

Introductions for Reading Cumulatively through the Revised Common Lectionary

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Introduction for Liturgical Year C

The Church's calendar begins, not on January 1, but on the First Sunday of Advent, four Sundays before Christmas. Liturgical time is structured loosely around the progression of the story of the Christ Event. During the coming year our congregation—and all congregations and denominations that 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 in a three-year cycle—will hear the story of Christ primarily offered in the voice of the Gospel of Luke. With Advent beginning, it is helpful to remind ourselves of the liturgical year as a whole.

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 C

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, both the immediate future of our daily lives and in the culmination of time itself, often referred to in popular lingo 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 1C

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 centers on Jesus' promise just before his death that the Son of man will come with power and glory.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 33:14–16

The early church interpreted our First Testament lection as a prophecy about the coming of Christ, who was said to be of the lineage of David. In its original context, however, the oracle was spoken in response to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. The prophet presents God as promising to reestablish the Davidic throne and to restore Jerusalem.

Psalms 25:1–10

Today's psalm speaks of sin and troubles from which the one praying seeks deliverance. Especially appropriate for Advent is the language of waiting for God's salvation.

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

Paul sent Timothy to check up on the church in Thessalonica. When he returned to Paul and reported on their faithfulness, Paul wrote them the letter from which we are about to read. In this passage he praises them for that faithfulness and, in tones fitting for Advent, prays that they might remain so until the coming of the Lord.

Luke 21:25–36

Each year of the three-year lectionary cycle is centered on Matthew, Mark, or Luke. During the coming liturgical year, the Gospel reading for most Sundays will come from Luke. Every year the Gospel lection for the First Sunday of Advent is drawn from Jesus' speech that occurs just as he leaves the temple in Jerusalem for the last time during the week of his passion. The speech begins with Jesus predicting the fall of the temple and moves on to describe the promise of the coming of the Son of man.

Introduction for Advent 2C

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 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

Malachi 3:1–4

Our First Testament reading was chosen because the early church interpreted its language of a messenger preparing the way of the Lord in reference to John the Baptist. However, in its original context five centuries before John the Baptist, the prophet is speaking of the Lord coming to purify temple worship.

Luke 1:68–79

In place of a Psalter reading, this week we read the poetic speech Zechariah uttered at the circumcision of his newborn son, John. Interestingly, Luke presents Zechariah as prophesying first about Jesus who is yet to be born and only secondly about his own son who has just been born as the one who prepares the way for the Lord.

Philippians 1:3–11

Similar to letters today, ancient letters opened in formulaic ways. They began with a greeting and expression of thanks for the recipient. Paul, however, used these standard parts of letters to foreshadow what would follow in the body of the letter and to highlight central themes of his theology. In today's reading from Philippians, Paul gives thanks for the church at Philippi and expresses hope that they remain faithful until the day of Christ arrives.

Luke 3:1–6

Having listened to Malachi's prophecy concerning a messenger who would prepare the way of the Lord, and to Zechariah who prophesied that his son would prepare the way of the Lord, we now listen to Luke who tells in similar terms of the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist.

Introduction for Advent 3C

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

Zephaniah 3:14–20

Appropriate to the theme of rejoicing characteristic of the Third Sunday of Advent, the prophet Zephaniah calls Israel to celebrate their redemption and be hopeful about signs of salvation yet to come.

Isaiah 12:2–6

In place of a reading from the Psalter, today we listen to a song found in Isaiah. This song rejoices over God’s promised salvation.

Philippians 4:4–7

As with our Epistle reading for last week, this week we read from the letter to the Philippians. Resonating with our two readings from the First Testament, Paul calls the church to rejoice always, for the Lord is near. If we are tempted to hear in Paul’s call a naïve expression of joy, we need only remember that he wrote these words while in prison, awaiting possible execution.

Luke 3:7–18

Last week’s Gospel lesson was the passage in Luke that immediately precedes today’s reading. In it the narrator introduced John’s ministry in relation to Isaiah’s prophecy of one who would prepare the way of the Lord. In today’s text we hear John himself preaching a message of repentance after which he clarifies that he is not the Messiah, but the forerunner of the Messiah.

Introduction for Advent 4C

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

Micah 5:2–5a

The materials in the book of Micah seem to address a time when Judah was weak and under threat from the expanding Assyrian empire. The prophet views this threat as God's judgment. In our lection for today, however, the prophet claims a ruler will emerge from Bethlehem to shepherd God's people into a new day of peace and security. We read this oracle today because the early church interpreted it as reference to Jesus' birth.

Luke 1:47–55

The Gospel lection we will read later is the exchange between Mary and Elizabeth when the two mothers-to-be greet each other and Elizabeth recognizes that Mary is to be the mother of the Lord. In place of a Psalter reading, today we read the Magnificat, Mary's prophetic and poetic speech in response to that greeting.

OR Psalm 80:1–7

Psalm 80 is a prayer that God might save God's people from their enemies. In a tone that is fitting for the end of a season of waiting and expectation, the portion of the psalm we read today anxiously asks how long the people will have to wait for the Lord to come to save them.

Hebrews 10:5–10

Today's Epistle lection comes from Hebrews. It is a passage that reminds us that Christ came for our salvation by metaphorically comparing the need for repeated sacrifices with Christ who sacrificed for himself for us once for all.

Luke 1:39–45 (46–55)

In telling of how Jesus came to be born, the Gospel of Matthew focuses on Joseph. But in Luke the focus is on Mary. In today's Gospel reading, we hear the story of Mary traveling to be with Elizabeth after the angel told her that Elizabeth too is pregnant. The meeting of the two women foreshadows the roles their sons will play.

Christmas

Year C

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 today 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

[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.

Psalm 96

Psalm 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.

PROPER 2 AND 3 ON FOLLOWING PAGES

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.

PROPER 3 ON FOLLOWING PAGE

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 1C

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 actually focuses on Jesus in the temple at age twelve.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections¹

1 Samuel 2:18–20, 26

Our First Testament lection presents the boy Samuel serving in the temple before he comes into his own as the great prophet of Israel. Read today, this passage echoes forward to our Gospel lesson, which presents Jesus as a boy in the temple. The closing lines of the two readings parallel each other.

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.

Colossians 3:12–17

The author of Colossians calls his readers to live a new morality in Christ. With themes similar to that of our Psalter reading, this lection proposes a new morality that should lead to a new worship of gratitude and praise.

Luke 2:41–52

The story of Jesus in the temple at age twelve is the only story in the Gospels concerning Jesus' adolescence, just before he reached the age of his Bar Mitzvah. While the story demonstrates Jesus' very human process of growing up as a child, however, it also shows that even at this early age he had an awareness of his identity as God's Child.

¹In congregations that celebrate Epiphany Sunday on the Sunday before Jan. 6 when Jan. 6 falls on a day other than Sunday, there will never be a Second Sunday after Christmas. (In fact, if the Jan. 6 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 include John 1:[1–9] 10–18) for Christmas 1 in (some) years where there is only one Sunday after Christmas.

Introduction for Christmas 2C²

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 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.

²See previous note on Christmas 1.

Introduction for Epiphany, Year C

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 where 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 C

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 1C)

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

Isaiah 43:1–7

After Jerusalem was destroyed and many of its inhabitants were taken into exile, prophetic oracles shifted from announcing judgment to proclaiming deliverance. Today's reading from Isaiah offers a vision of returning home from exile. The reading is used on Baptism of the Lord because part of the imagery it employs for this act of salvation involves God protecting the people as they pass through the waters.

Psalms 29

Because of its emphasis on the voice of God, particularly 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 8:14–17

Every year on the Baptism of the Lord, the lectionary omits an Epistle reading and substitutes in its place a reading from Acts that deals with the early church's practice and understanding of baptism. Today's reading deals with the relationship between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Philip had evangelized the area of Samaria and had baptized a number of converts. But the apostles had to follow and lay hands on the converts so that they might receive the Spirit.

Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

The story of Jesus' baptism is the focal reading for today. Each Gospel has a version of the story that is significantly different from those in the other Gospels. Unique to Luke's version is the narrator's description of the baptism coming after the report that John the Baptist had been arrested. Moreover, in Luke the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus not as he is coming up out of the water, but after the baptism when he is praying alone.

Introduction for Epiphany 2C

When the Feast of Epiphany first developed 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. As the events were separated liturgically, the first miracle became associated with the Second Sunday after Epiphany.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Isaiah 62:1–5

Our First Testament lesson is a prayer for the restoration of Jerusalem after it was destroyed by the Babylonians. So radical is the transformation envisioned that the city will be given a new name in the same way that Jacob became Israel and Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah.

