. The paradoxical language John uses of the Word being with God and being God has long shaped the church's understanding of both Christ as God-with-us and the Trinity.

---

<sup>2</sup>See previous note on Christmas 1.

## Introduction for Epiphany, Year B

January 6 is Epiphany. The word *epiphany* means “revelation,” and so this liturgical occasion celebrates the revealing of Christ to the Gentiles by focusing on the coming of the magi from the East to see and worship the Christ child in Bethlehem. Epiphany actually predates Christmas, and still today in some cultures, Epiphany is the highpoint of the Christmas season, with celebrations and gifts given as they are in our culture on December 25. Epiphany represents a hinge between two seasons, drawing the twelve days of Christmas and the celebration of the nativity to a close and opening the Season after Epiphany, when the church celebrates the manifold ways in which Christ’s true nature is revealed.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 60:1–6***

Our First Testament reading is the opening of a three-chapter-long section of Isaiah envisioning the restoration of the glory of Jerusalem after the exiles have returned from Babylon. This portion of the poem is used for Epiphany each year because it declares that God’s presence will be revealed to Zion and it speaks of foreign caravans bringing tribute of gold and frankincense to the Lord.

#### ***Psalms 72:1–7, 10–14***

Psalms 72 is a royal hymn celebrating the coronation of a king. The prayer asks that the king might rule with justice and equity, defending those who have been oppressed. Today we read portions of the psalm in which the language echoes forward to the magi caravanning to give homage to the new king.

#### ***Ephesians 3:1–12***

Our reading from Ephesians does not speak of the magi or the Christ child. But in a tone especially appropriate for Epiphany, it does declare that God’s grace has been revealed to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

#### ***Matthew 2:1–12***

While Luke tells of the Christ child being revealed to shepherds in a stable, Matthew tells of foreign magi—astrologers—following a star in the west that revealed the birth of a new king and led them to a house in Bethlehem. Matthew uses language and imagery from Psalms 72 and Isaiah 60 to describe their pilgrimage and their tribute.

# **Sundays after Epiphany**

## **Year B**

### **Introduction for the Sundays after Epiphany**

The day of Epiphany (January 6) is a liturgical hinge in the Christian year. It draws the Christmas season to a close and opens the Season after Epiphany. For much of the history of the liturgical year, the time between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday was considered Ordinary Time, like the Sundays after Pentecost. For Protestants, however, the Sundays after Epiphany focus on the revelation of God in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. This revelation is highlighted by opening and closing the season with celebrations of Jesus' baptism and of his transfiguration, both of which involve a heavenly voice declaring Jesus to be God's Son.

## **Introduction for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany 1B)**

When Epiphany first developed in the Eastern Church in the fourth century, it celebrated the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God in his birth, baptism, and first miracle (the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana). Throughout the centuries these different manifestations have been separated into individual celebrations. It is now standard practice to celebrate the Baptism of the Lord on the First Sunday after Epiphany each year. Not only do we remember Christ's baptism on this day, but we also remember the significance of the church's sacrament of baptism.

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Genesis 1:1–5***

The First Testament reading for Baptism of the Lord always involves water imagery. Today's reading is taken from the opening verses of the Bible, in which the wind from God passes over the waters of the deep.

#### ***Psalm 29***

Because of its emphasis on the voice of God, and especially the voice of God over the waters, Psalm 29 has long been associated with the celebration of Jesus' baptism, and is read every year on this Sunday. In this hymn of praise, God is honored as the One who reveals divine power in the forces of a mighty thunderstorm and who is enthroned in heaven in order to bring peace to the earth.

#### ***Acts 19:1–7***

Every year on the Baptism of the Lord, the lectionary omits an Epistle reading and substitutes a reading from Acts that deals with the early church's practice and understanding of baptism. In today's reading Paul finds some disciples who were baptized into John's baptism but did not receive the Holy Spirit.

#### ***Mark 1:4–11***

The story of Jesus' baptism is the focal reading for today. Each Gospel has a version of the baptism story that is significantly different from those in the other Gospels. In Mark's version, Jesus receives a private epiphany when the voice declares that he is God's Son.



## Introduction for Epiphany 2B

The lectionary that defines scripture readings for each Sunday of the Christian year is based on a three-year cycle focusing primarily on the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Since the Gospel of John does not anchor a year of its own, readings from it are offered at different times each year. One of those occasions is the Second Sunday after Epiphany, where the focus is on the early career of Jesus.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)***

Today's First Testament lection is the story of God speaking to Samuel for the first time. It is, in essence, the calling of Samuel to become a prophet. The text is chosen for today to compliment the Gospel reading in which Philip and Nathanael are called to follow Jesus.

#### ***Psalms 139:1–6, 13–18***

As God comes to Samuel in the temple in the middle of the night, so is God, according to the psalmist, able to come to us in all places and at all times. Psalm 139 is a prayer for help in which the one praying expresses poetic confidence in God's omniscience and omnipresence. The language of God knowing us before we are born resonates with descriptions of prophets being called before they are born.

#### ***1 Corinthians 6:12–20***

During most of the liturgical year, from Advent through Pentecost, the four lectionary readings for each Sunday are thematically connected. But the Sundays after Epiphany have only recently evolved into a thematic season. Traditionally, these Sundays comprised Ordinary Time, a pause between the liturgical cycles focused on Christmas and Easter. One of the remnants of that tradition is that the Epistle readings for these Sundays come from First and Second Corinthians without any significant thematic relation to the other readings. Last year we read from the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, in which Paul addressed the fact that the Corinthian church is socially, economically, and theologically divided. Today we pick up 1 Corinthians again, beginning in chapter 6.

#### ***John 1:43–51***

On the Second Sunday after Epiphany, the Gospel reading is always a scene from early in Jesus' ministry as told by John. Today's reading follows John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus at his baptism and is part of a larger scene in which Jesus calls his first disciples.

## Introduction for Epiphany 3B

As last week initiated the practice of reading through a portion of 1 Corinthians in a semicontinuous fashion for the remainder of the Sundays after Epiphany, so this week we begin reading through the early parts of Jesus' ministry as narrated by the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the primary Gospel for this liturgical year, and these opening readings provide the church with an introduction to Mark's theological and narrative interpretation of Jesus Christ.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Jonah 3:1–5, 10***

While we often focus on the part of the Jonah story that deals with the whale, today's reading comes from later in the narrative when Jonah proclaims that the time has drawn near for God's judgment to come down upon the Assyrian city of Ninevah. However, just as Jonah suspected, the city repents and God is merciful.

#### ***Psalms 62:5–12***

Psalms 62 is a prayer expressing confidence in God in the face of persecution. Our Psalter reading is the second half of the prayer, in which the psalmist declares God's justice in rewarding and punishing people as they deserve. The theme paradoxically resonates with our reading from Jonah in which God commands the prophet to proclaim a just punishment and then offers mercy.

#### ***1 Corinthians 7:29–31***

Our Epistle reading continues the process of reading through 1 Corinthians that began last week. In the section of the letter from which we are reading for the next few weeks, Paul is addressing various specific issues and questions about which the church wrote to him. Our passage comes from Paul's answer to a question concerning marriage.

#### ***Mark 1:14–20***

Immediately after being baptized by John and then being led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested, Jesus begins his Galilean ministry. Mark gives us a one-sentence summary of Jesus' proclamation that echoes Jonah's call for repentance. Then the author shows how Jesus begins the process of gathering disciples to follow, in a story that sounds quite different from the version of the call of the disciples we read last week in John.

## Introduction for Epiphany 4B

Last week, the Gospel reading told of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, offering a summary of his preaching and a glance at the call of the first disciples. This week, we begin a series of readings from Mark that present healing stories.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Deuteronomy 18:15–20***

Today's First Testament reading comes from the book of Deuteronomy. The passage promises that God will raise up a prophet to follow in Moses' stead and describes the prophet's accountability to speak God's word in truth.

#### ***Psalms 111***

Psalms 111 is a hymn that is arranged so that each line begins with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As our reading from Deuteronomy speaks of God's providence in terms of God choosing a prophet to follow after Moses, so does this Psalter reading praise God for the way God has provided for God's people.

#### ***1 Corinthians 8:1–13***

Our Epistle lection, as it has for the last two weeks, comes from the section in which Paul is addressing various specific issues and questions about which the church wrote to him. Today's text deals with the question of meat sacrificed to idols. In truth, almost all meat that was eaten in ancient Mediterranean cities was first sacrificed to a god. The dilemma for the Corinthian Christians was whether they could eat such meat. The community was divided over the answer to the question and Paul offers a community ethic to help them.

#### ***Mark 1:21–28***

Having read an opening summary of Jesus' proclamation of the coming of God's reign last week, we turn now to examples of his ministry of healing. In the exorcism we read about today, not only does Jesus subdue the demonic, he silences the demon when it is about to reveal his identity.

## Introduction for Epiphany 5B

The season after Epiphany this year is characterized by semicontinuous readings in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Mark. Nevertheless, in line with the season's emphasis on revelation, today's First Testament, Psalter, and Gospel readings resonate with the themes of God's creative and redemptive power.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 40:21–31***

Our text from Isaiah comes from the opening of a section in which the writer offers comfort to those who are suffering due to the exile in Babylon. The prophet celebrates God's creative power over the world as a testimony to God's ability to bring salvation to God's people.

#### ***Psalms 147:1–11, 20c***

Psalms 147 is a compilation of three hymns and, in some ancient translations of the psalm, verses 12–20 were separated off as a separate psalm altogether. The lectionary follows this practice by focusing primarily on the opening 11 verses. This is a song of praise that, similar to our passage from Isaiah, connects God as creator with God as savior of the poor and dispossessed.

#### ***1 Corinthians 9:16–23***

In last week's Epistle lection, we listened as Paul instructed the Corinthians not to place individual freedom over the common good when it came to the question of whether it is appropriate to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. In today's passage, Paul continues discussing that contrast. Here, however, he uses his rights as an apostle versus his behavior in community as an example of the church ethic he proposes.

#### ***Mark 1:29–39***

As our readings from Isaiah and Psalms declared that the creative power of God will come to the aid of those who need rescue from the turmoil of life, so our Gospel reading portrays Jesus as using his power to bring healing to those who sought him out. It is interesting to hear Jesus, as we did in last week's Markan reading, instruct the demons to be silent because they know who he is.

## Introduction for Epiphany 6B (Proper 1)

While we continue reading through the midsection of 1 Corinthians, in which Paul addresses different issues facing the church, our reading from Mark shapes the dominant theme for the day: God heals.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***2 Kings 5:1–14***

Today's reading from the First Testament is the story of Elisha healing Naaman of a skin disease simply by instructing him to wash in the Jordan River. Naaman's lack of understanding of the power of God is demonstrated in his desire for great fanfare on the part of the prophet. But God's power is demonstrated in the simplicity of the healing. This healing is read today to resonate with the healing story we will read in the Gospel of Mark.

#### ***Psalms 30***

Our Psalter reading joins with the First Testament and Gospel readings in celebrating God's healing power. Psalm 30 is a prayer of thanksgiving for God's having delivered the psalmist from near-death illness.

#### ***1 Corinthians 9:24–27***

In last week's Epistle lection, Paul contrasted his individual rights as an apostle with his behavior in community in which he refuses to exert those rights as an example of his core ethic for the church ethic. Today's reading draws that example to a close as he uses the metaphor of an athlete to show that Christian freedom does not mean that great discipline is not required.

#### ***Mark 1:40–45***

Resonating with the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings, our Gospel lection presents Jesus cleansing a man with a skin disease. And as Jesus commanded silence of the demons he cast out in our Gospel readings for the last two Sundays, so in this passage he orders the leper to tell no one that it was Jesus who healed him. This recurrent theme in Mark, often called the "Messianic Secret," presents a narrative view that Jesus' identity cannot be fully understood through works of power but requires the powerlessness of the cross.

## Introduction for Epiphany 7B (Proper 2)

For the past few weeks, the church has read a number of healing stories in Mark. In today's readings, healing and forgiveness are intertwined.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 43:18–25***

In our First Testament reading, the prophet declares that God will provide a new beginning for exiled Israel so radical that it is described with the metaphor of a river beginning to run through the desert. Essential to this transformation is the forgiveness of Israel's sins.

