

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Isaiah 7:10–14
Romans 1:1–7
Matthew 1:18–24

MONDAY

Luke 1:26–38
“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

TUESDAY

Luke 1:39–45
“Blessed are you among women . . .”

WEDNESDAY

Luke 1:46–56
“My soul magnifies the Lord . . .”

THURSDAY

Luke 1:57–66
“What then will this child become?”

FRIDAY

Luke 1:67–79
“Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit . . .”

SATURDAY*

John 1:1–18
“In the beginning was the Word . . .”

Salvation from Disaster

The Scriptures say it so quickly and casually that it is possible for us to overlook the crisis that it must have caused: “Mary was found to be with child” (see Matthew 1:18). What must Joseph have felt when he discovered that Mary was with child? Shock, devastation, betrayal? He knew that he was not the father. What hurt he must have felt when he supposed that this woman, who he treasured and planned to make his wife, had been unfaithful to him.

Such intense feeling must have driven him close to despair. As a person of faith, it is likely he turned to God to complain: “God where are you? My life is shattered, my hope is gone. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

Now in time, Joseph learned that Mary had not been unfaithful and that his marriage could proceed—

although on terms he had never imagined. But in that first moment, it was easy to presume that it might have felt that God was absent and unconcerned.

The experience of Joseph shows us that God often works in ways that are not immediately clear to us. He has a plan that is always unfolding, but usually that unfolding takes time.

Evil, sickness, and death will always be a part of our lives. But Christians face the future with hope because we believe that the present moment is only a part of the plan that God is enacting on our behalf.

When Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, he was convinced that his life was ruined. But this apparent setback was, in fact, the first step in the Salvation of the world.



The Faith of the Church

The Church sees in the disaster of Israel’s exile in Babylon a mysterious presence of the saving God and the beginning of a promised restoration. The remnant that returns from exile is a prefiguring of the Church, reminding us that in the darkest and most hopeless times, God is nevertheless leading us to Salvation (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 710).



Questions of the Week

Devastated by the news of Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph remained open to the promptings of God. When he was informed of the miraculous situation, he accepted it with trust. He is, thus, the model of a good spouse and faithful believer.

Adults

Where am I struggling to recognize God’s presence, and what steps can I take to trust that God is leading me into the future?

Children

When things are bad, do I realize that they will become better because God loves and cares for me?

*Alternate readings exist for this day.
The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Responding to God's Word . . .

In light of the experience of Joseph, we must be slow to judge when evil attacks us. Although God is always at work, it takes time to perceive what he might be doing in our lives.

When we receive bad news in our family, in school, or at our job, it is appropriate to be in shock or upset. But we are also called to believe that those disasters will not derail God's plan for our lives.

When we make foolish choices, we must admit our failures and live with the consequences of our decisions. But we continue to believe that God is with us, guiding us to learn from

our mistakes and to avoid them in the future. When someone we love faces sickness or death, we are rightfully discouraged. But we remain confident that God will provide opportunities for love, reconciliation, and growth. He is always in control.

Evil is real. It can attack us. We should never pretend that bad things are somehow good things in disguise. The present moment can seem like a disaster. But it can lead to goodness and life. Even when the present situation appears to be a total loss, God can still use it as part of our Salvation.

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. At a family gathering, share ways in which God has led you from something negative to something good. Give thanks together.

In the workplace or in school. Recognize someone who is struggling with a difficult situation. Assure them of your support.

In the community. Approach someone in your church community who is coping with sickness or loss. Share your faith that God is with us.



Meditation Moment

Critics ridiculed the Russian novelist Feodor Dostoevski for reaffirming his belief in Jesus after a period of faith-confusion and faith-questioning. Dostoevski responded to them, saying, "It is not like a child that I believe in Christ and confess him. My hosanna has come forth from the crucible of doubt."

For reflection . . .

Did I ever go through a period of faith-confusion and faith-questioning, as did Dostoevski? How do I resolve faith questions now?

I ALWAYS THINK THE BEST WAY
TO KNOW GOD IS TO LOVE MANY THINGS.
LOVE A FRIEND, A WIFE . . .
WHATEVER YOU LIKE . . .
THEN, YOU WILL KNOW THERE IS A GOD.
THEN, YOU WILL BELIEVE.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

FROM VISION BY MARK LINK, SJ

Trust for the Future

Eternal God,

I know the past and present,
but only you know what is to come.

I panic when evil touches my life.
I jump to the conclusion that a present
evil will destroy my future. Allow me to
examine the past and recognize how
many times you were faithful, how
many times you led me from disaster
to life. Lead me to know that since

only you know my future,

I must entrust it
to your care.

Amen.

*Carry this thought in your heart
as a guide for your faith journey
this week.*

For the cloud of the Lord was
on the tabernacle by day,
and fire was in the cloud by
night, before the eyes of all
the house of Israel at each
stage of their journey.

Exodus 40:38

Profile in Faith

The Priestly Authors of the Pentateuch

The greatest disaster of Israel's history was the exile. Political power and independence were lost. Yet it was in the exile that a group of priestly authors redefined Israel's faith. They came to see that their relationship to God was not dependent upon the land. God was free to accompany the people wherever they journeyed.

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† Most Reverend Kevin J. Farrell, DD, Bishop of Dallas
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