Psalms 36:5–10

Our Psalter reading comes from an individual's prayer for help. In the section we read, the one praying praises God for God's steadfast love and salvation in terms reminiscent of our First Testament lection.

1 Corinthians 12:1–11

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. The Sundays used to comprise Ordinary Time between the liturgical cycles focused on Christmas and Easter. One of the remnants of that tradition is that the Epistle readings for these Sundays for the three years of the lectionary cycle come from First and Second Corinthians without any significant thematic relation to the other readings. For the next three Sundays we will be reading from the middle of 1 Corinthians in which Paul is dealing with the conflict in the church over which spiritual gifts are the best.

John 2:1–11

Every year on the Second Sunday after Epiphany, the church reads from the early portion of the Gospel of John. This year we listen to the story of Jesus' first sign, the changing of water into wine, a traditional Epiphany story.

Introduction for Epiphany 3C

Following the celebration of Christ's nativity at Christmas and his revelation to the magi on Epiphany, the first two Sundays after Epiphany have focused on Jesus' baptism and first miracle. Beginning today the liturgical focus shifts to Luke's version of early events in Jesus' ministry.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5–6, 8–10

When Persia conquered the Babylonians in the sixth century before the Common Era and allowed the Israelites to return to Judea after the exile, those returning had two primary objectives. The first was physical: to restore the city and the temple. The second was social: the reestablishment of the Mosaic torah. Today's First Testament lection supports the second. It presents the priest Ezra leading a ceremonial reading of torah.

Psalms 19

Psalms 19 is a song of praise celebrating the revelation of God's glory in creation and in torah. This is an appropriate song of praise to read in response to our First Testament lection, in which Ezra reads the torah to those returned from exile.

1 Corinthians 12:12–31a

Last week we began reading through the midsection of 1 Corinthians, in which Paul addresses the church's conflict over spiritual gifts. In that passage he claimed that there are many spiritual gifts, but one Spirit who gives them. In today's reading, Paul extends that argument by claiming that the church is the one body of Christ with many members, all of whom are needed.

Luke 4:14–21

As our First Testament reading focused on the public reading of torah, so does our Gospel reading open with the reading of scripture in the synagogue. In Luke's version of Jesus' inaugural sermon, Jesus reads from Isaiah and claims that he is the fulfillment of the prophecy. The strong social justice tone of the Isaiah passage establishes Jesus' ministry as a prophetic ministry.

Introduction for Epiphany 4C

Today we read Jeremiah's account of his call as a prophet and Jesus' initial sermon in which he defines his mission. Both passages present a view of ministry that involves a difficult message for hearers. We also continue to read through 1 Corinthians as Paul addresses a church divided over spiritual gifts.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 1:4–10

Jeremiah describes his calling to be a prophet in a manner similar to other call stories in the First Testament. God calls Jeremiah; Jeremiah resists with claims of inadequacy; God promises to equip Jeremiah; and then God tells Jeremiah what he is to prophesy.

Psalms 71:1–6

Psalms 71 is the prayer of an aged person seeking help in a time of distress. In the portion we read today, the Psalmist claims to have leaned on God from the time of his birth in language reminiscent of Jeremiah's claim that God called him before he was born.

1 Corinthians 13:1–13

For the last two Sundays we read from 1 Corinthians 12, in which Paul addressed the church's schism over what spiritual gifts are the best to possess—specifically, some were arguing that speaking in tongues is the greatest gift. Paul argued that a diversity of gifts is essential within the unity of the body of Christ. In today's reading, Paul extends his argument to say that actually the greatest spiritual gift is love—a gift all possess and can exercise.

Luke 4:21–30

Last week our Gospel lection was the story of Jesus opening his ministry in his hometown by claiming that he was the one anointed to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Today's lection continues with that scene in the synagogue as Jesus compares his ministry to acts of ministry Elijah and Elisha performed for Gentiles.

Introduction for Epiphany 5C

Last week the lectionary readings focused on Jeremiah's call and Jesus' opening act of ministry. This week that theme of beginnings continues as we read of the call of Isaiah and of Jesus' first disciples. Also, in our reading of 1 Corinthians we shift from the middle of the letter to the closing section.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Isaiah 6:1–8 (9–13)

Last week we read Jeremiah's account of his call to be a prophet. This week we turn to Isaiah's story of his call. It opens with a vision of worship in the heavenly court. Isaiah resists the call claiming to have unclean lips; God cleanses Isaiah; and then God tells him what he is to prophesy.

Psalms 138

Psalms 138 is a song of thanksgiving for God having answered a prayer of distress. The psalm's language of worship and praise echoes Isaiah's vision of heavenly worship.

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Over the last few weeks, we have been reading through 1 Corinthians 12–13, in which Paul is addressing the conflict over what spiritual gifts are the greatest. In chapter 15 Paul shifts his attention to some in the church who claim there is no resurrection of the dead to come. Over the next few weeks we will read Paul's complicated rebuttal of this claim. We begin with the opening of the chapter, in which Paul retells the story of Jesus' resurrection as a foundation for his argument.

Luke 5:1–11

In tandem with the account of Isaiah's call as a prophet, our Gospel lection offers Luke's version of Jesus calling the first disciples to follow him. Unlike the version in Matthew and Mark in which Jesus calls fishermen on shore, here Jesus is in Simon's boat.

Introduction for Epiphany 6C (Proper 1)

During the year that the lectionary focuses on the Gospel of Matthew, we read from the Sermon on the Mount during Epiphany. This year we turn to Luke's version of the Sermon on the Plain. It opens with the Beatitudes and Woes.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 17:5–10

Our reading from Jeremiah is less a prophetic oracle and more an example of wisdom poetry with themes like those found in Proverbs. Those who trust in God will be blessed like trees planted by water while those who trust in human strength will be cursed like a shrub in the desert.

Psalms 1

Psalms 1 is a wisdom poem similar to Jeremiah 17. Those who delight in torah are blessed like trees planted by water, and those who are wicked are cursed like chaff in the wind.

1 Corinthians 15:12–20

Last week we began reading through chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. The chapter opened with Paul reminding the church of the tradition of the risen Jesus appearing to different individuals and groups. This tradition serves as the foundation for Paul's argument against those who claim there is no resurrection of the dead to come. He turns to that argument in today's Epistle lesson.

Luke 6:17–26

As we saw in our First Testament readings, the pattern of blessings and curses is ancient. Luke portrays Jesus as opening his Sermon on the Plain with that same pattern. In contrast to Matthew's "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Luke's blessings and woes begin simply with "Blessed are you who are poor."

Introduction for Epiphany 7C (Proper 2)

Jesus instructs us to love our enemies. Our First Testament lections for the day show how this ethic was part of ancient tradition.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Genesis 45:3–11, 15

According to Genesis, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, but he rose to power with Pharaoh's government. When a famine arises in the land, his brothers come to Egypt to seek help, only to find themselves at the mercy of Joseph himself. And indeed Joseph does show mercy, exemplifying the ethic of loving one's enemy held up in our Gospel lection.

Psalms 37:1–11, 39–40

Psalms 37 is a lengthy instructional poem in which each line begins with a different line of the Hebrew alphabet. The opening and closing of the psalm remind us of Joseph in our reading from Genesis in that they call for one to patiently wait for God's salvation and not to seek wrath against wrongdoers.

1 Corinthians 15:35–38, 42–50

For the last two weeks our Epistle lection has been drawn from 1 Corinthians 15, in which Paul argues against those who claim there is no bodily resurrection of the dead yet to come. In today's passage, the apostle attempts to describe what he means by "bodily."

Luke 6:27–38

Last week, we began reading through the Sermon on the Plain in the Gospel of Luke. As we continue working through that discourse, we listen as Jesus presents a radical ethic in which we are called to love our enemies.

Introduction for Epiphany 8C (Proper 3)

While we continue this week reading through chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, which deals with the resurrection of the body, the other readings from the First Testament coalesce with the Gospel lection in their use of wisdom motifs and metaphors from the world of plants.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Isaiah 55:10–13

Using imagery drawn from wisdom traditions, the poem we read from Isaiah 55 claims that God's word will be fruitful and nature shall respond with worship.

Psalms 92:1–4, 12–15

Psalms 92 is a psalm for Sabbath worship. We read from the opening and closing. In the fashion of wisdom literature, the closing declares the righteous to be like flourishing foliage.

1 Corinthians 15:51–58

Over the last three weeks, our Epistle lections have focused our attention on 1 Corinthians 15: Paul's argument concerning the resurrection of the dead yet to come. Today we read the close of that chapter, in which Paul celebrates God's victory over the power of death.