#### ***Psalms 41***

The Psalter reading is an individual's prayer for healing. But mixed into the prayer is a wisdom motif highlighting that healing, justice, compassion, and forgiveness are inseparable.

#### ***2 Corinthians 1:18–22***

For the past few weeks we have been reading from 1 Corinthians. Today we shift to 2 Corinthians, a letter much more disjointed than 1 Corinthians. It seems that sometime after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he made a visit to the church at Corinth that went poorly. So whereas Paul spends much of his time in 1 Corinthians dealing with the divisions within the Corinthian community, in 2 Corinthians he must deal with the broken relationship between himself and the church by defending his apostolic ministry.

#### ***Mark 2:1–12***

In our Gospel reading, Jesus heals a paralytic. The healing, however, is paired with Jesus pronouncing that the man's sins have been forgiven. It is Jesus claiming the authority to forgive sins and not his ability to make the lame walk that creates controversy.

## Introduction for Epiphany 8B (Proper 3)

While we continue this week reading through the opening chapters of 2 Corinthians, the readings from the First Testament coalesce with the Gospel lection to focus our attention on our dependence on God.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Hosea 2:14–20***

The book of Hosea opens with God commanding the prophet to take a wife of whoredom to symbolize Israel's idolatry. In the passage we are about to read, God speaks of taking Israel as God's wife and paying the bride price of righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness to symbolize the creation of a new covenant that will bring an end to idolatry.

#### ***Psalms 103:1–13, 22***

As our reading from Hosea celebrates God redeeming Israel from its idolatrous ways, so does Psalm 103 celebrate God's mercy and salvation. It is a song of praise from one who has experienced God's healing and forgiveness.

#### ***2 Corinthians 3:1–6***

In the ancient Mediterranean world, when people traveled to a new district of the Roman Empire, they would at times take with them letters of recommendation from important patrons so that they would be received well. In 2 Corinthians Paul is dealing with the tension that exists between himself and the church, and in today's passage he argues that he should need no such letter of recommendation to gain the church's favor, for they themselves are his letter of recommendation.

#### ***Mark 2:13–22***

Our Gospel reading includes two scenes, which draw together the imagery and themes found in our lections from Hosea and Psalm 103. The first scene addresses Jesus' rationale for relating to sinners. The second deals with the question of why Jesus' disciples do not fast, and Jesus' answer is that the wedding guests do not fast while the bridegroom is present.

# Introduction for Transfiguration of the Lord, Year B

On Baptism of the Lord, we listened as the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism declared him to be God's Son. We listen to that voice again today as we celebrate the epiphany that occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration, at which Jesus' glory was revealed to his inner group of disciples.

## Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

### ***2 Kings 2:1–12***

The First Testament reading for Transfiguration Sunday each year deals with either Moses or Elijah and offers some of the literary background to explain why the Gospels present them as appearing at Jesus' transfiguration. Today's lesson is the story of God carrying Elijah away in the whirlwind. The idea that Elijah never died—and there is a similar story about Moses in Jewish folklore—explains why he was expected to return and why he is able to appear and talk with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

### ***Psalms 50:1–6***

Psalms 50 focuses on rebuking those gathered in the temple for their disobedience and for misunderstanding the purpose of sacrifice. The portion of the psalm we read today comes before the rebuke. It establishes the character of God as the one who comes in judgment and who speaks to summon the faithful. The reading prepares the church to hear the heavenly voice that speaks at the end of the transfiguration story.

### ***2 Corinthians 4:3–6***

For the last two weeks, we have read Paul defending himself to the Corinthian church. In today's passage from 2 Corinthians, we listen as the apostle defends the Gospel he preached to them in terms of revelation and glory that are especially appropriate for the conclusion to the Season after Epiphany.

### ***Mark 9:2–9***

In today's reading, we join the group of inner disciples in seeing Jesus transfigured so that his full glory might be momentarily revealed and in listening to the heavenly voice declare his full identity.



# Lent

## Year B

### Introduction for Lent

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and extends through Holy Week. It is a season of fasting and penitence rooted in the ancient church's practice of preparing adult converts for baptism on Easter Day. Modeled on the forty days Jesus fasted in the wilderness, Lent is forty days long. However, because fasting is not appropriate on the day of resurrection (and since every Sunday is a little Easter), the forty-day period does not include Sundays. Thus the church often speaks of Sundays *in* Lent as opposed to Sundays *of* Lent (compare the Sundays *of* Advent). This year during Lent, the readings are focused, to a great extent, on the dual themes of covenant and Jesus' crucifixion.

## Introduction for Ash Wednesday, Year B

Applying ashes to oneself is an ancient sign of mourning or of penitence. On Ash Wednesday both of these ideas are present. We remind ourselves that we are mortal and grieve that we will return to the dust. This reminder calls us to repent before a gracious and forgiving God. The penitential theme of the day initiates a season of penitence, and thus Ash Wednesday is also a day when we are invited to focus on Christian disciplines of piety during the season of Lent. The scripture readings for this day are the same every year.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Joel 2:1–2, 12–17***

The book of Joel prophetically calls for responses to great locust swarms (which are perhaps metaphors for invading armies) that come as a sign of God's judgment. Today's reading calls the people to respond to the plague and prepare for the day of Lord, which is imminent, with repentance and fasting.

#### ***Psalms 51:1–17***

In this penitential psalm, an individual, who is filled with guilt for sins committed, confesses and prays for forgiveness and cleansing.

#### ***2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10***

In this reading from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, Paul proclaims that God effects our reconciliation with God by making Christ to be sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. This salvation, however, does not lead to a life of blessing in human terms. In a season in which the church lifts up the virtue of abstinence, it is important to hear Paul describe the blessing he has experienced in the midst of the suffering he has experienced as an apostle.

#### ***Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21***

Our Gospel lection comes from the Sermon on the Mount. In this reading, Jesus instructs his disciples to practice the religious disciplines of charity, praying, and fasting in a manner that brings honor to God and not to themselves.

## Introduction for Lent 1B

Each year the First Sunday in Lent sets the tone for the season by focusing on the temptation of Christ. As Christ fasted for forty days, so do we practice Lenten disciplines for the forty days of Lent—practices that we are tempted to forego.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Genesis 9:8–17***

The First Testament readings for the Sundays in Lent paint the salvation history presented in the First Testament in broad strokes by focusing on the key moments of origins, Abraham, the exodus, the nation, and the future day of the Lord. Today's reading comes from the story of the great flood. After the flood, God establishes a new covenant with humanity, marking a new creation.

#### ***Psalms 25:1–10***

Like the Psalter reading for Ash Wednesday, today's psalm speaks of sin and troubles from which deliverance is sought. Similar to wisdom literature in the First Testament, the verses we read from Psalm 25 ask that that deliverance come in the form of divine instruction in the ways of righteousness.

#### ***1 Peter 3:18–22***

Echoing our First Testament reading, our passage from 1 Peter offers a vision of the crucified Christ preaching the good news of salvation even to those who died in the great flood. Moreover, according to the author, that flood prefigured the salvation announced in baptism.

#### ***Mark 1:9–15***

The Sundays after Epiphany open with the story of Jesus' baptism, in which a heavenly voice declares Jesus to be God's Son. This year Lent also opens with that story, but now it is read in order to contextualize the story of Jesus' temptation.

## Introduction for Lent 2B

The Second Sunday in Lent keeps the church reading through Israel's covenantal history in our First Testament readings and tying that history to Jesus' death in the New Testament readings.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16***

As the First Testament readings for Lent take us on a journey through the history of God's acts of salvation presented in the First Testament, we move from last week's reading in which God established a covenant with Noah to this week's reading in which God establishes a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, promising that they will give birth to a great nation.

#### ***Psalms 22:23–31***

Psalms 22 opens with a lament of suffering that the Gospel writers used in shaping their stories of Jesus' passion. We read today, however, from the end of the psalm, in which the tone shifts to that of thanksgiving for God's providence and calls the children of Jacob—the descendants of Abraham—to worship in the temple.

#### ***Romans 4:13–25***

In our Epistle lection, Paul interprets salvation in light of Abraham's faith, linking this reading with our First Testament lection. Paul's argument is that as God reckoned to Abraham righteousness based on his faith and not on works, so are we justified by faith and not by law.

#### ***Mark 8:31–38***

In last week's Gospel reading, we listened again to the heavenly voice declare Jesus to be God's Son at his baptism. However, the disciples do not understand Jesus' true identity. When Jesus asks who they say he is, Peter does answer by claiming him to be the Christ. However, in Mark's version of this story, Jesus responds by silencing him and then teaching the disciples about the suffering he must face. That response is our Gospel reading for today.

## Introduction for Lent 3B

On the Third Sunday in Lent we continue reading through an overview of key moments in salvation history as portrayed in the First Testament. And as we head toward Holy Week, our New Testament readings focus on interpreting the significance of the cross.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Exodus 20:1–17***

Having read stories dealing with the God's covenants with Noah and Abraham on the first two Sundays in Lent, we turn to a passage drawn from the story of the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt, which is always the pattern for the Third Sunday of Lent. This year's reading is the Ten Commandments, which is a core expression of the Torah and of God's covenantal relationship with Israel.

#### ***Psalm 19***

Psalm 19 is an appropriate song of praise to read in response to our First Testament lection. The psalmist proclaims and celebrates the revelation of God's glory in creation and in Torah.

#### ***1 Corinthians 1:18–25***

Many of the New Testament readings during Lent this year offer varying perspectives on Jesus' death. In today's reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul claims that the message of salvation coming through the cross of Christ sounds like foolishness to both Jew and Greek.

#### ***John 2:13–22***

For the first two Sundays in Lent, our Gospel readings were taken from Mark, which is the dominant Gospel for this liturgical year. But each year during Lent and Easter, the church shifts some of its attention to the Gospel of John. In our first reading from John, we hear of Jesus cleansing the temple and interpreting the act as a foreshadowing of his death and resurrection. While in the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—this story occurs in Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, in John it occurs early in his ministry.

## Introduction for Lent 4B

The scripture readings for the Fourth Sunday in Lent focus on divine deliverance from human troubles. The Israelites are delivered from poisonous snakes conjured by their sins, the psalmist prays for deliverance from sin and sickness, the author of Ephesians celebrates Christians being delivered from their former manner of living, and Jesus proclaims that God sent God's Child to save the world.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Numbers 21:4–9***

As with last week's First Testament reading, this week's comes from the story of the exodus. The reading contains the familiar theme of the Hebrews complaining against God during the wilderness journey. It is an odd story, however, for modern ears, in that God punishes the people's sin by sending poisonous snakes into their midst. But God then heals those who are bitten by having Moses raise up a bronze snake in the middle of the camp.

#### ***Psalms 107:1–3, 17–22***

Psalms 107 is a lengthy prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance from various troubles. The portion of the psalm we read today echoes our reading from Numbers in that it offers thanks to God for saving those whose sinful ways brought upon them terrible illness.

#### ***Ephesians 2:1–10***

With Lent's emphasis on converts preparing for baptism, it is appropriate that we read from Ephesians, where the author contrasts the audience's life before and after entering the Christian faith in terms of the contrast between death and resurrection.

#### ***John 3:14–21***

Our Gospel lesson comes from Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus concerning the nature of salvation effected through Christ. The portion of the conversation we read begins with Jesus referring to our First Testament lection in which Moses lifts up the bronze snake in the wilderness.

## Introduction for Lent 5B

On this last Sunday before Holy Week, the themes that we have been exploring throughout Lent come together: sin, confession, covenant, salvation. And all point us ahead to Christ's death and resurrection.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Jeremiah 31:31–34***

The First Testament readings for Lent have followed a salvation history schema of origins, Abraham, and the exodus, and have focused on the theme of covenant. While those readings have looked back on God's covenantal acts, today's lection looks forward to a new covenant God will write on human hearts.

#### ***Psalms 51:1–12***

On Ash Wednesday, we read Psalm 51 as a prayer of confession. We return to this penitential prayer now as the season draws toward to a close.

#### ***OR Psalm 119:9–16***

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible; each of its stanzas is made up of eight lines which all begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The portion we read today echoes our lesson from Jeremiah with its theme of seeking God's teachings with one's whole heart.

