

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

---

November 28, 2021 • 1st Sunday of Advent • Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

---

## Don't Be Anxious

*This Gospel from Luke is read on the first Sunday of Advent, the season we are to prepare for the coming of Jesus, not just as a baby but also at the end of time. It's a frightening reading about roaring seas and nations in disarray. Jesus tells his disciples to pray for the strength to stand firm, "Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" (v. 36).*

**M**y generation worries, as did generations before, about how quickly the world is changing. We've watched technological development escalate. We see the global scope of poverty and the rising horrors of terrorism and genocide. We live in an age of constant alteration and altercation, and we are worried.

Parents today are responsible for preparing children for a future none of us can even imagine. We have no idea what questions or decisions today's children will face. Yet somehow, in the few precious years from infancy to adulthood, parents must equip their youngsters with the tools that will help them not only survive, but also do well, while revitalizing the world they inherit.

Certainly one of the key factors in facing the uncertainties of the future is belief in a greater reality, and hope in a higher power.

So much is possible and bearable when you believe in a loving God who promises not only to be *with* you but also *in* you. So much is possible and

bearable when you know you are a part of something that is true and good, bigger and stronger than our chaotic world. So much is possible and bearable when you know you are not alone and can count on the support of others who will be there for you and with you. These are important truths in an uncertain world—important for grown-ups, too.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Ask each person to share the best thing that happened to him or her this week. What was most difficult?

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

What are your hopes and concerns for the year ahead? What were the highlights from last year?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

December 5, 2021 • 2nd Sunday of Advent • Luke 3:1-6

## John the Baptist Prepares the Way

*John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, was a prophet who came to prepare the people for Jesus. John was a holy man who spent most of his time praying in the desert. When he left the desert, he traveled throughout the region of the Jordan calling people to repent and change their lives: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (v. 4).*

God calls each of us to a close, intimate relationship. Toddlers and teens, grown-ups and elders are all invited to share in God's love. The invitation is extended in all sorts of ways: through Scripture and study; through friends, relatives and acquaintances; in quiet spaces and noisy places.

But God especially counts on parents to issue the invitation to children, to introduce them to a loving God and to nurture their relationship with Jesus Christ. Our church baptizes infants because we trust that children will be nourished by their parents' faith until they are old enough to claim their own.

Like John the Baptist, parents are expected to prepare the way so their children will be open to accepting God's personal invitation.

This can be done in subtle ways, such as creating a Christian environment at home with crucifixes and Bibles or beginning family rituals, such as nightly prayer or seasonal devotions (such as praying together around an Advent wreath).

But the most effective way for children to know who God is and what God asks of them is by listening to and watching the people who are most important to them. If God is going to be a reality in their lives, children must see in actions and hear in words that God is a reality in the lives of their mothers and fathers. For children, God's invitation to a forever relationship is best delivered personally through the words and example of their parents.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Ask each family member to find something in the house that makes him or her think about God or faith. Talk about what each person finds.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

Are you comfortable talking about your faith with your family? Why or why not?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

---

December 12, 2021 • 3rd Sunday of Advent • Luke 3:10-18

---

## John the Baptist Baptizes with Water

*John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus by telling people to repent. He baptizes them with water as a sign of their repentance. When people begin to think that John might be the Messiah, he makes it very clear that they are wrong. He tells them that one mightier than he is coming. “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (v. 16).*

**W**hen John the Baptist’s followers are ready to turn away from their dishonesty and selfishness, he baptizes them with water, a cleansing ritual that signifies their wish to repent.

But repentance is not enough to bring freedom and salvation. It takes the Holy Spirit and the new life Jesus offers us through his life, death and resurrection.

Repenting, or saying we are sorry, is the first step to freedom and salvation. The second step is to focus on changing our behavior. If we say we are sorry and have no intention of changing our actions, we can’t be forgiven. Even God cannot free us from sin if we insist on holding on to it. Sometimes we are really sorry for our actions but can’t muster the courage to change. In that case, we need to ask God for the *desire* to change. Even this small inclination to mend our ways is enough to loosen sin’s grip and allow the Holy Spirit to slip in.