Luke 6:39–49

At the center of our Gospel lesson for today, which comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, Jesus uses traditional wisdom to declare that people's character is revealed in their behavior. Using language drawn from nature, he says that a good tree does not produce bad fruit.

Introduction for Transfiguration of the Lord, Year C

On the First Sunday after Epiphany, 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 in which Jesus' glory was revealed to his inner group of disciples.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Exodus 24:29–35

Our First Testament passage follows a covenant ceremony where the Israelites declare that they will be obedient to all that the Lord has spoken and where Moses is called up to God on the mountain to receive the stone tablets containing the torah. In imagery the Gospel writers borrow to describe Jesus' transfiguration, Moses' face is made to shine by his encounter with God on the mountain. So awesome is the sight of his face that he wears a veil so that the Israelites will not be afraid.

Psalms 99

Our Psalter reading celebrates the Lord's royalty. God's holy rule is described in terms of great power and justice. The psalm is fitting for today because it names Moses, who appears in both our First Testament and Gospel readings, as one of the great priests who called upon the Lord and because it recalls that God spoke to the great priests in the pillar of cloud.

2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2

In our Epistle lesson for today, Paul draws on the tradition named in our reading from Exodus where Moses puts on a veil to cover his shining face. He uses the image metaphorically to present the old covenant whereas those under the new covenant are, with unveiled faces, transformed by God's glory.

Luke 9:28–36 (37–43)

As with Luke's version of Jesus' baptism, the story of the transfiguration is set when Jesus is at prayer. Also unique to Luke's version of this story is the fact that Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about his "exodus" that is to come in Jerusalem. This reference prepares the church, even as it closes the season celebrating God's revelation in Christ, for the story of Jesus' death and resurrection toward which Lent will take us.

Lent

Year C

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 speaks of Sundays *in* Lent as opposed to Sundays *of* Lent (compare the Sundays *of* Advent).

Introduction for Ash Wednesday, Year C

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

The 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 1C

The First Sunday in Lent each year 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 forty days of Lent: spiritual practices that we are tempted to forego.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Deuteronomy 26:1–11

The First Testament readings for the Sundays in Lent paint the salvation history presented in the First Testament in broad strokes. Today's reading is a liturgy for the tithing of first fruits in the promised land. Words to be spoken include a creedal-like recitation of the nation's origins.

Psalms 91:1–2, 9–16

As our reading from Deuteronomy recites God's redemptive acts of establishing Israel, so Psalm 91 is a wisdom psalm that professes confidence in God's protection.

Romans 10:8b–13

Echoing our First Testament reading's use of a creedal-like recitation, Paul speaks of confessing Jesus as Lord as a complement to belief in the resurrection. Indeed, Paul draws on a different passage from Deuteronomy—from chapter 30—to make his argument.

Luke 4:1–13

After the Spirit descends on Jesus following his baptism, it leads him into the wilderness to be tested by Satan. In Luke's version of the temptation, the last test Jesus undergoes takes place in Jerusalem, foreshadowing that Jesus would fulfill his mission in the city. It is there that Satan quotes from Psalm 91, which we read earlier, to tempt Jesus to test God's providential care.

Introduction for Lent 2C

The Second Sunday in Lent flows from last week's readings. The lectionary keeps the church reading through Israel's salvation history in our First Testament lection and continues to foreshadow Jesus' death in Jerusalem in our Gospel reading.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18

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. This week we focus on Abraham and read of God promising to protect Abraham and give him many descendants in an ancient covenant ceremony.

Psalms 27

In our reading from Genesis, God promised to be Abraham's shield. Likewise, Psalm 27 is a song of confidence and trust in which the psalmist declares that God is a stronghold against enemies.

Philippians 3:17—4:1

In our Epistle lection, Paul calls on the Philippians to imitate him in living as citizens of heaven. But he warns that those who live as enemies of the cross and seek only self-pleasure will end in destruction.

Luke 13:31–35

In today's Gospel reading, the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod is out to kill him. But Jesus tells them that, like all of the prophets, he must die in Jerusalem. Jesus then laments over Jerusalem.

Introduction for Lent 3C

On the Third Sunday of Lent, the symbol of water as God's gift of salvation weaves itself through several of the lections. Meshed with this is the call to a faithful, penitential life. These themes connect in a way that reminds us that Lent is a season of preparing for baptism into the Christian life.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Isaiah 55:1–9

Our First Testament lesson is a prophetic text composed as an invitation from God to come to a banquet celebrating the restoration of the nation under God's reign. The restoration is symbolized in the opening words that those who thirst should come to the waters.

Psalms 63:1–8

Reminiscent of God's invitation to the waters in Isaiah, Psalm 63 opens with language of the soul thirsting for God in a land where there is no water. This psalm begins as a lament, a prayer for help, but as with many laments shifts in the end to express confidence in God's providence.

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

As water is an important metaphor in the First Testament readings, so is it prominent in our Epistle lection. Paul interprets the story of Moses getting water from the rock as part of a lengthy exhortation against idolatry. It begins with a description of all of the Israelites drinking the spiritual drink but moves to some of them committing idolatry.

Luke 13:1–9

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus points out that those who suffer at the hands of moral or natural evil do not so because they have sinned. Instead, all need to repent; or, like a fig tree that produces no fruit, they will wither.

Introduction for Lent 4C

The scripture readings for the Fourth Sunday in Lent focus on divine redemption. This theme is explored from a number of perspectives: entering the promised land, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the lost being found.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Joshua 5:9–12

During Lent, the First Testament readings often emphasize key moments in Israel's salvation history. Today the event highlighted is the shift from Israel being a wandering people for whom God provided heavenly manna on a day-to-day basis to being a stationary people living off the produce of the promised land. How appropriate it is that that transition was marked with the celebration of the Passover meal, which was first celebrated as Israel was delivered from Egypt.

Psalms 32

Our reading from Joshua concerned Israel claiming the Promised Land, which symbolized the removal of Israel's disgrace of being held captive in Egypt. Our Psalter reading echoes this theme. It is a penitential psalm celebrating the removal of sin.

2 Corinthians 5:16–21

The emphasis on salvation found in the First Testament continues in the lesson from 2 Corinthians. Paul speaks of God making Christ to be sin so that we might be reconciled to God.

Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32

Our Gospel lection is the familiar parable of the prodigal son. At the end of the parable, the elder son protests that the father accepts the younger son back home after he has squandered his inheritance. The father responds with words that both echo themes of redemption in our other readings for the day and foreshadow the celebration to come in the season of Easter: "This brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Introduction for Lent 5C

On this last Sunday before Holy Week, the readings foreshadow where we have been heading throughout Lent: Easter. It may seem premature to focus on resurrection on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, but the theme is lifted up in a manner that foreshadows Jesus being raised from the dead as well as reminding us that resurrection always lies in our future, not just in the biblical past.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections for Lent 5C

Isaiah 43:16–21

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

Psalms 126

Our reading from Isaiah envisioned a restored Israel after the exile using the metaphor of a river being established in the desert. Likewise, our Psalter reading begins by recalling how God restored Jerusalem and asks in turn that God again restore the fortunes of those praying. Such restoration is compared to filling the dry beds of the desert with watercourses.

Philippians 3:4b–14

As the church draws toward the end of Lent and the beginning of Eastertide, it turns to Philippians, in which Paul speaks of sharing in the sufferings of Christ so that he might know the power of Christ's resurrection.

John 12:1–8

Every year during Lent, we turn for part of the season to the Gospel of John. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, foreshadowing his own resurrection to come. This sign (or miracle) causes the religious authorities to begin to plot against him, seeking both his life and that of Lazarus. However, Mary, Lazarus' sister, responds by anointing Jesus as an expression of thanksgiving. This act foreshadows Jesus' death and burial.

Introduction for Holy Week, Year C

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 C

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.

Luke 19:28–40

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. Unique to Luke's version is the closing dialogue with the Pharisees who try to dampen the celebration.

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.

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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.

Luke 22:14—23:56

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. In Luke's version of these stories, Jesus is repeatedly presented as an innocent martyr.

Introduction for Holy Monday, Year C

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 Luke'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 C

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 the 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 C

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 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 C

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 come 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 C

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 C

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 is found 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 C

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 C

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 each year, 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 altered to fit with the 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.

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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 reading 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 near-death oppression.

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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 144, 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.

Luke 24:1–12

Our Gospel reading for tonight is the story of the discovery of the empty tomb. In Luke's version, the women encounter in the tomb not a young man (as in Mark) or an angel (as in Matthew) but two men in dazzling clothes who tell them that Jesus is risen from the dead.