#### ***Hebrews 5:5–10***

Christ as the high priest through whom salvation comes is a major theme for the book of Hebrews. In today's passage, the author of Hebrews speaks of God's election of Christ as this high priest who was made perfect through his suffering.

#### ***John 12:20–33***

In our Gospel reading for today, John narrates the moment in which Jesus turns from his public ministry to his private time with the disciples before his death. In a tone very different than that found in the other Gospels, John presents Jesus as speaking of his death and resurrection as his glorification.

## **Introduction for Holy Week, Year B**

Holy Week is the culmination of Lent and the hinge that swings into Easter. From Palm/Passion Sunday to Easter Sunday, the church remembers and celebrates the core of the Christian story, the anchor of the liturgical year. Holy Week focuses on Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, including the triumphant entry, the Last Supper and foot washing, the crucifixion, and burial; and then on Easter, of course, we celebrate the resurrection. Most of the scripture readings for this week are the same every year.



# Introduction for Palm/Passion Sunday, Year B

Palm Sunday is the celebration of the story of Jesus' triumphant entry in to Jerusalem, when the crowd laid clothes and branches before him as a carpet for royalty. The day also, however, provides an opportunity to hear the whole story of Jesus' last week in Jerusalem leading up to his death on the cross. Thus, the service begins with the liturgy of the palms and moves into the liturgy of the passion. Testifying to the connectedness of the Lenten season from beginning to end, palms used in worship on this day are burned to make the ashes used on Ash Wednesday of the following year.

## Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

### Liturgy of the Palms

#### *Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29*

Psalm 118 is used on Palm Sunday because it was as a processional song of pilgrims approaching the temple, singing about binding the festal procession with branches. Indeed, the Gospel writers put the words, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord," on the lips of the crowd accompanying Jesus into Jerusalem.

#### *Mark 11:1–11*

The Gospels present Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in terms of an ancient coronation ceremony in which the king rode into the city to be anointed and crowned in the temple. For Mark, however, the triumphant tone of the procession immediately dissipates when Jesus enters the temple, looks around, and simply leaves.

### Liturgy of the Passion

#### *Isaiah 50:4–9a*

Isaiah 40–55, a section referred to by scholars as Second Isaiah, contains four poems called the Servant Songs. The identification of the suffering servant about whom the prophet was originally speaking is disputed, but the early church interpreted the poems to be predictions of Jesus and his passion. Every year during Holy Week, the church reads these Servant Songs to reflect on the meaning of redemption that comes through suffering.

#### *Psalm 31:9–16*

Psalm 31 is a prayer in which the psalmist petitions for divine protection from his enemies. The section we read today uses language similar to that of Isaiah 50 in naming intense suffering from which the psalmist seeks rescue.

#### *Philippians 2:5–11*

In Philippians 2, Paul quotes a hymn that may well have already been familiar to his readers. In this pre-Pauline hymn, Christ is described as being in the form of God but emptying himself and becoming human, resulting in his death and subsequent exaltation.

### ***Mark 14:1—15:47***

Having begun the service with Jesus' somewhat triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we now read of his last hours. On most Sundays, the church reads only short passages from the Gospels. But today we hear the cornerstone of the Gospel message in its fullness: Judas' betrayal; Jesus' last supper with his disciples; his arrest and trials; and his suffering, death, and burial. Continuing the coronation theme from our opening Gospel reading, Mark presents Jesus' passion as an ironic enthronement on the cross.

## **Introduction for Holy Monday, Year B**

After remembering the broad strokes of the story of Jesus' last days on Palm/Passion Sunday, we turn during Holy Week to concentrate on individual events during those days. On the Fifth Sunday of Lent we read of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Today we hear of the responses to that miracle set six days prior to Passover.

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Isaiah 42:1–9***

Throughout Holy Week, the church reads the Servant Songs from Isaiah 40—55 because the early church understood these poems to be predictions about Jesus. While this interpretation is no longer held, reading them during Holy Week helps us understand significant elements of the New Testament's interpretation of the significance of Jesus' ministry and crucifixion. In today's Servant Song, the servant is described as one who brings God's justice to God's people.

#### ***Psalms 36:5–11***

Psalms 36 is an individual's prayer for help. In the section we read today, however, the psalmist declares in language reminiscent of the Servant Songs that God's steadfast love that overcomes wickedness knows no limits.

#### ***Hebrews 9:11–15***

Using metaphoric language of the ancient sacrificial system, the author of Hebrews interprets Christ's death as mediating a new covenant between God and God's people.

#### ***John 12:1–11***

On Palm/Passion Sunday we read the bulk of Mark's version of Jesus' last week in Jerusalem. Throughout the rest of Holy Week we read individual scenes from this week according to John's Gospel. In today's lesson, we hear of two responses to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead: Mary, Lazarus' sister, symbolically anoints Jesus as messiah in thanksgiving for the miracle; and the religious leaders plot to have Jesus killed.

## Introduction for Holy Tuesday, Year B

On Holy Monday, we listened to the story of the religious leaders plotting to kill Jesus. Today we hear John tell of Jesus preparing for and beginning to prepare his disciples for that death.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 49:1–7***

As we continue reading the Servant Songs from the section of the book of Isaiah referred to as Second Isaiah, we hear a description of the servant being called by God even while in his mother's womb. The servant's role is not only to restore Israel after the exile but also to bring salvation to all nations. Read during Holy Week, the text resonates with the Christian claim that God's salvation in Christ is for all people.

#### ***Psalms 71:1–14***

Psalms 71 is the prayer of someone near the end of his or her life, asking God for continued protection. In language similar to Isaiah 49, the psalmist reminds God that God has provided for the psalmist since God took that person from her or his mother's womb.

#### ***1 Corinthians 1:18–31***

The Christian claim that God's salvation is somehow conveyed by the death of Jesus is paradoxical to say the least. As we journey another day closer to the cross, we listen as Paul defends God's foolishness.

#### ***John 12:20–36***

Having read of the plot to kill Jesus as narrated early in John 12 yesterday, today's reading comes from later in the chapter when Jesus withdraws from public view because the hour of his glorification has arrived. As he explains this withdrawal to his disciples, he predicts his death and resurrection that are coming soon.

## Introduction for Holy Wednesday, Year B

Midway through Holy Week, we take a step closer to the cross. On Holy Wednesday, we listen as Jesus names Judas to be the one who will hand him over to the religious authorities.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 50:4–9a***

As the lectionary's choices for First Testament readings during Holy Week continue to focus on Isaiah's Servant Songs, we return to the reading for Palm/Passion Sunday. In the Servant Songs read today and on Good Friday, the church especially attends to language of the vicarious suffering to help understand the significance of Jesus' redemptive suffering on the cross.

#### ***Psalms 70***

Our Psalter reading is an individual's prayer for protection from oppressors who seek to kill him. During Holy Week, the anguish expressed in the prayer reminds us of Jesus facing his own death.

#### ***Hebrews 12:1–3***

In this passage from Hebrews, the author calls the readers to persevere in the faith. The fact that Christ has perfected faith by enduring the shame and suffering of the cross is the basis of their ability to persevere.

#### ***John 13:21–32***

Just before the passage we read from John today is the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet and instructing them to love one another. Having served them, he now tells them that one of them will betray him. This betrayal will lead to his glorification, which in John refers to Jesus' death and resurrection.

## Introduction for Holy Thursday, Year B

Holy Thursday is also known as Maundy Thursday. The word *Maundy* shares the same root as *commandment*, and refers to Jesus giving the “new commandment” to his disciples to love one another as he first loved them. Continuing on the church’s Holy Week journey to the cross, this is the day we remember Jesus’ last supper. For us, this involves a special liturgical remembrance of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, lifted up in our reading from 1 Corinthians. John’s Gospel, however, does not narrate Jesus giving bread and wine to his disciples. The Fourth Gospel tells of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet.

This day begins the Easter or Paschal Triduum (three days), referring to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Vigil/Sunday.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Exodus 12:1–4 (5–10) 11–14***

While most of the other First Testament lections during Holy Week proceed from the Servant Songs in Isaiah, today the lectionary directs our attention to the institution of Passover in the book of Exodus. This text sets the stage for focusing on Jesus’ last supper with the disciples on Passover.

#### ***Psalms 116:1–2, 12–19***

Psalms 116 is one of the psalms traditionally sung after the Passover meal. It is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for delivering the psalmist from the threat of death.

#### ***1 Corinthians 11:23–26***

Our Epistle reading records the earliest tradition in scripture of the account of Christ instituting the Lord’s Supper as a meal that proclaims his death.

#### ***John 13:1–17, 31b–35***

In the chronology of John’s narrative, at supper on the night before Passover Jesus washes his disciples’ feet as a model for their ministry before his departure. And in the tradition of ancient biblical characters offering a final testament before dying, Jesus uses this occasion to offer a final instruction, to give a new commandment.

## Introduction for Good Friday, Year B

Also called Great, Sorrowful, Holy, and even Long Friday, it is not clear how this day came to be called “Good.” What is clear about the designation, however, is that it expresses the paradox of this sacred day. Commemorating Jesus’ death at the hands of the religious and political authorities, Good Friday both reveals the depths of human sin and the expanse of God’s grace. Holy Week’s journey to the cross draws to a close.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Isaiah 52:13—53:12***

Of all of Isaiah’s Servant Songs from which the church has read during Holy Week, this final song has probably had the strongest influence on the church’s interpretation of Christ’s passion. This is due to the song’s deep pathos, strong imagery of violence, and significant claims of the servant’s vicarious suffering on behalf of others.

#### ***Psalms 22***

The Gospel writers used Psalm 22 to inspire the way they tell the story of Christ’s suffering and death, even to the point of having Jesus cry out its opening line while hanging on the cross. The fact that the psalm paradoxically begins with a plea for deliverance and ends with thanksgiving makes it a poignant reading for Good Friday.

#### ***Hebrews 10:16–25 OR Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9***

As seen in earlier readings from Hebrews during Holy Week, the author of this book holds the death of Christ to be a once-for-all sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins in which Christians can trust absolutely. Today’s reading expresses that view once again.

#### ***John 18:1—19:42***

The extended Gospel reading offers John’s version of Jesus’ arrest, Peter’s denial, the trial before Pilate, the mocking by the soldiers, the crucifixion, death, and the burial.

## Introduction for Holy Saturday, Year B

In accordance with the ancient Jewish understanding of a new day beginning at sundown instead of sunrise, the celebration of Christ's resurrection begins on Saturday night with the Great Easter Vigil. However, for churches that either have earlier services on Saturday or have their first Easter service on Sunday, Holy Saturday is a time for reflecting on Jesus' burial as the period at the end of the sentence, "Jesus suffered and died."

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Job 14:1–14***

Lent began on Ash Wednesday with a reminder of our mortality. So on the day after Jesus' death do we read from Job a lament of human mortality.

#### ***OR Lamentations 3:1–9, 19–24***

In the midst of his anguish on the cross, Jesus cried out a line from Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That same sense of experiencing God as refusing to hear the prayers of one afflicted is expressed in today's reading from Lamentations. However, the second section names the hope of the faithful, that God's steadfast love will overcome God's wrath.

#### ***Psalm 31:1–4, 15–16***

At the beginning of this week, the church read a portion of Psalm 31 in which the one praying asks God for protection in the face of suffering. We return to a different section of that psalm again at the end of the week to extend that prayer for refuge.

#### ***1 Peter 4:1–8***

In our passage from 1 Peter the author instructs his readers that they must be prepared to suffer for the faith as Christ suffered for them. The author then makes a claim that later shows up in some creedal expressions: that is, that after his death, Christ descended to hell to proclaim the good news to the dead.

#### ***Matthew 27:57–66***

Our Gospel reading tells a story that appears only in Matthew's Gospel. After Jesus is buried, the religious authorities seek to place guards at the tomb so that the disciples cannot steal his body and fake a resurrection.

#### ***OR John 19:38–42***

Early in Lent, we heard of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night and learning what it means to be born from above. In an element unique to John's Gospel, Nicodemus returns to join Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus.