The third step is to admit we need help. We humbly acknowledge that we need God’s help to love the way God wants us to love. We face our limitations

and even our powerlessness, and ask the Spirit to fill us with strength and new life. We trust that with God’s help we can overcome our sins or our most compelling bad habits and become the person God calls us to be.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Adult family members may want to practice a simple Act of Contrition using the three steps above. (*Say you are sorry. Promise to change. Ask for God’s help to do better.*) Say this prayer with your children before bedtime.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

What about yourself would you like to change? What keeps you from changing? Are you ready to ask for God’s help to change?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

---

December 19, 2021 • 4th Sunday of Advent • Luke 1:39-45

---

## Mary Visits Elizabeth

*Mary is pregnant when she sets off to help her cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant. Mary has just said “yes” to becoming the mother of Jesus. Elizabeth welcomes Mary, and experiences a special blessing for herself and her child. She praises Mary for her faith and rejoices with her over her miracle.*

**M**ary was newly pregnant and not married when she left for Judah. She probably spent much of the journey wondering how her cousin would receive her. Imagine her relief when she saw Elizabeth’s face and heard her greeting: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”

Sometimes we forget that Mary was just a young girl, probably about fourteen, when she agreed to become the mother of Jesus. There is no questioning her courage and colossal faith, but she was probably still confused and scared after the angel left.

Mary came to help her cousin, but (as is often the case) she ended up being ministered to also. How affirming it must have been to hear Elizabeth, an older woman, praise her for her faith and trust in the Lord. Like all of us, Mary needed to know that she was not alone. Her courage and faith needed to be bolstered. Elizabeth gave Mary the reinforcement she needed.

Like Mary, we are also asked to have faith and to believe in the promises of a God we cannot see. We

are asked to believe in God’s unconditional love for us, and to say “yes” to that love so that like Mary we too can bring Jesus into the world. Amidst all our confusion and fear, God asks us to have the courage to share our faith, bolster the faith of those closest to us and make the presence of Jesus real in our households.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Ask family members to talk about the last time someone bolstered their courage. Who are the people in your lives who remind you of Jesus? In what way?

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

Who are the people who remind you of Jesus? In what ways?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

December 25, 2021 • Christmas • John 1:1-18

## Jesus Is Born

*In John's Gospel there is no account of Jesus' birth. Instead, John reminds us that Jesus has been a reality since the beginning, even before creation. Jesus is the Word who was with God and was God. Father, Son and Spirit are not sequential. They are One. The Word became flesh, he brought new life, and this life was a light shining in the darkness. "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (v. 9).*

On the first Christmas, a child was born who would change the world forever. He brought strength to the weak, courage to the fearful, consolation to the sad, and hope to the abandoned. The child was Jesus. He brought light into the darkness.

All through the New Testament, and especially in John's Gospel, we hear Jesus referred to as "the light." We can understand this metaphor when we contrast the gift of light to darkness. Nothing else changes when the lights go out, but in the dark we may feel disoriented and vulnerable, sometimes even afraid. Turn on the lights, and we regain our sense of place and position. This is precisely why Jesus came.

When the world was created, it was good. There was harmony in the universe and a sense of peace in that harmony. When people were created, they were created good. Scripture tells us that humans were created in the image and likeness of God. With their Creator they shared the ability to love and to create good out of love. Somewhere along the way this was forgotten, evil moved in, and the lights went out. Disorientation, vulnerability and

fear followed. Love became tarnished, and what humans designed was not always good.

Then came the first Christmas, and a new light came into the world. As John tells us in his Gospel, those who accepted the light were given the power to become the children of God. They regained their sense of place and position. The darkness had no power over them. They knew who they were and whose they were. Christmas celebrates this light, this life born in Bethlehem, with us still today and yet to come in glory.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Share the Christmas traditions you remember from when you were growing up. Ask family members to talk about their favorite family Christmas traditions.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

What are the positive things you want to remember about the family you grew up with?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

---

December 26, 2021 • The Holy Family • Luke 2:41-52

---

## The Holy Family

*Jesus lived a rather ordinary life with his family. We have only one story from his childhood: Luke's account of Jesus being left behind in Jerusalem. I love this story because it makes the Holy Family seem so human, and it reminds us that even the holiest of families have problems.*

**M**ary and Joseph are coming back from Jerusalem in a large caravan of relatives. After traveling for a full day they realize Jesus is missing. Imagine the scene. They are scared to death. Maybe they even argue a bit about what to do. Perhaps Joseph allows his fear to sound like anger as he questions Mary about when she has last seen Jesus. They turn around and retrace their steps to and through Jerusalem.

For three days they search for Jesus, concerned that he is afraid, alone and lost. Instead, they find Jesus in the temple, sitting comfortably with the teachers. Their relief turns to the very human emotion of frustration, as Mary asks her son, "Why have you done this to us?" Jesus answers like any other twelve-year-old: "I thought you'd know..."