Introduction for Easter Day, Year C

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 15:19–26

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. In this passage, Paul refers to Christ’s resurrection as the first fruits of all who will be raised from the dead.

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 Luke 24:1–12

On Easter Sunday every year, we join the women in discovering that the tomb is empty. In Luke’s version of the story, the women encounter in the tomb not a young man (as in Mark) or an angel (as in Matthew) but two men in dazzling clothes who tell them that Jesus is risen from the dead.

Introduction for Easter Evening, Year C

[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 proper, 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.

Psalm 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 proceeds 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 2C

On the first three Sundays of Easter, the church remembers the risen Christ appearing to followers. Although we do not celebrate Pentecost until the last day of Eastertide, today we hear a different 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 5:27–32

In Acts 5, the apostles are arrested for preaching and healing in the temple. But an angel of the Lord frees them from the prison in the middle of the night and instructs them to return to their ministry in the temple. Our reading for today is the scene in which the religious authorities question the apostles after they apprehend them a second time.

Psalms 118:14–29

Psalms 118 is a lengthy prayer in which one gives thanks for God's deliverance from one's enemies. Today the line that rings out 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 rejected stone 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.

OR Psalm 150

Psalms 150 draws the Psalter to a close with a doxology in which all of creation praises God. The call to sing God's glory is especially fitting for the season of Easter in which we celebrate the resurrection.

Revelation 1:4–8

During Eastertide this year, our Epistle readings come from portions of the book of Revelation, also known as the "Apocalypse of John." While Revelation is not technically an Epistle, it does open with a letter from John to the seven churches in Asia. The "Apocalypse" is a bizarre, symbolic vision of the end of the world offered to Christians being persecuted by the Roman Empire in order to comfort them and give them the hope needed to persevere through the oppression.

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 his account of what happened that evening when he 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 risen Jesus the others had.

If Luke 24:1–12 was read on Easter Sunday:

Last Sunday we read Luke's version of the discovery of the empty tomb. Today we shift to John's Gospel, where we will remain for most of Eastertide. We also shift from the story of Easter morning to the story of Easter evening, 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 3C

On the first three Sundays of Easter, the church remembers the risen Christ appearing to his followers. Today we read of Jesus having breakfast by the Sea of Galilee. We also read of Paul's epiphany of the risen Jesus in the book of Acts, listen to a psalm in which one offers thanks for being rescued from death, and witness the heavenly worship of the exalted Lamb.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Acts 9:1–6 (7–20)

In last week's reading from Acts, we listened to Peter's response to the persecution of the apostles when they ministered in the temple. This week's reading is God's response to one particular persecutor—Paul. God responds by calling him into Christian service.

Psalms 30

Psalms 30 is a prayer of thanksgiving for God having delivered the psalmist from serious illness. The prayer is filled with language of rescue from death that resonates with the themes of Easter.

Revelation 5:11–14

Throughout Eastertide, we are reading from Revelation, which was written to offer hope to Christians who were being persecuted. The book is an account of John's vision of being carried up to heaven where he witnessed the unfolding of God's apocalyptic assault on the evil powers that caused the church's suffering. Today's lesson comes from the opening of that vision, in which John observes worship taking place in the heavenly throne room.

John 21:1–19

Last week's Gospel reading was John's version of the risen Jesus appearing to the disciples in Jerusalem on the evening of Easter. Today we read of a later appearance by the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus calls Peter to his post-resurrection ministry.

Introduction for Easter 4C

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

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Acts 9:36–43

Although the season of Easter is beginning to shift its focus from celebrating the empty tomb to preparing for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the theme of resurrection continues in the life of the church. In today's reading from Acts, Peter raises a disciple from the dead.

Psalms 23

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

Revelation 7:9–17

Our Epistle readings for Eastertide come from the "Apocalypse of John," which was written to offer hope to Christians who were being persecuted. Key to the first half of the book is a heavenly vision of the opening of seven seals that reveal the tribulations that God will send upon the earth before the return of Christ. Today's lection comes from a passage that explains what will happen to believers on earth when these tribulations come and how the Lamb will save them.

John 10:22–30

Each year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Gospel reading comes from John 10, which uses a variety of metaphors drawn from shepherding practices of Jesus' day. In this year's lection, some ask Jesus if he is the Messiah. Jesus' answer asserts that they refuse to see that he is, but that his sheep know his voice.

Introduction for Easter 5C

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 the ascension and Pentecost, the last three Sundays focus on Jesus preparing his disciples for his departure and the gift of the Spirit.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Acts 11:1–18

In Acts 10, Peter preaches to the household of Cornelius the centurion and converts the first Gentiles to the Christian faith. In Acts 11, from which we read today, Peter reports back to the Jerusalem church concerning what happened. He explains how the Holy Spirit gave him a vision of God declaring unclean animals to be clean, thus symbolically removing the barrier between Jew and Gentile.

Psalms 148

Psalms 148 is a hymn of praise in which the psalmist calls the entire cosmos, all of heaven and earth, to join in a chorus of doxology.

Revelation 21:1–6

For the first four weeks of Eastertide we have read passages from the first half of Revelation. For the remaining weeks, we turn to the last two chapters of the book, where we read of John's vision of the victory that follows the apocalyptic battles between God and Satan. This salvation is imagined in terms of a new heaven and a new earth.

John 13:31–35

Today's Gospel lection comes from Jesus' farewell discourse to the disciples before his death. It may seem odd to read from the farewell discourse given that we have already commemorated Jesus' death and resurrection. But for the Gospel of John, the glorification of which Jesus speaks as his "departure" involves his death, resurrection, and exaltation.

Introduction for Easter 6C

The lections for today offer an expansive view of God's salvation. As the church prepares for the celebrations of ascension and Pentecost, which include the risen Christ's commission to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, our readings remind us that the good news belongs to all the nations.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections for Easter 6C

Acts 16:9–15

Last week in Acts, we read of Peter's vision that led him to remove the boundary between Jew and Gentile in the church. This week we read of Paul's vision of a man calling him to the Roman district of Macedonia. There he meets the Gentile woman Lydia, proclaims to her the good news, and baptizes her household.

Psalms 67

Our Psalter reading is a prayer of blessing. In concert with the reading from Acts, which ends with a Jewish apostle staying in the home of a Gentile, Psalm 67 calls all nations to sing God's praise.

Revelation 21:10, 22—22:5

Last week as we read from the book of Revelation, we heard of John's vision of salvation imagined in terms of a new heaven and a new earth. Today that vision is extended to a picture of God creating a New Jerusalem for all the nations to replace the one destroyed by the Roman Empire. Through the middle of the new city will flow a river of the water of life.

John 14:23–29

As with last week's Gospel reading, this week we read from Jesus' farewell discourse in the Fourth Gospel. In this passage John presents Jesus as promising his disciples that God will send the Holy Spirit when he departs.

OR John 5:1–9

As our reading from the book of Revelation envisioned a New Jerusalem with a river of life-giving water flowing through it, so our Gospel lesson is set at a pool of water in Jerusalem that was believed to have healing powers. However, as the story unfolds, we see Jesus healing one who cannot make it into the pool.

Introduction for Ascension, Year C

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.

Psalms 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 books of Luke and Acts are penned by the same hand, they do not tell exactly the same ascension story. Our Gospel lesson complements the reading from Acts.

Introduction for Easter 7C

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 for Easter 7C

Acts 16:16–34

Earlier during Eastertide, we read from Acts 5, where the Apostles were arrested in Jerusalem but rescued by an angel. In today's reading from Acts 16, Paul and Silas are similarly imprisoned for healing a slave woman possessed by a spirit of divination. While they are singing hymns and praying in the middle of the night, a miraculous earthquake unlocks their chains and cells. Paul and Silas, however, do not flee, but stay and proclaim the Gospel to their prison guard.

Psalms 97

Psalms 97 is an enthronement hymn, celebrating God's rule over the world. Echoing our reading from Acts, this psalm combines themes of worship and awesome signs of God's power found in nature.

Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21

As Eastertide winds down, so does our series of readings from the "Apocalypse of John." Our final lection comes from the epilogue of the book, which both restates that as creation was God's so is the final salvation and claims that the contents of the book are to be held as sacred.

John 17:20–26

Our Gospel lesson comes from Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples in the Gospel of John. Jesus closes this discourse with a prayer for the disciples and for those who will be brought into the Christian faith by their ministry.

Introduction for Pentecost, Year C

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.

Psalms 104:24–34, 35b

Psalms 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 8:14–17

In Romans 8, Paul presents his understanding of life in the Spirit. In the section drawn from that discourse for today's Epistle lesson, we hear Paul speak of God's Spirit as leading us to be children of God.