# Easter

## Year B

### Introduction for Easter

The Season of Easter (often called Eastertide or The Great Fifty Days) is the theological center of the liturgical year. It begins with the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening and continues fifty days until Pentecost. In sum, the season is a celebration of Christ's resurrection, the events that proceed from the resurrection (discovery of the empty tomb, appearances of the risen Christ, the ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit), the beginnings of the post-resurrection church (as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles), and the theological and existential implications of the resurrection for a life of faith.

## Introduction for Easter Vigil, Year B

In ancient times, the church held a vigil through the night to await the dawn of Easter on Sunday morning. When the sun arose, “Alleluias” that had been silenced during the time of preparation were sung once again, and catechumens were baptized. While few churches continue the practice of praying through the entire night, the Great Vigil is still held by many congregations (often ending after midnight) and is considered the first service of Easter, similar to the Christmas Eve service being the first service of Christmas.

The Easter Vigil moves symbolically from the darkness of the tomb to the light of the dawn of resurrection. In terms of its use of scripture, the service follows the pattern that has dominated the use of the First Testament throughout Lent in highlighting biblical events that serve as examples of the biblical view of salvation history. In other words, while Christians hold the passion and resurrection of Christ to be the epitome of God’s self-revelatory activity for the church, the readings for this night remind us of the broader theological context that claims God always has been and always will be with us in a way that is redemptive. With the exception of the Gospel lection, the scripture readings for this night are the same every year and have been read on this night for centuries.

## Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

*[NOTE: The RCL prescribes that while all of the readings suggested for the Vigil need not be used, at least three readings from the First Testament (one of which should always include the Exodus passage) should be used each year. The introductions below will need to be modified to fit the flow of choices made. The Psalter readings are offered as responses to the primary lections. If they are not used, the last sentence of the introductions will need to be omitted.]*

### ***Genesis 1:1—2:4a (Psalm 136:1–9, 23–26)***

As the church traces its sacred history on this glorious night, we begin at the beginning. Our opening reading is a creation litany, declaring that God tamed the chaos to make a good, orderly world. The sections of the psalm we read in response likewise celebrate God’s creative work.

### ***Genesis 7:1–5, 11–18; 8:6–18; 9:8–13 (Psalm 46)***

Our next lection is composed of short selections from the story of Noah. In these readings we hear of the flood, the subsiding of the water, and the covenant God made with Noah symbolized by the rainbow. This story of the flood is especially appropriate on this night since the church has often called on its imagery of water to artistically interpret baptism. Psalm 46 is used as a response to this story because it proclaims that God will protect God’s people, even in the face of roaring waters.

CONTINUED ON FOLLOWING PAGE

### ***Genesis 22:1–18 (Psalm 16)***

We move from biblical stories that concern the ancestry of all humankind to those that ground the faith and history of Israel. Earlier during Lent we read of God establishing a covenant with Abraham. Tonight we hear the story of God instructing Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, a story as troubling as it is powerful. We read the story tonight because the early church interpreted it as an allegory about God sacrificing Jesus on the cross. Psalm 16, which is a prayer for protection in a time of distress, is a fitting response to the story of Isaac's near sacrifice.

### ***Exodus 14:10–31; 15:20–21 (Exodus 15:1b–13, 17–18)***

At the center of Israel's understanding of salvation is the story of the exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea. As with the story of Noah we read earlier, the water imagery has informed the church's interpretation of baptism as salvation through water. Instead of a psalm related to this story, we read the song Moses sang in response to crossing the Red Sea as our response.

### ***Isaiah 55:1–11 (Isaiah 12:2–6)***

With our next reading, the church shifts from Israel's foundational narratives to its prophetic proclamation. In our reading from Isaiah 55, we hear the prophet invite hearers into God's justice using the imagery of a free banquet. Again, the church hears the ripple of its baptismal waters foreshadowed in this passage when the thirsty are invited to the waters. Our responsive reading is not a psalm but an earlier passage from Isaiah celebrating God's deliverance in terms of drawing water from the wells of salvation.

### ***Proverbs 8:1–8, 19–21; 9:4b–6 (Psalm 19)***

Our next reading celebrates the wisdom tradition of the First Testament. Wisdom found in the midst of nature and life is a gift from God that offers life and redemption. In one line, resonating with the church's sacramental practice, wisdom personified as a woman invites hearers to a meal of bread and wine. Psalm 19, which celebrates the manner in which nature reveals God, serves as the response to the reading from Proverbs.

### ***Ezekiel 36:24–28 (Psalms 42—43)***

The prophet Ezekiel had argued that the exile to Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem were acts of God's judgment. But after the judgment comes restoration. In our reading from Ezekiel 36, the prophet speaks of God's promise to return the exiles to their home in Judea and to purify them for God's sake. Psalms 42 and 43, the responsorial psalms for the Ezekiel reading, originally comprised a single prayer for help when oppression gives one the experience of being abandoned by God.

### ***Ezekiel 37:1–14 (Psalm 143)***

Our second lesson from Ezekiel is a prophetic vision of the resurrection of the land and people of Israel after the Babylonian exile. It declares that God alone can give new life to dry bones. Psalm 143 serves as a response to Ezekiel 37, for in it the psalmist prays with a soul that thirsts like a parched land for deliverance from oppression.

### ***Zephaniah 3:14–20 (Psalm 98)***

Although from an earlier day than Ezekiel, the book of Zephaniah also focuses on the judgment Jerusalem will experience. However, tonight's lesson from Zephaniah is the conclusion of the prophetic writing, where the theme changes. Here the prophet calls the reader to rejoice in the fact that restoration and salvation will follow the judgment. Psalm 98 likewise calls the congregation to praise God for the salvation God brings to Israel.

### ***Romans 6:3–11 (Psalm 114)***

Our New Testament reading for tonight comes from Paul's letter to the Romans. In this passage, Paul describes baptism as participating in Christ's death so that we may in turn participate in Christ's resurrection. Using Psalm 114, with its celebration of God delivering the Israelites through the Red Sea, as a response to Paul's description reminds us that baptism links the Christian community to the whole of God's salvation history.

### ***Mark 16:1–8***

Our Gospel reading for tonight is the story of the discovery of the empty tomb. In Mark's Gospel, this scene concludes the story, but it is a parabolic ending. Throughout the Sundays after Epiphany we heard the Markan Jesus command silence of those in Galilee who made claims about his identity. Now when the young man tells the women at the tomb to proclaim Jesus' resurrection, they leave in fear and silence. The open ending is ours to complete.

## Introduction for Easter Sunday, Year B

*[NOTE: In the introduction for the day, omit “and Jesus’ first resurrection appearance” if the Markan text is used for the Gospel reading instead of John 20.]*

At the center of Christian theology, experience, and worship is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On Easter Sunday, “Alleluias” ring out as the church listens again to the story it knows so well: the story of the empty tomb and Jesus’ first resurrection appearance.

## Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

### ***Acts 10:34–43***

Since ancient times, the church has substituted readings from Acts for First Testament lections during Eastertide. This is appropriate since the resurrection transformed the Jesus movement into the church. Today’s reading comes from the story of Peter preaching to Cornelius’ household, the first Gentile converts. At the core of Peter’s sermon is the apostle’s witness to the resurrection.

### ***Psalms 118:1–2, 14–24***

On Palm/Passion Sunday, we read portions from Psalm 118. We return to portions of that psalm, but the line that rings out in the context of Easter is, “I shall not die, but I shall live.” But we should also be aware that the early church repeatedly applied the metaphor of the stone rejected by the builders becoming the chief cornerstone to Christ, especially his rejection and execution by the religious and political leaders and his exaltation to the right hand of God.

### ***1 Corinthians 15:1–11***

First Corinthians 15 is Paul’s defense of the belief in the resurrection of the body based on the claim that Christ’s resurrection was a bodily resurrection. We read from this chapter every Easter. In this year’s passage, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the tradition that recounts Jesus’ resurrection appearances, a tradition quite different than that found in the Gospels.

### ***John 20:1–18***

On Easter Sunday every year, we join the women in discovering that the tomb is empty. In John’s version of the story, Peter and the beloved disciple run to the tomb to confirm the women’s findings and then Mary Magdalene mistakes the risen Christ for a gardener who might have stolen Jesus’ body. This lesson initiates a series of readings from John throughout Eastertide.

### ***OR Mark 16:1–8***

On Easter Sunday every year, we join the women in discovering that the tomb is empty. In Mark’s version, this scene concludes the story. It is a parabolic ending. Throughout the Sundays after Epiphany we heard the Markan Jesus command silence of those in Galilee who made claims about his identity. Now when the young man tells the women at the tomb to tell of Jesus’ resurrection, they leave in fear and silence. The open ending is ours to complete.

# Introduction for Easter Evening, Year B

*[NOTE: Few Protestant Churches hold worship services on Easter evening. However, similar to the pattern we found for Christmas Eve/Day with three sets of propers, the Revised Common Lectionary offers readings for the Easter Vigil, Easter morning, and Easter evening. While the set of readings for Easter evening was not given primary consideration in the cumulative preaching strategies, introductions are provided here for churches that might wish to use these readings.]*

The Easter story begins with the discovery of the empty tomb, but the risen Jesus appears to his followers a number of times after that. Luke tells of Jesus appearing to two followers on the road leading from Jerusalem to Emmaus late on that first day of the week. The other readings for the evening support the Gospel story by placing Jesus' breaking the bread with these disciples in the context of the symbolic import of the exodus and the Passover meal.

## Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

### ***Isaiah 25:6–9***

Although we replace First Testament readings with lections from Acts on the Sunday mornings in Eastertide, this evening we return to Isaiah. Resonating with the Gospel story in which Jesus is made known in the breaking of the bread, the prophet offers a vision of a great feast of salvation in which death is swallowed up forever.

### ***Psalms 114***

Reminding us that God's redemptive act in the resurrection is part of God's acts of salvation throughout history, Psalm 114 takes us back to a Hebraic celebration of God delivering the Israelites through the Red Sea.

### ***1 Corinthians 5:6b–8***

Our short Epistle reading comes from a longer section of the letter to the Corinthian house churches in which Paul is dealing with issues of sexual morality. These few verses are used on Easter evening because, in Paul's call for Christians to reject the evil of their past and embrace the new creation for which Christ was sacrificed, he compares this participation in the new thing God has done to sharing in the unleavened bread of the Passover feast.

### ***Luke 24:13–49***

Our Gospel reading for this evening is Luke's account of Jesus' resurrection appearances on Easter evening. Central to the story is the scene in which two disciples, who had not recognized the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus, come to know him in the breaking of the bread. Luke uses this story to transform the somber Last Supper into a joyful resurrection meal.

## Introduction for Easter 2B

On the first three Sundays of Easter, the church remembers the risen Christ appearing to the disciples. Although we do not celebrate Pentecost until the last day of Eastertide, today we hear John's version of the risen Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit on the disciples. Thus even before the Day of Pentecost, Eastertide is a celebration of the post-resurrection, Spirit-filled church.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Acts 4:32–35***

Our lesson from Acts is one of Luke's summary snapshots of the life of the early church. Here the church gathers around the apostolic proclamation of the resurrection and shares all their possessions to care for one another.

#### ***Psalms 133***

Following the portrait of the Christian community in our reading from Acts, our Psalter lection celebrates the community of pilgrims who come together in Jerusalem for worship.

#### ***1 John 1:1—2:2***

During Eastertide this year, our Epistle readings are taken from portions of 1 John. Although more of a sermon or essay than an actual letter, 1 John addresses a community from which some members have left over core matters of faith, such as Jesus' humanity and issues of morality. The author, who is probably from the same community as the author of the Gospel of John, attempts to undergird the faith of those who remain and to condemn those who have left. Today's reading opens the essay to the church.

#### ***John 20:19–31***

*If John 20:1–18 was read on Easter Sunday:*

Last Sunday we read John's story of the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter morning. Today, as we do every year on the Second Sunday of Easter, we read the Fourth Gospel's account of what happened that evening when Jesus appeared to the disciples and breathed on them the Holy Spirit. Thomas, however, was missing on Easter evening, and wanted the same experience of the resurrection that the others had.

*If Mark 16:1–8 was read on Easter Sunday:*

Last Sunday we read Mark's version of the discovery of the empty tomb and the failure of the women to tell anyone what they found. In contrast, today we read the story of Easter evening from John's Gospel, when the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples and breathed on them the Holy Spirit. Thomas, however, was missing on Easter evening, and wanted the same experience of the resurrection that the others had. This is the Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Easter every year.