John 14:8–17, (25–27)

In our reading from the Fourth Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus responds by speaking of the intimacy of identification between himself and the God he reveals. Jesus then goes on to speak of the coming Spirit as participating in that intimacy.

Ordinary Time (Season after Pentecost) Year C

[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 First Testament lections focus on the prophets. They are arranged in chronological order, beginning with narratives focusing on Elijah and Elisha in the ninth century B.C.E. and ending with the postexilic prophets of the sixth century B.C.E. Extended attention is given to Jeremiah.

Epistles: During the Season after Pentecost this year, the Epistle readings jump around in the New Testament. They begin with Galatians and Colossians, move to the middle of Hebrews (the first part of Hebrews was read last year during Ordinary Time), and then end up with the Pastoral Epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy.

Gospel: As with liturgical time since Advent, the church continues to read in the Gospel of Luke. During the Sundays after Epiphany we read through the section where Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth, called his first disciples, and preached his Sermon on the Plain. During Ordinary Time our lections pick up at that point and move us through the rest of Luke's account of the Galilean ministry and the travel narrative to Jerusalem.

Introduction for Trinity Sunday, Year C

[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

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31

On Trinity Sunday we honor God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Today's reading from the First Testament speaks of God creating through Wisdom personified. While Wisdom is often associated with the Holy Spirit, this passage served as the basis for John's description of God creating through the Word.

Psalms 8

As our First Testament reading spoke of God as creator, so does Psalm 8 praise God for the glory of creation. The psalmist especially wonders at the place God has given to humanity in the creation.

Romans 5:1–5

With our First Testament readings, we reflected on God as creator. Our passage from Romans lifts up God as redeemer. God justifies us through Jesus Christ and pours God's love into us through the Holy Spirit.

John 16:12–15

In our scripture readings so far, we have focused on God's roles as Creator and Redeemer. Our Gospel lection comes from Jesus' farewell discourse to the disciples in the Fourth Gospel. In this passage, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come to the disciples to sustain them after his departure.

Proper 4C

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

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

1 Kings 18:20–21 (22–29) 30–39

During the Season after Pentecost this year, readings from the First Testament focus on Israel's prophetic tradition. The series of readings opens with the story of Elijah. The narrative of

1 Kings dates Elijah's ministry to the ninth century B.C.E., a time when King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were pushing Israel to combine their worship of the God of Abraham with worship of Baal. In today's lection, Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to a prophetic duel.

Psalm 96

Echoing our First Testament lesson, Psalm 96 speaks of the glory and righteous judgment of Israel's God, declaring all the gods of other nations as false idols.

Galatians 1:1–12

Paul's letters usually begin with a standard greeting and prayer of thanksgiving. Today we begin reading from the letter to the Galatians, but its opening has no prayer of thanksgiving. This is because Paul wrote to chastise the church for forsaking his interpretation of the Gospel for that offered by rival missionaries who have appeared in his absence.

Luke 7:1–10

Since Advent, Luke has been the primary Gospel from which we have read. Indeed, during the Season after Epiphany, we began reading through the Gospel of Luke in order. Specifically, we spent a number of Sundays working through Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth and his Sermon on the Plain. As Ordinary Time begins, we pick up where we left off after Epiphany. For the next few weeks we read from the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry with stories of Jesus bringing salvation to various individuals.

Proper 5C

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

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

1 Kings 17:8–16 (17–24)

In today's First Testament lection, Elijah makes a jar of meal last throughout a drought and raises a widow's dead son. The first miracle echoes back to God sustaining the Israelites in the wilderness with the gift of manna. The second miracle is echoed by our Gospel reading for today, when Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead.

Psalms 146

Psalms 146 is a hymn of praise. It celebrates God's care for the suffering and oppressed. Lifting up a recurring biblical theme and echoing our First Testament lection, the psalm speaks of God upholding the widow.

Galatians 1:11–24

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians to chastise the church for forsaking his interpretation of the Gospel for that offered by Jewish Christian missionaries who have appeared in his absence. In today's lection, Paul offers one of his most detailed autobiographical references. In order to ground his proclamation in God's initiative as opposed to his own, Paul describes his apostolic calling.

Luke 7:11–17

We begin Ordinary Time by reading through the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry according to Luke, focusing on stories in which Jesus brings salvation to various individuals. Today's Gospel lection is the raising of the widow's son in Nain.

Proper 6C

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

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

1 Kings 21:1–10 (11–14) 15–21a

When the Israelites asked Samuel to give them a king, he warned them that kings take from their people. Today's First Testament reading illustrates that truth. Queen Jezebel has Naboth killed so that King Ahab can take his vineyard. But, in response, God instructs Elijah to pronounce judgment on the royal couple. In Elijah's words to the king, we hear a central theme of the prophetic tradition: God's justice.

Psalms 5:1–8

Our Psalter reading is a prayer for help. It speaks of God as a judge who will provide refuge for the oppressed and will bring to naught those who are arrogant, deceitful, and bloodthirsty.

Galatians 2:15–21

Paul wrote to the Galatians to convince the church not to forsake his interpretation of the Gospel for that proclaimed by Jewish Christian missionaries who appeared while he was away. Specifically, what is at stake is whether Gentiles must become Jewish to be fully Christian. In today's Epistle lesson, Paul emphatically rejects such a claim, arguing instead that all are justified completely through God's initiative in Christ.

Luke 7:36—8:3

Many of the stories we find in Luke's version of Jesus' ministry in Galilee focus on salvation he offers to individuals. Most of these passages, like those we read for the last two weeks, are healing stories. In this week's Gospel lesson, however, a woman anoints Jesus' feet to thank him for forgiving her sins.

Proper 7C

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

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

1 Kings 19:1–4 (5–7) 8–15a

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel tried to merge the worship of Baal with Israel's religion in the ninth century B.C.E. The prophet Elijah, however, resisted their efforts to the point of killing the prophets of Baal. In today's reading, Jezebel hears of Elijah's victory over the Baal prophets and seeks to have him killed in turn, so Elijah flees in fear. God meets him on Mount Horeb, the mountain where Moses encountered God, but sends him back down the mountain to continue his ministry in Israel.

Psalms 42 and 43

Although modern Bibles divide Psalms 42 and 43, they were originally two parts of a single prayer of an individual who is under serious threat from enemies. The one praying seeks help from God who has been silent.

Galatians 3:23–29

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians to address Gentile Christians who had been influenced by Jewish Christian missionaries' message that a person had to be circumcised to become fully Christian. In today's lection, Paul claims that the law was necessary because of human transgression, but it was temporary until God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

Luke 8:26–39

In Luke's version of Jesus' Galilean ministry, Jesus brings salvation to individuals through healing, resurrection, and forgiveness. In today's lesson from Luke, Jesus brings salvation by casting out a host of demons.

Proper 8C

[Sunday between June 26 and July 2 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

2 Kings 2:1–2, 6–14

When Elijah fled to Mount Horeb to escape Queen Jezebel's wrath, God sent him back down the mountain and told him to appoint Elisha as his prophetic successor. Elijah obeyed God's instruction and called Elisha to follow him as a disciple. In today's lesson, we hear of God carrying Elijah away in a whirlwind, and Elisha taking his place in offering prophetic leadership in Israel.

Psalms 77:1–2, 11–20

One way the ancient stories of Israel demonstrate that God had chosen a prophet to lead the people was to tell stories of God dividing waters for them. As God separated the Red Sea for Moses, so did God divide the Jordan River for Joshua, Elijah, and finally Elisha. Although today's Psalter reading is a prayer for help, it is full of hope based on the tradition of God as One who brought salvation through the waters.

Galatians 5:1, 13–25

The letter to the Galatians is Paul's attempt to persuade the Gentile recipients not to be circumcised, because he believes that such an action calls into question God's justification of all through Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, trusting in God's free gift of salvation does not mean one should sin freely. In today's Epistle reading, Paul claims that those baptized into the Christian faith should respond to God's grace by living by the Spirit instead of indulging in works of the flesh.

Luke 9:51–62

Today's lection is a key transition point for Luke. Following his Galilean ministry, Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem and begins an approximately ten-chapter journey to the cross and resurrection. It is in this "travel narrative" that Luke collects most of Jesus' teaching. Almost all of our Gospel lections for the rest of the Sundays after Pentecost will come from this section of the Third Gospel.

Proper 9C

[Sunday between July 3 and July 9 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

2 Kings 5:1–14

In last week's First Testament lesson, we read of Elisha taking Elijah's place as the prophetic leader in Israel in the ninth century B.C.E. Today we see him perform a healing miracle similar to those performed by Elijah. Naaman, a Syrian, is cured of a skin disease.