## Introduction for Easter 3B

On the first three Sundays of Easter, the church remembers the risen Christ appearing to followers. Last year on the Third Sunday of Easter, we read Luke's story of Jesus appearing to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. This year we read the conclusion to that story, the scene where Jesus appears to the whole group of followers.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Acts 3:12–19***

Last week in Acts we read a summary of the early church's inner life as a resurrection community. This week we listen as Peter addresses a crowd that gathers because he and John healed a crippled beggar at the temple. Peter uses the crowd's amazement as an opportunity to proclaim Christ's resurrection.

#### ***Psalms 4***

As our reading from Acts is related to a crippled man seeking help from the temple precincts, so is our Psalter reading a prayer of distress uttered in the temple, where the psalmist seeks sanctuary.

#### ***1 John 3:1–7***

Throughout Eastertide this year, we are reading from 1 John, which was written to call a community to keep the faith in light of some whom the author calls antichrists and who proclaim and live out a different theology than that on which the community was founded. In today's lesson, we listen as the author speaks of Jesus' revelation and of our revelation that is yet to come.

#### ***Luke 24:36b–48***

After the two disciples in Emmaus recognized the risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread, they returned to Jerusalem to tell the others what had occurred. They were met with news that Jesus had also appeared to Simon. In this passage, as the disciples are discussing these appearances, Jesus appears to the whole group, eats before them, and interprets the resurrection in light of scripture. We read of this third resurrection appearance in today's Gospel lesson.



## Introduction for Easter 4B

The first three Sundays of Easter focus on Jesus' resurrection appearances, and the last three focus on Jesus' preparing his disciples for his departure and the gift of the Spirit. The Fourth Sunday of Easter, lying as a transition between these two foci, is "Good Shepherd Sunday," because the Gospel reading for the day is always drawn from John 10, in which Jesus uses various shepherding metaphors to describe his mission.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Acts 4:5–12***

Our reading from Acts last week told of Peter's sermon after he and John healed the crippled beggar in the temple. Because of that sermon, the religious authorities arrested the two apostles. Today's reading proceeds from Peter's speech at the trial that followed the arrest.

#### ***Psalms 23***

On the day we celebrate Christ as our Good Shepherd, we always read the familiar psalm that declares the Lord as our shepherd.

#### ***1 John 3:16–24***

Our New Testament lections for Eastertide continue to be drawn from 1 John, in which the author condemns opponents for contrary theology and morality. In today's passage, the author calls the church to live out the command to love one another in a manner in which the opponents have not: to the degree of laying down their lives for one another.

#### ***John 10:11–18***

Each year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Gospel reading comes from John 10, which utilizes a variety of metaphors drawn from shepherding practices of Jesus' day. In this year's lection, Jesus claims to be the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Appropriate to Eastertide, he specifies that he lays it down in order to take it up again.

## Introduction for Easter 5B

The first three Sundays of Easter focus on Jesus' resurrection appearances. The Fourth Sunday is Good Shepherd Sunday. And then as the church nears the commemoration of Ascension and Pentecost, the last three Sundays focus on Jesus preparing his disciples for his departure.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Acts 8:26–40***

According to Acts, after Stephen was martyred, persecution hit Jerusalem causing many disciples to flee the city. One of those fleeing was Philip. After preaching in Samaria, the Holy Spirit leads him to offer the Gospel to a eunuch returning to Ethiopia. This story illustrates both that the good news is spread to Africa and the early church's concern for the giving of the Holy Spirit in relation to baptism.

#### ***Psalms 22:25–31***

Psalms 22 is a lament, but the section we read today expresses confidence in God. It is chosen because its description of God as ruling over all nations echoes Luke's concern to highlight the spread of the Gospel to Africa in the Acts lesson.

#### ***1 John 4:7–21***

As we continue reading through 1 John, we hear the author calling the readers to love one another in the same vein that he did in the passage we read last week. Here the call is rooted in the understanding of God as love.

#### ***John 15:1–8***

*[NOTE: This introduction should be modified if Ascension lections are substituted for the Easter 7 readings.]*

For the three Sundays of Eastertide leading up to Pentecost, the church reads from John's account of Jesus' farewell discourse to the disciples before his death. This may seem odd given that we have already commemorated Jesus' death and resurrection. But for John, Jesus' departure involves his death, resurrection, and exaltation. In the readings for these three Sundays, the thematic focus is on the intimate relation of God and Jesus and Jesus' followers.

## Introduction for Easter 6B

As the church nears the celebrations of Ascension and Pentecost, Eastertide focuses on Jesus preparing his disciples for his departure by giving the new commandment to love one another.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Acts 10:44–48***

Last week's reading from Acts told of Philip being carried away by the Holy Spirit after he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. This week's reading speaks of the Holy Spirit coming upon Gentiles who were listening to Peter preach, which leads to their being baptized as the first Gentile converts to Christianity.

#### ***Psalms 98***

When the Holy Spirit comes upon those listening to Peter's sermon, they break into spontaneous praise of God. In a similar vein, today's Psalter reading calls all the earth to sing new praises to God, who is the righteous judge and ruler of the world.

#### ***1 John 5:1–6***

Throughout the season of Easter, we have been reading through 1 John and have heard the commandment to love one another emphasized repeatedly. In today's passage, the commandment is the foundation for a claim that faith in Jesus Christ leads to new birth.

#### ***John 15:9–17***

As with last week's Gospel lection, this week's reading from the farewell discourse in John names the intimate relationship between God and Jesus and Jesus' followers. To live out of that love from God and Christ, disciples must hold an ethic of loving one another.

## Introduction for Ascension, Year B

The Feast of the Ascension as a distinct liturgical celebration set forty days after Easter Sunday dates back at least to the fifth century. The story, doctrine, and liturgical celebration of the Ascension are paradoxical. On the one hand, it celebrates with great fanfare the exaltation of Jesus Christ to the right hand of God. On the other hand, the story names the fact that the resurrected Jesus is not present with the church in the same manner that he was present with the apostles. This is a day for grand celebration mixed with a subtle hint of melancholy. The readings for this holy day are the same every year.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Acts 1:1–11***

During most of the church year, the Gospel reading is the primary liturgical focus of the set of readings for any particular Sunday. But on Ascension and Pentecost, the readings from Acts take center stage. Today's lesson is the opening passage of Luke's second volume and tells of Jesus' promising that God will send the Holy Spirit to the disciples and then departing into heaven forty days after the resurrection.

#### ***Psalm 47***

The doctrine that Jesus ascended to the right hand of God declares Christ's sovereignty over the world that now serves as a footstool. Psalm 47 likewise celebrates the power and majesty of God, who rules over all the earth.

#### ***Ephesians 1:15–23***

The author of the Epistle to the Ephesians uses hymnic language in describing Christ's exaltation to heaven. While this exaltation foreshadows the *future* subjugation of the principalities and powers that rule the world unjustly, it indicates that Christ is the head of the church now and always.

#### ***Luke 24:44–53***

Luke ends his Gospel the same way he begins his book of Acts: by telling of Christ's ascension. However, while the same hand pens the books of Luke and Acts, they do not tell exactly the same ascension story. Our Gospel lesson complements the reading from Acts.

## Introduction for Easter 7B

The Seventh Sunday of Easter lies between the celebration of Ascension (forty days after Easter) and Pentecost (fifty days after Easter). The themes of both holy days shape the scripture readings for today.

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***Acts 1:15–17, 21–26***

According to Acts, after Jesus' resurrection the community of disciples began to prepare to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. An important element of that preparation was replacing Judas so that the *twelve* apostles would be in place and ready to lead the community of faith. Appropriate to Eastertide, one of the primary qualifications for being an apostle was having witnessed the resurrection.

#### ***Psalms 1***

In our reading from Acts, Matthias is chosen to replace Judas as one of the twelve apostles. The contrast between Matthias and Judas is echoed in today's Psalter reading. It contrasts the ways of the righteous and of the wicked.

#### ***1 John 5:9–13***

We read from 1 John one last time during Eastertide. Today's lesson is the exclamation point on the author's claim to be upholding the true Christian faith over against his theological opponents. Specifically, the author claims that the theology he promotes proceeds from the testimony of God while that of his opponents has a human origin.

#### ***John 17:6–19***

Jesus closes his farewell discourse to the disciples with a prayer for the disciples. As he prepares to depart to be with God, he prays out of his intimacy with God that God protect and unify his followers.

# Introduction for Pentecost, Year B

Pentecost is the climax of the liturgical seasons of the Christian year. It is the last day of Eastertide and serves as the red exclamation point to the white sentence proclaiming that Christ is risen indeed. More broadly speaking, from Advent's expectation of the coming of God-in-Christ, to Christmas and Epiphany's celebration of the nativity and of God's self-revelation in Christ, through Lent's fast and Easter's celebration of resurrection and baptism, we now arrive at the conclusion of the liturgical retelling of the Christ Event: the gift of the Holy Spirit and birth of the church.

## Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

### ***Acts 2:1–21***

Through most of the time from Advent to Pentecost, the Gospel reading is the primary liturgical focus of the sets of lections for each Sunday. But on Ascension and Pentecost, the readings from Acts take center stage. On Ascension we listened as Luke told of Jesus' departure. Today we hear of the coming of the Holy Spirit to fill the gap of Jesus' departure.

### ***Psalm 104:24–34, 35b***

Psalm 104 is a lengthy hymn of praise to God as creator. The portion we read today speaks of God creating by sending forth God's spirit or breath, language that reminds us of the opening lines of the creation story in Genesis 1, in which the wind or spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.

### ***Romans 8:22–27***

In Romans 8, Paul presents his understanding of life in the Spirit. In the section drawn from that discourse for today's lection, we hear Paul speak of God's Spirit as granting us, and all of creation, renewed strength and comfort.

### ***John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15***

In John's presentation of Jesus' farewell discourse, from which we have been reading for the last few Sundays, Jesus comforts his disciples by promising that when he departs, God will send the Holy Spirit upon them.

# Ordinary Time (Season after Pentecost) Year B

*[NOTE: Since the Sundays in Ordinary Time have no central thematic focus, broad introductions for each Sunday are not included as they are for Advent through Pentecost, except on special days (e.g., Trinity Sunday). Instead, for each Sunday, only introductions for the individual lections are called for.]*

## Introduction for Ordinary Time

The church year is divided into liturgical time and ordinary time. Liturgical time proceeds from Advent, through Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter to Pentecost and is structured loosely around the progression of the story of the Christ Event. Ordinary Time encompasses the other half of the year and has no specific thematic foci that shape Sunday worship.

Our congregation, and all congregations and denominations that use a lectionary for each Sunday and holy day in a three-year cycle, will notice a shift in the way the scripture readings function in worship as liturgical time gives way to the Season after Pentecost. During the liturgical seasons, the lections are chosen to serve the thematic needs of those seasons. During Ordinary Time, however, the scripture lessons are not subordinated to such liturgical needs, with the exception of a special day here and there (e.g., Trinity Sunday, All Saints', and the Reign of Christ).

The result is that the three primary sets of readings (First Testament, Epistles, and Gospels) are read in a semicontinuous fashion during this season. This year the readings exhibit the following patterns:

**First Testament:** This year the opening readings come from narratives that deal with Israel as a nation. The focus is on the early years of the monarchy: Saul, David, and Solomon. The glance at Solomon's reign invites a turn to wisdom literature, for which, according to tradition, Solomon was a major source. The Hebrew Bible is divided into three parts: Torah, Prophets, and Writings. The wisdom literature is found in the Writings.

**Epistles:** The Season after Pentecost continues the semicontinuous reading of 2 Corinthians that we started during the Season after Epiphany. We continue with the Pauline corpus by turning to Ephesians for almost two months. As we turn to wisdom literature in the First Testament lections, we begin reading James from the New Testament, which has some affinities with wisdom thought. And as James is considered a "catholic Epistle," (i.e., not addressed to a specific community), so we end the season with another catholic Epistle, Hebrews.

**Gospel:** As with liturgical time since Advent, the church continues to read in the Gospel of Mark. During the Sundays after Epiphany we read through the opening section of the Galilean ministry, in which Jesus performs a series of healing miracles. Our lessons pick up at that point and move us through much of the narrative of Jesus' ministry.

# Introduction for Trinity Sunday, Year B

[First Sunday after Pentecost]

The designation of the Sunday after Pentecost as a liturgical celebration of the Trinity originated some seven hundred years ago and was raised in prominence in the early twentieth century. The doctrine of the Trinity arose after the biblical period, primarily as a result of different groups debating in what way Jesus is or became divine and thus his relation to the Eternal Creator. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not to be found in the Bible, the belief is built on biblical language of Father/Creator, Son/Redeemer, and Spirit.

## Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

### ***Isaiah 6:1–8***

Today's First Testament lection is the story of Isaiah's call into prophetic ministry. It is read on Trinity Sunday because it is a vision of the majesty and sovereignty of God, who speaks in the heavenly court as ruler of the cosmos.

### ***Psalms 29***

As our First Testament lesson lifted up the voice of God, so does our Psalter reading celebrate God's voice revealed in the thunderstorm.

### ***Romans 8:12–17***

In Romans 7, Paul describes the human condition as our inability to do the good called for by the law because we are of the flesh and enslaved to sin. Today's Epistle reading is part of his description of God's answer to this dilemma: God's gift of life in the Spirit through Jesus Christ.

### ***John 3:1–17***

Today's Gospel lesson is the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night. Jesus tells of God's love in terms of our being born from above. As with Paul's description of salvation in our reading from Romans, the Gospel of John also employs language that helped the church shape its doctrine of the Trinity.



## Proper 4B

[Sunday between May 29 and June 4 inclusive (if after Trinity Sunday)]

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)***

*[Note: Use the following words for the first proper used after Trinity Sunday:* Last year during the Season after Pentecost, our First Testament readings focused on the constitution of Israel as a nation. We read of the people's origins in the stories of Abraham and Sarah and their descendents, of the people's enslavement in and exodus from Egypt, of their entry into and conquest of the promised land, and of the judges' charismatic leadership of the twelve tribes.] Today we read the story of Samuel who served as a transitional leader between the time of the judges and of a monarchy.

#### ***Psalms 139:1–6, 13–18***

In our First Testament reading, God searched out Samuel when he was lying down. So in today's Psalter reading does the psalmist affirm that God knows us at all times. God searches out our paths and our lying down.

#### ***2 Corinthians 4:5–12***

*[NOTE: Use the following words for the first proper used after Trinity Sunday:* During the Season after Epiphany, we began reading from the opening chapters of 2 Corinthians. It seems that sometime after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he made a visit to the church at Corinth that went poorly. So whereas Paul spends much of his time in 1 Corinthians dealing with the divisions within the church, in 2 Corinthians he must deal with the broken relationship between himself and the church. We continue reading through this letter now.] In today's Epistle reading, Paul defends what appears to be weakness in his apostolic ministry.

#### ***Mark 2:23—3:6***

*[NOTE: Use the following words for the first proper used after Trinity Sunday:* Since Advent, Mark has been the primary Gospel from which we have read. Indeed, during the Season after Epiphany, we began reading through the Gospel of Mark in order. Specifically, we spent a number of Sundays working through scenes from the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry.] Today's Gospel lection offers two stories in which Jesus is in conflict with religious authorities concerning Sabbath practice.

## Proper 5B

[Sunday between June 5 and June 11 inclusive (if after Trinity Sunday)]

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### **1 Samuel 8:4–11 (12–15) 16–20; (11:14–15)**

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the First Testament lection for Proper 4.]*

Samuel led the twelve tribes of Israel as a judge and a prophet. But as he grew old, the tribes asked that he appoint a king to rule over them. Samuel warns the people that kings take much from their subjects, but the people would not be swayed in their desire to be like other nations.

#### **Psalm 138**

Samuel argued that a human king is a poor substitute for the Lord as ruler of the nation. Likewise, Psalm 138 calls the kings of all nations to worship God.

#### **2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1**

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the Epistle lection for Proper 4.]*

Throughout a great deal of 2 Corinthians, Paul is trying to defend his apostolic ministry. In today's Epistle reading, Paul claims that the affliction he experiences because of his proclamation of the Gospel to unbelievers will be redeemed in God's future.

#### **Mark 3:20–35**

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the Gospel lection for Proper 4.]*

One of Mark's major motifs is that Jesus' true identity as the Child of God can only be known through his death. Thus throughout the Gospel, the writer presents various characters as misunderstanding Jesus. In today's lection, two stories are sandwiched together to show that both the scribes and Jesus' own family misunderstand who he is.

## Proper 6B

[Sunday between June 12 and June 18 inclusive (if after Trinity Sunday)]

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***1 Samuel 15:34—16:13***

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the First Testament lection for Proper 4.]*

The twelve tribes of Israel asked Samuel to anoint a king to rule over them. Upon God's instruction, Samuel anointed Saul as king to protect the people from the Philistines. But Saul's reign made both God and Samuel regret the choice. In today's First Testament reading, God instructs Samuel to anoint David to succeed Saul.

#### ***Psalm 20***

Our reading from 1 Samuel told of Samuel anointing David as the future king of Israel. Psalm 20 is a prayer that echoes this scene as it prays that God help the king. Indeed, this psalm may have been used as part of enthronement ceremonies.

#### ***2 Corinthians 5:6–10 (11–13) 14–17***

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the Epistle lection for Proper 4.]*

In today's Epistle lesson, Paul defends himself against rival missionaries who have appeared in Corinth, commending themselves outwardly with displays of ecstatic experience. In spite of all the appearances of frailty and mortality, Paul claims the Gospel of reconciliation as his commendation.

#### ***Mark 4:26–34***

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the Gospel lection for Proper 4.]*

In order to emphasize that Jesus' full identity as God's Child can only be known through the cross, Mark presents even those closest to him as not understanding him or his message. Today's lection is the end of a series of parables. Even though we would expect the disciples to understand the mystery of God's reign, Jesus must explain the parables to them.

## Proper 7B

[Sunday between June 19 and June 25 inclusive (if after Trinity Sunday)]

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***1 Samuel 17:(1a, 4–11, 19–23), 32–49***

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the First Testament lection for Proper 4.]*

After Samuel anointed David to become king over Israel in the place of Saul without Saul's knowledge, Saul brought David into his service to be his armor-bearer and to play the lyre to sooth his spirit. In today's reading, the servant-boy David shows faith in God as he defeats the champion of the Philistine army, Goliath.

#### ***OR 1 Samuel 17:57—18:5, 10–16***

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the First Testament lection for Proper 4.]*

After Samuel anointed David to become king over Israel in the place of Saul without Saul's knowledge, Saul brought David into his service to be his armor-bearer and to play the lyre to sooth his spirit. It is this position that allows David to show faith in God by defeating the champion of the Philistine army, Goliath. Today's reading follows on the heels of that battle. In it we find David ascending to leadership in Saul's army, claiming the heart of Saul's son Jonathan, and invoking Saul's jealousy.

#### ***Psalms 9:9–20***

Psalms 9 and 10 were originally a single psalm, which is a prayer for deliverance. The psalmist's claims that God is on the side of weak against their oppressors are offered today as a commentary on the story of David facing Goliath.

#### ***2 Corinthians 6:1–13***

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the Epistle lection for Proper 4.]*

Part of the conflict Paul experiences with the Corinthian church was rooted in missionaries who came to Corinth while he was gone. They commended themselves in terms of their appearance, religious experience, and status. In today's lection from the letter, Paul seeks reconciliation by offering his own commendation in terms of the suffering he has endured.

#### ***Mark 4:35–41***

*[NOTE: See the introduction for the Gospel lection for Proper 4.]*

Mark repeatedly presents the disciples as not fully understanding who Jesus is in order to help his readers better understand the significance of the cross. In today's Gospel lection, the disciples are scared of the power of a storm; but in their lack of faith, they fail to understand the power that Jesus has as the Child of God.

## **Proper 8B**

[Sunday between June 26 and July 2 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***2 Samuel 1:1, 17–27***

In today's First Testament lection, David learns of the death of Saul and Jonathan on the battlefield. Even though Saul was jealous of David, David honored him as God's anointed king. And David loved Jonathan greatly. Thus David leads the people in a lament.

#### ***Psalms 130***

Psalms 130 is one of the penitential psalms. It is a lament by one who is in great distress and thus seeks forgiveness and help.

#### ***2 Corinthians 8:7–15***

Having defended his apostolic ministry and sought reconciliation with the church in the early chapters of 2 Corinthians, Paul moves on to other issues in the later chapters. One issue to which he gives considerable attention is a collection the Gentile churches are taking up for the poor in Jerusalem. The view of stewardship he offers is that of giving out of abundance for the sake of economic equality.

#### ***Mark 5:21–43***

A common technique for Mark is the sandwiching of two stories together so that the readers will interpret them in tandem. In today's Gospel lection, Mark sandwiches together the stories of Jesus raising a young girl from the dead and a woman touching Jesus to be healed of a hemorrhage.

## **Proper 9B**

[Sunday between July 3 and July 9 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***2 Samuel 5:1–5, 9–10***

Last week we read of David leading Israel in a lament over the death of King Saul. After Saul died, there were a number of contenders for the throne of Israel, and different tribes claimed different kings. In today's First Testament lesson, all of the tribes come together to anoint David to be king over the whole land.

#### ***Psalms 48***

As David unified Israel under his rule, so he also unified the nation by establishing Jerusalem as its political and religious capital. Psalm 48 is a song of Zion, a celebration of Jerusalem, where God reveals God's power.

#### ***2 Corinthians 12:2–10***

Rival missionaries who came to Corinth boasted of their superiority to Paul, for example in the area of having ecstatic religious experiences. In today's passage from 2 Corinthians, Paul counters these rivals by claiming that he can boast of religious experience with the best of them. But because such boasting is foolish, he boasts instead in his affliction and weakness for the sake of the Gospel.

#### ***Mark 6:1–13***

Mark's Gospel is structured in a way that the readers are moved along to the cross where Jesus can be fully recognized as God's Child. Until then, people consistently misunderstand who he is and what his ministry is all about. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus' own hometown rejects him. But Jesus simply takes his ministry and sends his disciples on to other towns.

## Proper 10B

[Sunday between July 10 and July 16 inclusive]

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

#### ***2 Samuel 6:1–5, 12b–19***

Last week our First Testament lection dealt with David being declared king of all of Israel. Today we read from the passage in which David brings the ark of the covenant—Israel’s most precious religious object, signifying God’s presence—to Jerusalem in order to secure his political power by making the city the center of both the religious and political life of the nation.

#### ***Psalms 24***

Psalms 24 resonates with David’s act of bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. It is a pilgrimage hymn, a liturgy for entering Jerusalem and the temple.

#### ***Ephesians 1:3–14***

For the next few weeks the lectionary shifts our attention to the letter to the Ephesians. Although this letter is attributed to Paul, many scholars think it was written by one of Paul’s disciples, who attempted to apply Paul’s teaching and theology to new circumstances after the apostle’s death. Today’s lesson is the prayer that opens the letter and foreshadows the central themes to follow in the body of the letter.

#### ***Mark 6:14–29***

Mark’s Gospel begins with John the Baptist proclaiming the coming of the Christ and baptizing Jesus. In today’s reading, well into Mark’s narration of Jesus’ Galilean ministry, John’s ministry comes to an end when he is martyred.

## **Proper 11B**

[Sunday between July 17 and July 23 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***2 Samuel 7:1–14a***

Last week we read of David bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem to establish the city as the religious and political center of his kingdom. In today's First Testament lesson, David considers building a temple for God in the city as well. But God tells David that such an endeavor is not his to undertake. Nevertheless, God establishes a covenant with David that his descendants shall sit on the throne of Israel forever. This Davidic covenant exerts an enormous influence over Israel's and the church's theology for centuries to follow.

#### ***Psalms 89:20–37***

Psalms 89 is a lengthy hymn of praise to God as the one who chose the Davidic line to rule over Israel. The excerpt we read recounts David's vision in which God established this covenant with him.