Psalms 30

In response to the story of Elisha healing Naaman, we read a psalm that is a song of thanksgiving for healing. The one praying poetically expresses the experience of illness taking her or him from prosperity to the point of death. But God brought the one praying back to the fullness of life.

Galatians 6:(1–6) 7–16

In last week's Epistle lection, Paul argued that those baptized into the Christian faith should respond to God's free gift of justification through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ by living by the Spirit instead of indulging in works of the flesh. In today's reading from Galatians, Paul extends that argument into the section of practical, ethical instruction that follows the body of the letter.

Luke 10:1–11, 16–20

In our Gospel lection for last week, Luke told us that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." With those words, Luke began his travel narrative, in which he presents Jesus as teaching and training his disciples en route to the cross and resurrection. In today's reading from Luke, Jesus sends out seventy to minister as he ministers.

Proper 10C

[Sunday between July 10 and July 16 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Amos 7:7–17

Today we turn from reading narratives about the early prophets that are found in Israel's historical books to reading from the prophetic books of the First Testament themselves. We start with the eighth-century prophets who followed in Elijah and Elisha's ninth-century footsteps. Specifically we start with Amos, whose central message is one of divine judgment against Israel and its neighbors for socioeconomic injustice. Today's lection lifts up this theme and provides a biographical snapshot of Amos.

Psalms 82

Our Psalter reading shares themes of judgment with Amos. Psalm 82 is a prayer calling upon God to bring justice to the weak and the oppressed.

Colossians 1:1–14

For the last few weeks our Epistle readings have been drawn from the letter to the Galatians, in which Paul attempts to dissuade the Gentile church from following the instruction to be circumcised offered by rival Jewish Christian missionaries. In similar fashion, the letter to the Colossians is focused on a threat to Pauline teaching. Here, however, the issue is not submission to Jewish torah but to heretical teaching concerning asceticism and worship practices that seem to be drawn from Hellenistic culture. Today we begin reading a series of lections taken from Colossians.

Luke 10:25–37

In last week's Gospel lection, we read of Jesus sending out the seventy to heal the sick and proclaim the reign of God. When they returned victorious over evil, Jesus offered a prayer of thanks that God had shown them what had been hidden from political and religious leaders. At that very moment, the occasion of today's Gospel lesson, a religious leader addresses Jesus to test him.

Proper 11C

[Sunday between July 17 and July 23 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Amos 8:1–12

Last week in our First Testament lection we heard of Amos' vision of God judging Israel as a wall is judged by a plumb line. Similarly, today Amos proclaims the end of Israel using the image of a basket of summer fruit. The image is based on a pun: in Hebrew the word for summer fruit is "qayitz" and the word for end is "qetz."

Psalm 52

Psalm 52 announces judgment against a powerful one who perpetuates evil against the righteous. In the end, the righteous can trust in God's justice.

Colossians 1:15–28

The letter to the Colossians was written to warn those in the church against submitting to teaching concerning asceticism and worship practices that contradicted the Pauline approach to the Christian Gospel. In today's lection, the author, who is probably a disciple of Paul writing in Paul's name, offers a hymn about Christ to demonstrate the core of the Gospel and to establish its trustworthiness.

Luke 10:38–42

In the section of Luke usually called the travel narrative, Jesus is presented as being on a long, meandering journey to Jerusalem. Jesus teaches his followers about discipleship and ministry as well as healing—and preaching to—various people he encounters on the way. More than any of the other Gospels, Luke presents women as playing a significant role in Jesus' ministry as followers. In today's lection, Jesus encounters Martha and Mary.

Proper 12C

[Sunday between July 24 and July 30 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Hosea 1:2–10

The early years of the Israelite monarchy—during the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon—was a time in which the twelve tribes of Israel were united as one kingdom. Upon Solomon’s death, however, the kingdom divided into a Northern Kingdom called Israel and a Southern Kingdom called Judah. Most of the eighth-century prophets, like Amos, came from the Southern Kingdom even if they prophesied about the Northern Kingdom. Hosea is the only First Testament book of a prophet from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He uses metaphors drawn from marriage and family life to proclaim his message.

Psalms 85

Our First Testament lection proclaimed God’s judgment on Israel’s unfaithfulness. Yet it ended with God’s promise to restore the people. Similarly, Psalm 85 is a communal prayer for help. In this prayer the people seek restoration as God has restored them in the past.

Colossians 2:6–15 (16–19)

The Pauline disciple who wrote Colossians was concerned with dissuading the church from adhering to teaching concerning asceticism and worship practices that were contrary to the Christian Gospel. In today’s lesson, the author rejects the false, extraneous teachings on the basis of the fullness of life in Christ.

Luke 11:1–13

Prayer plays a central role in key moments in the narratives of Luke and Acts, such as Jesus’ baptism, the transfiguration, Pentecost, and the apostles being rescued from prison. It is no surprise, then, that during the travel narrative in which Luke collects much of Jesus’ instruction to the disciples, we find Jesus teaching them how to pray. Today’s Gospel lection includes Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, which differs somewhat from the one found in Matthew.

Proper 13C

[Sunday between July 31 and August 6 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Hosea 11:1–11

Hosea, an eighth-century prophet from the Northern Kingdom, was concerned about Israel's relationship with God because of the religious, political, and social sin that was prevalent in society. In today's lection, the prophet presents God speaking to Israel as a parent speaks to a child. The oracle opens with God seeing the need for punishment, but ends with God wanting to withhold judgment.

Psalm 107:1–9, 43

Psalm 107 is a prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance from different situations of distress. In the excerpt we read today, the distress is described in terms of wandering in a wasteland thirsting for salvation.

Colossians 3:1–11

In last week's reading from Colossians, the author warned the church against following the instructions of false teachers. In this week's Epistle lesson, the author offers his own moral instruction rooted in the baptismal metaphor that we have been raised with Christ.

Luke 12:13–21

In the narrative section presenting Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, Luke gathers a number of parables found in none of the other Gospels. We read one of those a few weeks ago: the parable of the good Samaritan. This week we read the parable of the rich fool.

Proper 14C

[Sunday between August 7 and August 13 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Isaiah 1:1, 10–20

Today we turn to one last prophet from the eighth century: Isaiah. However, unlike Amos and Hosea who prophesied about the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Isaiah's focus is the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Today's reading comes from the opening of the book, where the contrast between religious practice and a just society is established as a major theme of the prophet's ministry.

Psalms 50:1–8, 22–23

Psalms 50 is a liturgy of covenant renewal. In it the people are reminded that God rebukes those who think they can violate God's standards of justice as long as they offer right sacrifices.

Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16

The book of Hebrews reads like a series of interconnected homilies. Last year during Ordinary Time, we read through portions of the first ten chapters of Hebrews, which focused to a great extent on Christ as the great high priest who offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for atonement. For the next several weeks, our Epistle readings will come from the final three chapters of Hebrews, which focus on faith. Today's reading offers Abraham as an example of faith.

Luke 12:32–40

Last week's Gospel lesson was the parable of the rich fool, in which Jesus warned against storing up treasures for ourselves instead of being rich toward God. This week's reading from Luke extends the theme of trusting in God and not possessions.

Proper 15C

[Sunday between August 14 and August 20 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Isaiah 5:1–7

In today's reading from the First Testament, the eighth-century prophet Isaiah offers a song of a vineyard. In it the vineyard owner takes care to nurture the vineyard, yet it only produces sour grapes. The song is a parable of judgment against the Southern Kingdom. As the vineyard owner destroys the unfruitful vineyard, so will God judge Judah for its injustice.

Psalms 80:1–2, 8–19

Similar to what we found in Isaiah, the metaphor of the vineyard for Judah is central to Psalm 80. However, whereas Isaiah speaks of judgment, the Psalmist prays for restoration.

Hebrews 11:29—12:2

Last week, our reading from Hebrews defined faith as the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Abraham was then offered as an example of such faith. Today's lection continues with the theme of faith and presents Moses, other Israelites, and finally Jesus as examples of faith.

Luke 12:49–56

In last week's reading from Luke, Jesus exhorted the disciples to keep watch for the Son of man, who will come at an unexpected hour. In today's reading, this focus on God's future continues as Jesus explains that his ministry will bring division.

Proper 16C

[Sunday between August 21 and August 27 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 1:4–10

For the last six weeks, our First Testament readings have been drawn from the eighth-century prophets. Now we shift our attention to Jeremiah, whose ministry occurred about a century later, after the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been destroyed by Assyria, and the Babylonian Empire had become a threat to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Today's reading is a description of Jeremiah's initial call to become a prophet about forty years earlier.