#### ***Ephesians 2:11–22***

Many scholars assume that Ephesians was originally written by one of Paul's disciples as a general letter to be circulated among the Pauline churches in order to apply Pauline teaching to a number of new circumstances that had arisen after the apostle's death. In today's reading, the author speaks of salvation by contrasting the former lives of the Gentile believers with their current life in Christ. This new life is evidenced in the unity of Gentiles and Jews in the church.

#### ***Mark 6:30–34, 53–56***

Mark tells the story of Jesus sending out the twelve apostles to preach and heal. While they are gone, Herod kills John the Baptist. In today's Gospel lection, the apostles return to tell Jesus of all that has happened while they were away. But the crowds do not allow them to be alone with Jesus.



## **Proper 12B**

[Sunday between July 24 and July 30 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***2 Samuel 11:1–15***

When the people first asked Samuel to anoint a king over Israel, he warned them that kings take what they want from their subjects. In today's lection from 2 Samuel, we witness David doing just that as he takes Bathsheba for himself and takes the life of her husband Uriah.

#### ***Psalm 14***

Psalm 14 is read in response to the story of David's great sin. It is a warning that God will judge immoral leaders, and they will be punished.

#### ***Ephesians 3:14–21***

Just before today's lection from Ephesians, the author has described Paul's ministry to the Gentiles as one involving imprisonment and suffering for their sake. The author concludes this section by interjecting a prayer for the Gentile readers: a prayer that they might mature in their knowledge of God through Christ.

#### ***John 6:1–21***

Last week's Gospel reading from Mark led up to Mark's version of Jesus feeding the crowd of five thousand, but skips over it. This week we shift to John to hear a version of the miracle of the feeding. In John, this story sets up a lengthy discourse on Jesus as the bread of heaven. We will be reading from this discourse in John 6 for the next four Sundays.

## **Proper 13B**

[Sunday between July 31 and August 6 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***2 Samuel 11:26—12:13a***

Last week our First Testament reading was the story of King David taking Bathsheba for himself and having her husband Uriah killed to cover his sin of getting her pregnant. This week, we read of God confronting David through the prophet Nathan.

#### ***Psalms 51:1–12***

Psalms 51 is a penitential prayer in which the one praying seeks cleansing and forgiveness. The traditional heading for the prayer describes it as David's response after Nathan revealed God's displeasure with his sins.

#### ***Ephesians 4:1–16***

Letters in the Pauline corpus move from the pastoral-theological body of the letter to a section of ethical exhortation. Today's lection is the opening of this moral discourse, but it echoes back to a theme previously dealt with in the Epistle: unity in the church.

#### ***John 6:24–35***

Last week we shifted from Mark to John and read the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. For the next few weeks, we will be reading from the discourse that follows that scene. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus accuses the crowd of following him only because he fed them. Instead, he urges them to seek the bread of life.

## **Proper 14B**

[Sunday between August 7 and August 13 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***2 Samuel 18:5–9, 15, 31–33***

For the last two weeks we have read of David engaging in the kingly habit of taking whatever he wants. One consequence of such behavior is that it is passed from father to son. Amnon, David's firstborn son, lusted after his half-sister Tamar and took her against her will. Absalom, Tamar's full brother, took Amnon's life in vengeance. And even after David forgave him for that murder, Absalom took David's throne. In today's reading, David's armies defeat and kill Absalom, and David mourns the loss.

#### ***Psalms 130***

Psalms 130 is one of the penitential psalms. It is a lament by one who is in great distress and thus seeks forgiveness and help. We read it today in response to David mourning the loss of Absalom, as we read it several weeks ago in response to David mourning the loss of Saul and Jonathan.

#### ***Ephesians 4:25—5:2***

Early in the letter to the Ephesians, the author describes salvation in terms of a contrast between an old and a new way of life. That contrast is the foundation of today's Epistle lesson, which is a broad description of the ethics of the new life in Christ.

#### ***John 6:35, 41–51***

Last week's Gospel reading was the scene in John in which Jesus tells a crowd that he is the bread of eternal life that came down from heaven. In today's lection from John, the religious authorities complain that Jesus has been claiming such things when he is simply the son of Joseph. Jesus' response is to describe his intimate connection with God.

## **Proper 15B**

[Sunday between August 14 and August 20 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***1 Kings 2:10–12; 3:3–14***

For weeks we have been reading of David's rise to power and of his tumultuous reign over Israel. Upon his death, his son Solomon became king. Our First Testament lection tells of that succession and of Solomon asking God for wisdom to rule over the land.

#### ***Psalms 111***

Psalms 111 is a hymn of praise for all of God's wondrous deeds. It is an especially appropriate response to our reading about Solomon's request for wisdom, for the psalm ends with the declaration that wisdom is the beginning of the fear of the Lord.

#### ***Ephesians 5:15–20***

At the core of the ethical discourse of Ephesians is the contrast between the Gentile readers' life in Christ with their former pagan ways. In today's Epistle reading, that contrast is expressed in terms of the difference between being wise and foolish, between being drunk with wine and filled with the Holy Spirit.

#### ***John 6:51–58***

For several weeks, our Gospel readings have come from the discourse in John 6 in which Jesus declares that he is the bread of heaven. When he extends the metaphor to say that whoever eats this bread will live forever, the religious authorities argue about the meaning of eating Jesus' flesh. In graphic language that evokes the Lord's Supper, Jesus reasserts that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood abide in him and have eternal life.

## **Proper 16B**

[Sunday between August 21 and August 27 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10–11) 22–30, 41–43***

When King David decided to build a temple for God in Jerusalem, God told him that that task was reserved for his son. And indeed, the narratives of Solomon's reign focus primarily on this task. Today's First Testament reading comes from the dedication of the Jerusalem temple.

#### ***Psalms 84***

Psalms 84 is a song of Zion, a celebration of the temple uttered by one who is making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The hymn declares that God is met in the temple.

#### ***Ephesians 6:10–20***

For the last few weeks we have been reading from the section of Ephesians dedicated to ethical instruction. Today's Epistle reading is the conclusion to that instruction. Here the author extends the metaphor of clothing oneself with the new self in Christ by calling readers to put on the armor of God. While the metaphor is troubling for its use of militaristic language, the images of the armament come primarily from the First Testament and are for the most part described as defensive as opposed to offensive weapons.

#### ***John 6:56–69***

For the past four weeks, our Gospel lections have been drawn from John 6. In this discourse, Jesus declares he is the bread of heaven, and that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood will have eternal life. Today's reading is the final one from this discourse. In it Jesus turns from arguing with the religious authorities to speak with his disciples. He asks if they will take offense at his words and go away as others do.

## **Proper 17B**

[Sunday between August 28 and September 3 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Song of Solomon 2:8–13***

For the last two weeks our First Testament lections have been taken from the cycle of stories dealing with Solomon's reign over Israel. Tradition holds that Solomon, who at the beginning of his reign requested wisdom from God instead of wealth or power, was an author of much of the wisdom tradition. One of the works attributed to him is the love poem called the Song of Solomon that is a dialogue between two young lovers. In today's reading, the young man appears at his lover's window at dawn and calls her to go away with him.

#### ***Psalms 45:1–2, 6–9***

As the Song of Solomon celebrates romantic love, Psalm 45 is a song composed for a royal wedding. The excerpts we read today are addressed to both groom and bride and celebrate God's blessing upon them.

#### ***James 1:17–27***

For many weeks, our Epistle lections were drawn from 2 Corinthians and Ephesians. For the rest of the Sundays after Pentecost, however, our attention shifts from the Pauline collection to the general letters of the New Testament, specifically James and Hebrews. We begin today with James, which is often referred to as "Christian wisdom literature" for its concern with correct Christian behavior instead of correct Christian belief and for its similarities to the First Testament wisdom writings such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Indeed, the first chapter reads like a collection of aphorisms dealing with righteous living.

#### ***Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23***

After taking a five-week side trip into John, we return to our primary Gospel journey through Mark. We are nearing the end of Mark's story of Jesus' Galilean ministry. In the excerpts read today Jesus confronts the religious authorities by rejecting traditional views concerning defilement. When Jesus speaks to the crowd, he shifts from speaking of rituals to speaking of morality.

## **Proper 18B**

[Sunday between September 4 and September 10 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Proverbs 22:1–2, 8–9, 22–23***

Last week we turned from reading stories about Solomon to reading wisdom literature attributed to him. This literature is part of the section of the Hebrew Bible known as “the Writings” in contrast to the Torah and the Prophets. Our First Testament lections will come from the Writings for the rest of the Season after Pentecost. Whereas most of the narrative and prophetic materials of the First Testament grow out of a worldview rooted in a particular understanding of a saving God active in history, wisdom literature grows out of theology rooted in the God of human experience. Our selections from Proverbs speak of how the wealthy should view the poor.

#### ***Psalms 125***

Psalms 125 expresses confidence that God will protect the nation from foreign enemies. In classic wisdom tones, the psalm speaks of blessings upon those who do good and curses upon those who are evildoers.

#### ***James 2:1–10 (11–13) 14–17***

The first chapter of James reads like a collection of short proverbs dealing with righteous Christian behavior. The rest of the book is composed of brief essays that unpack and expand the themes of those proverbs. Today’s Epistle lection opens the section of essays and deals with problems of privileging the rich and failing to live out the Torah.

#### ***Mark 7:24–37***

Last week we read of Jesus rejecting traditional views of what is clean and unclean. Those teachings set the stage for today’s Gospel reading in which the issue of the barrier between Jew and Gentile is brought into focus. There is a twist in this story, however. Instead of Jesus initiating a change in the traditional view, a strong Gentile woman convinces him to cross the barrier.

## **Proper 19B**

[Sunday between September 11 and September 17 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Proverbs 1:20–33***

The wisdom literature of the First Testament grows out of a theology rooted in God and God's will being known through human experience. Today's reading from Proverbs personifies wisdom as a woman prophesying in the street.

#### ***Psalm 19***

Psalm 19 glorifies God as creator and as the giver of Torah. In classic wisdom tones, it extols God's commands as beneficial to those who adhere to them.

#### ***James 3:1–12***

For the last two weeks our readings from James have emphasized Christian works. Given that emphasis on active deeds over passive faith, it is not surprising to find the author concerned about the destructive power of speech.

#### ***Mark 8:27–38***

Thus far in Ordinary Time, our Gospel lections have been drawn from Mark's version of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Today's reading is a key passage for Mark and is a transition from that itinerant ministry to a journey on the way to Jerusalem. Here Jesus asks who people think he is. There is much misunderstanding, but it appears that Peter understands until Jesus rebukes him.



## **Proper 20B**

[Sunday between September 18 and September 24 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Proverbs 31:10–31***

As last week's reading from Proverbs 1 portrayed wisdom as a woman prophesying in the street, so today's reading from Proverbs 31 poetically shows a capable wife as exemplifying wisdom in the world.

#### ***Psalm 1***

Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm that opens the Psalter by offering readers the choice between two ways: the way of righteousness and the way of wickedness.

#### ***James 3:13—4:3, 7–8a***

For several weeks our readings from James have spoken of the connection between faithfulness and works. Today's Epistle lesson discusses the relationship of wisdom and works. Where the two are not bound together, strife will be found.

#### ***Mark 9:30–37***

Mark presents Jesus as foretelling his passion three times. To illustrate that one can only fully understand Jesus after the crucifixion, Mark presents the disciples as responding inappropriately after each prediction. In last week's Gospel reading, Peter attempted to rebuke Jesus for speaking of his death. In this week's lection, the disciples respond to news of Jesus' impending death by arguing about which of them is the greatest.

## **Proper 21B**

[Sunday between September 25 and October 1 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Esther 7:1–6, 9–10, 9:20–22***

The wisdom literature from which we have been reading comes from the section of the Hebrew Bible called the Kethuvim, or “Writings.” The book of Esther also comes from this collection of material. Esther is a Jewish woman, whom the king selects as his queen without realizing that she is a Jew. When Haman, one of the king’s highest officials, conspires to execute Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, and to annihilate all the Jews in Persia, Esther pleads with her husband.

#### ***Psalms 124***

In response to the story of deliverance of the Jews through Esther’s maneuvers, we read Psalm 124. This is a song of thanksgiving for God’s deliverance of the people from the hands of their enemies.

#### ***James 5:13–20***

Last week our reading from James dealt with strife in the community of faith. This week’s lesson offers a vision of a church united in prayer and mutual support.