Psalms 71:1–6

Psalms 71 is a prayer for help from an older person who honors God for the many years of providential care he has experienced. Indeed, in language reminiscent of Jeremiah's claim that God called him before his birth, the Psalmist claims that God has been with him since he was in his mother's womb.

Hebrews 12:18–29

For the last two weeks, our readings from Hebrews have explored the nature of faith and offered biblical examples of such faith. Today's lection is part of a passage in which the author of Hebrews exhorts his readers to live out that faith in response to God's self-revelation.

Luke 13:10–17

In today's Gospel lection, we encounter a common motif in the Gospels: Jesus comes into conflict with religious authorities concerning sabbath practice. Specifically, in today's reading from Luke, Jesus heals a woman on the sabbath and then rebukes the religious leaders for criticizing the healing.

Proper 17C

[Sunday between August 28 and September 3 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 2:4–13

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was spent critiquing the religious, social, and political circumstances that led to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. In today's First Testament lesson, Jeremiah accuses the Judeans of turning away from the God who brought them out of Egypt and into the promised land.

Psalms 81:1, 10–16

Psalms 81 is a liturgy that, similar to our reading from Jeremiah, accuses the people of failing to live up to the covenant they made with the God who led them out of Egypt.

Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16

The final section of Hebrews is a homily calling the readers to live out their faith in Jesus Christ. Today's Epistle lection is a string of exhortations concerning acts of loving service to one another, which also serve as offerings of praise to God.

Luke 14:1, 7–14

In last week's Gospel lesson, we read of a situation when Jesus was in conflict with religious authorities concerning healing on the sabbath. Today's reading from Luke follows another such controversy. While Jesus is sharing a sabbath meal at a Pharisee's house, he heals a man with a withered hand. After offering the guests a new interpretation of sabbath practice, Jesus critiques the way that guests at the meal vie for places of honor.

Proper 18C

[Sunday between September 4 and September 10 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 18:1–11

Last week we read one of the many passages in Jeremiah where the prophet accuses Judah of being unfaithful to God in its religious, social, and political life. In today's reading from Jeremiah, the prophet calls the nation to repent by reminding it that just as a potter determines the fate of clay on the potter's wheel, so will God judge and decide the fate of Judah.

Psalms 139:1–6, 13–18

Psalms 139 is a prayer for help in a time of distress. The psalmist trusts that God can provide rescue because God is all-knowing and all-powerful. God can do as God pleases with the one praying.

Philemon 1–21

Today's Epistle reading is the entire letter to Philemon, Paul's shortest letter. He wrote to Philemon on behalf of a runaway slave, Onesimus, whom he met while in prison and converted to the Christian faith. Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter, asking him to receive Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

Luke 14:25–33

For weeks we have been reading through Luke's travel narrative, in which Jesus makes his way from Galilee to Jerusalem to die a prophet's death. In this section of the Gospel, Luke collects many of Jesus' teachings, especially those about discipleship. In today's Gospel lection, Jesus warns that while following him is rewarding, it is also costly.

Proper 19C

[Sunday between September 11 and September 17 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 4:11–12, 22–28

In previous readings from Jeremiah we have listened as the prophet accused Judah of idolatry and injustice and called the people to repent. Today we listen as Jeremiah pronounces judgment in specific terms. A hot strong wind is coming from the north that will bring destruction on the nation. Any contemporary of Jeremiah would have known he was speaking of the Babylonian Empire.

Psalms 14

As Jeremiah prophesies concerning impending destruction coming upon Jerusalem, Psalm 14 prays that God will bring forth from Zion deliverance for Israel.

1 Timothy 1:12–17

For the next seven weeks, the lectionary appoints us to read from 1 and 2 Timothy. Along with the letter to Titus, these letters make up the section of the Pauline letters usually referred to as the Pastorals. They were written by one of Paul's disciples for churches that, after Paul's death, had to deal with new false teachings as well as developing institutional needs. In today's reading from 1 Timothy, the writer expresses gratitude for God's expansive mercy.

Luke 15:1–10

Luke often portrays Jesus as being in conflict with religious leaders. In today's Gospel lesson, the religious authorities complain about Jesus associating with sinners. Jesus answers them with the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (better known as the prodigal son). Today we read the first two of those parables.

Proper 20C

[Sunday between September 18 and September 24 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 8:18—9:1

In Jeremiah's day, it had become clear that Babylon in the north was a major military threat. The prophet had interpreted this threat in religious terms, calling Judah to repent of its idolatrous and oppressive ways. But in today's passage a tone of mourning replaces accusations. Jeremiah laments that defeat and destruction are inevitable.

Psalms 79:1–9

As Jeremiah grieves over the impending destruction that the Babylonian Empire represents for Judah, so Psalm 79 is a communal prayer for help in light of that destruction. The psalmist interprets the attack on Jerusalem as an attack on God.

1 Timothy 2:1–7

As the Christian movement became more and more of an institutional church, there seemed to be a need for better defining standard practices and standards of leadership. In today's Epistle lesson from 1 Timothy, the author offers instructions in prayer.

Luke 16:1–13

In last week's Gospel lection, Jesus told the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin to answer religious leaders who complained that he was associating with sinners. This week's reading from Luke follows those parables. Jesus now turns to the disciples and offers them a different parable of reconciliation: the strange parable of the dishonest manager.

Proper 21C

[Sunday between September 25 and October 1 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 32:1–3a, 6–15

In 588 B.C.E., the Babylonians had Jerusalem under siege, and King Zedekiah of Judah imprisoned Jeremiah for prophesying that Jerusalem would be lost. At a time when a foreign army is marching through the land, leaders are being taken into exile, and everyone who can is fleeing Judah, what does the prophet of doom and judgment do? He buys real estate as a sign that someday, God will return things to normal.

Psalms 91:1–6, 14–16

Psalms 91 proclaims the many ways that God's providence is manifested among the people. The psalm's tone of trust in God's protection resonates with Jeremiah's act of faith in buying a field just before the Babylonians enter the city.

1 Timothy 6:6–19

In a closing exhortation to the reader, the author of 1 Timothy denounces the pursuit of riches that can be found in false teachers within the church. Instead, the writer calls the reader, as a leader of the community of faith, to pursue righteousness.

Luke 16:19–31

For the last two weeks we have read parables that are found in Luke's travel narrative, most of which are not found in any other Gospel. Last week's reading was the parable of the dishonest manager, which Jesus followed up with exhortation concerning the use of money. Today's Gospel lesson is the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, which presents Luke's view of salvation as the reversal of social circumstances.

Proper 22C

[Sunday between October 2 and October 8 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Lamentations 1:1–6

For a number of weeks our First Testament lessons have come from Jeremiah, and we listened as the prophet prepared Judah for defeat at the hands of the Babylonians in the sixth century B.C.E. And we will return to hear what Jeremiah had to say after the defeat next week. But this week we turn to Lamentations, which tradition claimed had been written by Jeremiah. The book is a series of poems weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem.

Psalm 137

Psalm 137 is a lament over the plight of those taken into exile by the Babylonians. The prayer's harsh words, especially those that close the psalm, are difficult to hear today, but they ring with an emotional honesty that is part of our biblical heritage.

2 Timothy 1:1–14

First and Second Timothy and Titus make up the section of the Pauline letters usually referred to as the Pastorals. A disciple of Paul's wrote them for churches that, after Paul's death, had to deal with new false teachings as well as developing institutional needs. After having spent a few weeks in 1 Timothy, today the Epistle lection turns our attention to 2 Timothy. The tone of this letter is one of personal instruction in which the author offers Paul's suffering as a basis for calling the reader to faithful endurance.

Luke 17:5–10

Luke presents Jesus as traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem and teaching along the way. Many of these sayings are found only in the Third Gospel. Today's Gospel lection is a composite of different sayings that deal with faith and discipleship.

Proper 23C

[Sunday between October 9 and October 15 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 29:1, 4–7

When the Babylonians conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem, they took many Judeans into exile to Babylon. The destruction of the temple was a threat to the Jewish faith and the exile was a threat to the very existence of the Jewish people. In today's First Testament lection, Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles, advising them to settle down in the foreign land for their own sake.

Psalms 66:1–12

Psalms 66 is a hymn of thanksgiving that celebrates God's mighty acts of salvation. It is read in the context of remembering the exile in order to imply that as God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, so would God deliver them from Babylon.

2 Timothy 2:8–15

Today's Epistle lection comes from a section of 2 Timothy in which the writer offers personal instructions concerning the reader's faith, life, and ministry. The passage we read reminds the recipient of the resurrection and calls for faithful endurance.

Luke 17:11–19

Many of the sayings and stories found in Luke are not found in any of the other Gospels. Such is true of today's reading. This passage is the story of Jesus healing ten lepers. Nine obediently go to the temple upon being cleansed. But one, a Samaritan, disobeys Jesus' command in order to return and thank him.

Proper 24C

[Sunday between October 16 and October 22 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Jeremiah 31:27–34

Our final reading from Jeremiah strikes a radically different tone than most of the other lections we have read from this book. The others looked ahead to judgment and destruction. But once destruction had arrived and the people had been taken into exile, Jeremiah looked ahead to the restoration of the people. In today's reading, which comes from a section of Jeremiah traditionally called the "Book of Consolation," Jeremiah envisions God making a new covenant with God's people.

Psalms 119:97–104

Psalms 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible and celebrates the torah that God gave to the people. The portion we read today is an appropriate response to Jeremiah's proclamation that God would make a new covenant with Judah.

2 Timothy 3:14—4:5

Second Timothy is a compilation of personal instructions offered on behalf of the reader's faith, life, and ministry. In today's reading, the author reminds the recipient of the faith he was given, calls him to continue studying scripture, and urges him to proclaim sound doctrine in the face of false teachings.

Luke 18:1–8

For several months, our Gospel lections have been drawn from Luke's travel narrative, in which Jesus heads toward his crucifixion and resurrection. Luke weaves into this journey most of Jesus' teachings, including a number of parables unique to Luke. Today's lesson is the troubling parable of the widow and the unjust judge.

Proper 25C

[Sunday between October 23 and October 29 inclusive]

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Joel 2:23–32

Our long series of readings from the prophets has taken us from the time of Elijah in the ninth century B.C.E. to the exile in the sixth century. For the next month, our prophetic readings reflect a postexilic view: after the Babylonians were defeated and the Persian Empire allowed the Jewish exiles to return home. Although the dating of some of these prophets is not clear, they all share an emphasis on looking forward to God's redemption in the future. Today we read from Joel, who speaks of terribly destructive locust plagues having occurred in the recent past. It is unclear whether Joel is speaking literally of locusts or metaphorically of invading armies. What is clear, however, is that Joel sees the day of Lord on the horizon.

Psalms 65

While Joel declares that God will deliver the people from the locust plagues that threaten their land, Psalm 65 praises God for the bounty of the earth at harvest.

2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18

Second Timothy is a letter of personal instruction to a young minister. The tone of letter is one of a last will and testament. The author, who writes in Paul's name, speaks of the apostle's martyrdom and the reward that comes from faithful endurance.

Luke 18:9–14

Last week our Gospel reading was the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. Luke often connects different parables of Jesus together. Today's lection is a parable that follows immediately after last week's text and focuses on the interaction of two people in a similar fashion to that parable. It is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

Proper 26C

[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

Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4

Our First Testament lection comes from the prophet Habakkuk. The first section of the reading is the opening of the book, in which the prophet cries out to God for the people, asking how long must they wait for God's salvation to come. The second section comes a little later in the book when the prophet looks for God's answer to his lament, looks for the day of the Lord to appear on the horizon.

Psalms 119:137–144

As Habakkuk struggles with and hopes for God's justice in the face of suffering, so the portion of Psalm 119 we read today declares God's righteousness.

2 Thessalonians 1:1–4, 11–12

Toward the end of the liturgical year as Advent begins to appear on the horizon, the church lifts up the theme of God's future. This is why the lectionary turns our attention to 2 Thessalonians now. The letter seems to have been written to correct a misinterpretation of Paul's teaching concerning the coming of the day of the Lord. Some in the church assume that Christ's coming is so near that they need work no longer. Today's lection is the opening of the letter.

Luke 19:1–10

For months our Gospel lections have had us follow Jesus after he set his face toward Jerusalem. With today's reading from Luke, the end of that journey draws close. Just before arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus passes through Jericho and once again seeks out the lost.

Introduction for All Saints' Day or Sunday, Year C

[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' 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' to remember especially those of the church who have died during the last year.

Oral Introductions for Individual Lections

Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18

The book of Daniel offers an apocalyptic vision of the day of the Lord in response to great persecution in the second century B.C.E. The short excerpt we read today names that persecution as coming at the hands of four successive empires. But the exclamation point at the end of the description is that the persecution cannot stop the saints, or holy ones, from receiving God's kingdom.

Psalms 149

Psalms 149 is a hymn of praise, celebrating God's salvation. Specifically the salvation that is envisioned in the song is similar to that found in Daniel's vision: it is God's victory over nations that have posed themselves as enemies of Israel.

Ephesians 1:11–23

In our lection from Ephesians, the author speaks of the inheritance that the saints receive from God. It is God's power revealed in the resurrection and the establishment of the church.

Luke 6:20–31

Matthew's version of the Beatitudes has been traditionally associated with All Saints' because it has been interpreted as describing the characteristics of faithful saints. Today's Gospel lection, however, is Luke's version of the Beatitudes. While much of the language of the two versions is similar, they have quite different tones. Matthew begins with a blessing upon "the poor in spirit" while Luke opens simply with a blessing upon "the poor." Luke's version exemplifies his concern for the marginalized and his understanding of salvation as a reversal of the status quo.

Proper 27C

[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.]

Haggai 1:15b—2:9

After the Persians allowed the exiles to return to Judea, the people focused on rebuilding the economy, social and political structures, and religious life. In our First Testament lesson, the prophet Haggai preaches to the political and religious leaders, calling them to make the rebuilding of the temple that was destroyed their highest priority. The rebuilding should be offered in response to God's providence. Moreover, rebuilding the temple is a prelude to the coming day of the Lord.

Psalm 145:1–5, 17–21

Psalm 145 is a hymn of praise celebrating God's compassion and providence. God's faithfulness is especially evident in divine care for the weak and afflicted.

OR Psalm 98

Psalm 98 is a song celebrating salvation that comes from God as ruler and judge of the world.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–5, 13–17

Second Thessalonians seems to have been written to correct a misinterpretation of Paul's teaching concerning the coming of the day of the Lord. Some in Thessalonica assume that Christ's coming is so near that they need work no longer. Today's lection is an apocalyptic description of signs of Christ's return.

Luke 20:27–38

Every year, the Gospel lections for the Season after Pentecost end in Jerusalem, with Jesus teaching in the temple and speaking about God's future. In today's reading from Luke, Jesus reinterprets the Jewish belief in the resurrection for religious leaders who were trying to trip him up.

Proper 28C

[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.]

Isaiah 65:17–25

Although the prophet Isaiah lived in the eighth century B.C.E., the biblical book that bears his name includes materials that come from times long after that. Chapters 1—39 come from the time of Isaiah himself, while chapters 40—55 come from the exilic period, and chapters 56—66 come from the postexilic period. Our First Testament reading comes from the last section. In it the prophetic voice envisions the coming day of the Lord as a time of prosperity and peace.

Isaiah 12

In place of a Psalter reading, today we turn to a song of thanksgiving found in Isaiah 12. Similar to our reading from Isaiah 65, this song praises God for the day of salvation that is coming.

2 Thessalonians 3:6–13

Second Thessalonians seems to have been written to correct a misinterpretation of Paul's teaching concerning the coming of the day of the Lord. Some in the church assume that Christ's coming is so near that they need work no longer. Today's lection is a warning against such idleness.

Luke 21:5–19

In last week's Gospel lection, religious leaders confronted Jesus in the temple concerning belief in the resurrection. In today's reading, Luke presents Jesus as foretelling the destruction of the temple.

Introduction for Reign of Christ (Proper 29C)

[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

Jeremiah 23:1–6

In our lesson from Jeremiah, the prophet declares that when the people return from exile in Babylon, God will raise up just rulers to shepherd them. Specifically, God will raise up a righteous branch from David's family tree. As with many such prophecies in the First Testament, the early church interpreted this language to refer to Christ.

Luke 1:68–79

In place of a Psalter reading, today we read a canticle, or poetic speech, found in Luke. These words come from Zechariah at the birth of John the Baptist, but they open with references to the coming birth of Jesus. Traditionally called the Benedictus, this speech echoes Jeremiah's language that God would raise up a ruler from the line of David.

Colossians 1:11–20

Our Epistle lection from Colossians includes a poetic piece often called the Christ Hymn. It describes Christ in cosmic terms as the one through whom all things were created and reconciled to God.

Luke 23:33–43

Our Gospel lesson expresses the ironic claim of the good news of Jesus Christ: that, through the cross, God transformed human powerless into divine power. While many mock Jesus with the labels of king and messiah, Jesus establishes his reign by offering compassion to a criminal dying next to him.