#### ***Mark 9:38–50***

In last week’s Gospel reading, the disciples argued with one another over which of them was the greatest. In today’s lesson from Mark, Jesus undercuts any view that the disciples have an exclusive claim on divine power as he honors the work of someone else casting out demons in his name.

## **Proper 22B**

[Sunday between October 2 and October 8 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Job 1:1; 2:1–10***

The book of Job is a piece of wisdom literature found in the section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Writings, alongside the Song of Solomon, Proverbs, and Esther. For the next few weeks, we will be reading from Job, which deals with questions of God’s justice in the face of innocent human suffering. The book opens with a prose narrative of a heavenly being, named Satan, challenging God that if God were to remove divine protection and blessing from the righteous man Job, he would cease to be righteous.

#### ***Psalms 26***

As Job suffers unjustly, so Psalm 26 is uttered by one who seeks vindication against false accusations. The one praying is willing to be tested for faithfulness and righteousness.

#### ***Hebrews 1:1–4; 2:5–12***

Although considered one of the general Epistles of the New Testament, Hebrews is best compared to an extended written sermon that was sent to an unknown church. The sermon opens with the claim that God has spoken to the world through Jesus Christ. The rest of the sermon interprets what it is God says through Christ, relating it to claims found in the First Testament and instructing the readers how to live as faithful Christians in light of what God has spoken.

#### ***Mark 10:2–16***

Mark’s version of Jesus and the disciples journeying toward Jerusalem is loosely connected around the theme of discipleship “on the way.” But there are also occasions during the journey when Jesus engages those outside his circle of disciples. In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus speaks to outsiders about divorce and receiving children. The teachings are connected in that women and children were powerless in ancient society.

## **Proper 23B**

[Sunday between October 9 and October 15 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Job 23:1–9, 16–17***

Last week our First Testament reading came from the introduction to the book of Job, where God is baited by a heavenly being into testing Job's righteousness. The great bulk of the material that follows comprises a poetic dispute between Job and his friends. They tell him that if he would confess his sin, God would return God's blessing to him. But Job insists that his suffering is not punishment for something he has done, and that given a chance he would plead his case to God directly.

#### ***Psalms 22:1–15***

As Job experiences God's silence in his suffering, so Psalm 22 is a lament, in which the petitioner complains that God is silent and distant.

#### ***Hebrews 4:12–16***

The book of Hebrews is a sermon that unpacks the meaning of Jesus Christ as the central revelation of God. The sermon actually consists of a series of short homilies that build on one another. Today's lection from Hebrews draws to a close a short homily on Psalm 95, in which the writer calls the readers to repent of hardened, sinful hearts so that they might enter into God's rest. While God's word will judge the heart, we receive God's mercy through Christ as our great high priest.

#### ***Mark 10:17–31***

In Mark's version of Jesus and the disciples journeying toward Jerusalem, Jesus primarily teaches the disciples in private. But there are also occasions along the way when Jesus engages those outside his circle of disciples. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus calls a man to gain eternal life by giving away his wealth and following him.

## **Proper 24B**

[Sunday between October 16 and October 22 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Job 38:1–7 (34–41)***

In last week's First Testament lection, we listened to Job wish aloud that he could plead his case before God, that he could demonstrate his innocence and that his suffering was undeserved. In today's reading, God responds with a series of questions that demonstrate the vast divide between human knowledge and divine wisdom.

#### ***Psalms 104:1–9, 24, 35c***

God's response to Job highlights the divine role of creator. Likewise, our Psalter reading praises God as creator of heaven and earth.

#### ***Hebrews 5:1–10***

In last week's reading from Hebrews, we were introduced to the author's reference to Christ as the great high priest. The author uses this metaphor extensively throughout the writing. In today's lesson, the author presents the idea that one does not choose to be the high priest but is chosen by God in order to support the idea that God claims Jesus as God's Son.

#### ***Mark 10:35–45***

Several weeks ago we read two scenes from Mark in which Jesus told his disciples that he was headed toward Jerusalem where he would be killed and then rise again. Both times the disciples responded inappropriately; first Peter rebuked Jesus and next the disciples argued about who was the greatest. Today's Gospel lection comes right after Jesus has foretold his death a third and final time. Once again the disciples respond inappropriately.

## **Proper 25B**

[Sunday between October 23 and October 29 inclusive]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Job 42:1–6, 10–17***

After long, poetic dialogues between Job and his friends and between Job and God about the nature of suffering, the book of Job ends by returning to the narrative with which it started. Whereas God removed Job's fortunes in the opening scene, God restores his fortunes in the conclusion.

#### ***Psalms 34:1–8, (19–22)***

Psalms 34 is a song of thanksgiving for deliverance from trouble and suffering. It is an appropriate response to the relief Job experienced.

#### ***Hebrews 7:23–28***

For the last two weeks, our lections from Hebrews have explored the metaphor of Jesus as the great high priest. In today's reading, the author contrasts Christ with the high priest of former times. Whereas they were mortal, Christ is the great high priest forever. And while they had to offer sacrifices daily, Christ offered himself once for all.

#### ***Mark 10:46–52***

For weeks we have been reading from Mark's story of Jesus traveling on the way to Jerusalem and teaching about discipleship. Today's reading is the conclusion to that journey. Just before he enters Jerusalem, Jesus heals a blind man who then follows him on the way. Gaining vision and following Jesus to the cross is what discipleship is all about.

## **Proper 26B**

[Sunday between October 30 and November 5 inclusive, if All Saints' Day is not celebrated on this day. See All Saints' Day or Sunday below.]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

#### ***Ruth 1:1–18***

For a couple of months, our First Testament lections have been taken from the section of the Hebrew Scriptures known as The Writings. The last such writing we consider this season is the story of Ruth, the Moabite great-grandmother of David. The story opens with the tragedy of women being widowed in a man's world. But the bond between Ruth and her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi empowers these strong women to take control of their lives.

#### ***Psalms 146***

Psalms 146 is a hymn of praise for God's help. It is an especially appropriate response to the story of Naomi and Ruth because it declares that God upholds the widow.

#### ***Hebrews 9:11–14***

The book of Hebrews reads like a series of short homilies that build on one another. The last three readings from Hebrews for Ordinary Time come from a homily that speaks of Christ as the great high priest offering himself as a sacrifice of atonement in order to establish the new covenant. At the center of today's lection is the contrast between the once for all offering of Christ and the annual sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

#### ***Mark 12:28–34***

The first two sections of Mark's Gospel tell of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and of his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The third section focuses on Jesus' final days in Jerusalem. For the next three weeks, our Gospel readings are taken from Jesus teaching in and about the temple in Jerusalem. In today's lection, Jesus converses with a scribe about the greatest commandment.

# **Introduction for All Saints' Day or Sunday, Year B**

[November 1 or First Sunday in November]

The church celebrates November 1, or the first Sunday in November, as All Saints' Day. In early Christianity, congregations honored martyrs on the anniversaries of their deaths. As more and more of the faithful died and different congregations merged their traditions, it became too complex to honor the memory of every individual martyr. Many days were still set aside for those the church canonized as saints, but All Saints' Day was created as a day to celebrate all those who died faithfully in the Lord. In recent years, Protestants have reclaimed the Pauline understanding of "saints" as all those who are part of the faith and thus celebrate All Saints' Day to remember especially those of the church who have died during the last year.

## **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

### ***Isaiah 25:6–9***

In today's First Testament lection, Isaiah offers a vision of a great feast of salvation in which death is swallowed up forever. It is an appropriate reading for the day on which the church celebrates those who have died in the Lord.

### ***Psalms 24***

Psalms 24 is a pilgrimage hymn, a liturgy for entering Jerusalem and the temple. Similar to honoring the saintly, this liturgy lists the qualifications of those worthy to enter the temple.

### ***Revelation 21:1–6a***

Our next scripture reading comes from the "Apocalypse of John," or the book of Revelation. The portion of John's vision that we read today imagines salvation in terms of a new heaven and a new earth.

### ***John 11:32–44***

For All Saints' Day this year, our Gospel lesson is the scene in the Gospel of John in which Jesus proclaims that he is the resurrection and the life and then raises Lazarus from the dead.



## **Proper 27B**

[Sunday between November 6 and November 12 inclusive, if All Saints' Day is not celebrated on this day. See All Saints' Day or Sunday above.]

### **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

*[NOTE: The following introductions need to be altered if the readings for Proper 26 were not read because of the celebration of All Saints' Day.]*

#### ***Ruth 3:1–5; 4:13–17***

The book of Ruth opens with the story of Naomi and Ruth being widowed and left alone. In today's reading from the First Testament, we learn how these women secure their livelihoods by getting a kinsman of Naomi's husband to take Ruth as his wife.

#### ***Psalms 127***

Psalms 127 is a wisdom psalm lifting up the blessing of a large family. It was possibly composed to greet the birth of a child and is read today in response to the story of Ruth giving birth to Obed, David's grandfather.

#### ***Hebrews 9:24–28***

Our Epistle lection comes from section of Hebrews that speaks of Christ as the great high priest offering himself as a sacrifice of atonement in order to establish the new covenant. At the center of today's lection is the contrast between the earthly sanctuary in which the former high priests made offerings to God and the heavenly sanctuary Christ entered.

#### ***Mark 12:38–44***

Our Gospel lections for the end of the Season after Pentecost come from Mark's presentation of Jesus teaching in the Jerusalem temple during his last days. The section is dominated by conflicts between Jesus and the religious authorities. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus warns about religious leaders and temple practices that are oppressive.

## Proper 28B

[Sunday between November 13 and November 19 inclusive]

### Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

*[NOTE: The following introductions need to be altered if the readings for Proper 27 were not read because of the celebration of All Saints' Day.]*

#### ***1 Samuel 1:4–20***

During the latter part of the Season after Pentecost, our First Testament lections have lifted up strong women, such as Esther, Naomi, and Ruth. Today we read of another such biblical woman. Hannah prays at the temple for a child and refuses to be dismissed easily by the priest. Her prayers are answered and she gives birth to Samuel, who would come to serve as a transitional leader in Israel between the time of the judges and the monarchy.

#### ***1 Samuel 2:1–10***

In place of a Psalter reading, today we read from 1 Samuel 2. It is the song of Hannah, offered to God after the birth of Samuel.

#### ***Hebrews 10:11–14 (15–18) 19–25***

For the last two weeks, we have read from the section of Hebrews that speaks of Christ as the great high priest offering himself as a sacrifice of atonement in order to establish the new covenant. At the center of today's lection is the theme of assurance in God's perfect sanctification that comes through Christ.

#### ***Mark 13:1–8***

At the end of the liturgical year, with Advent on the horizon, the church begins to reflect on the claim that the future is God's. Last week, our Gospel lesson told of Jesus condemning the temple for taking a widow's last cent. In today's reading, as Jesus and the disciples leave the temple, he predicts the destruction of the temple, and a discussion about the "end of time" begins.

# **Introduction for Reign of Christ B (Proper 29)**

[Sunday between November 20 and November 26 inclusive]

One of the newer holy days of the church year, the Reign of Christ, also known as Christ the King, was instituted in 1925 to celebrate Christ's present and future rule over humankind. The celebration is an appropriate way to end the liturgical year. As Advent opened the year with the church waiting in expectation for God-in-Christ to come to us, so the Reign of Christ looks forward to the consummation of God's reign of peace and justice in the final exaltation of Christ.

## **Oral Introductions for Individual Lections**

### **2 Samuel 23:1–7**

David's last words comprise our First Testament lection for today. In them he compares a just ruler to the rising sun.

### ***Psalm 132:1–12 (13–18)***

Psalm 132 is a royal psalm celebrating the covenant God established with David. The covenant was that one from the David's lineage would always sit on the throne of Israel.

### ***Revelation 1:4b–8***

Our Epistle reading is the opening letter to the seven churches in the "Apocalypse of John," or the book of Revelation. In the letter, John calls Jesus the ruler of kings on earth, who made us to be God's kingdom.

### ***John 18:33–37***

Our Gospel lection for the Reign of Christ is Jesus' trial before his crucifixion. Pilate asks Jesus if he is king of the Jews. Jesus responds by saying that his kingdom is not of the earth.