Like all families, the Holy Family probably had times when their communication was less than perfect. Like all strong families, they probably said their "sorrys" and learned from their mistakes. I jokingly like to say that we don't hear about Jesus for the next eighteen years because he was grounded, but

I'm just projecting a mother's frustration. More seriously, we know this was an important event for Mary, because she kept it forever in her heart.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

All families have problems. Handling problems in a positive way, and not letting them dissolve family unity, is a trait of strong families. And so is good communication. Ask family members to talk about positive ways of solving problems.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

All parents hold things in their hearts regarding their children. What are the really special things about your child or children that you do not want to forget?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

---

January 2, 2022 • Epiphany of the Lord • Matthew 2:1-12

---

## Epiphany of the Lord

*Wise men from the East have followed a star from its rising to find the new king of the Jews. They encounter a jealous Herod, the current king, who tries to have them reveal the child's whereabouts so he can get rid of him. When they find Jesus, they give him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.*

**W**hen the wise men find what they are looking for, they share their most precious treasures. What are *you* looking for? What is *your* most precious treasure?

You may not want to admit it, but if you are like most people, you have probably spent a great deal of your life hoping to find the love you deserve: a love that accepts and affirms you completely. Some people follow star after star, looking for that unconditional love, only to be disappointed over and over again.

Why does this happen? We are human, which is to say imperfect. At some point, all parents end up hurting and disappointing their children. Those hurts and disappointments condition the way we love. We become frustrated and lose our tempers. We push too much or say too much. We are jealous or too sensitive. And we find ourselves hurting and disappointing the ones we love most. Those who love us do the same.

If we are lucky, we find a spouse who will grow with us through those hurts and disappointments, and the love that blessed us when we were married grows and matures. And if we are really lucky, our children forgive us for the hurts and disappointments we inflicted on them, and they love us for

a lifetime. But we poor, flawed humans can never love unconditionally in this lifetime.

The only way to find that love is to follow the same star the wise men followed: the star that leads to Jesus. Only God can love us unconditionally, and Jesus is the Way to God's love. Open yourself to God's love so that you can share that love with all its acceptance and affirmation with your most precious treasure: your children.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

It is important to affirm your children. Tell each family member what you like most about him or her. Ask other family members to do the same.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

Where are you in your relationship with God? Are you open to discovering who God is and how much you are loved? If so, how can you go about it?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

January 9, 2022 • The Baptism of the Lord • Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

## Jesus Is Baptized by John

*John the Baptist tells his followers that he baptizes with water but that one mightier than he will baptize with the Spirit. John baptizes Jesus, and while Jesus is praying a voice is heard from heaven. “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (v. 21).*

I think that Jesus, from the time he was very little, experienced the loving intimacy of being God’s son. Because he was fully human, he probably assumed everyone else had the same experience. When he is baptized, he is not surprised by the voice calling him the beloved son. But perhaps he is surprised at the spectators’ astonishment. This is the moment when Jesus finally understands that everyone else does not experience God as a loving Father as he does.

After his baptism Jesus goes into the desert for forty days to pray about what he has discovered. He is tempted to use this knowledge for his own gain, but instead, he leaves the desert to begin his ministry. The rest of his life is spent trying to convince others—that includes us—that we are all are sons and daughters of God; a God who loves us unconditionally as the best-ever Father would. Remember the prayer Jesus gives his followers begins, “Our Father...”. Everything else Jesus teaches follows from this.

If we open ourselves to God’s love and allow that love to forgive our sins and heal our hurts, we begin to experience our kinship with God and all peoples. When we really believe that we are a son or daughter of God, we begin to see how precious and valuable we are. Because we are loved unselfishly,

we can then love selflessly. And like our brother Jesus, we can become healers and peacemakers. And God’s plan (sometimes called God’s kingdom or reign) of justice, peace and harmony can become a reality in our lives.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Talk to your children about how much God loves them. Do this often. Let them know how much you love them, and then tell them that God loves them even more. Ask them how they know God loves them. Tell them how you know God loves you.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

Hear the words that were spoken when Jesus was baptized as if God is speaking them to you: “You are my beloved son or daughter. With you I am well pleased.” Put those words in the first person (“I am God’s beloved child”), and say them to yourself often. How does this make you feel?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

January 16, 2022 • 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time • John 2:1-11

## Jesus' First Miracle: The Wedding Feast at Cana

*Jesus and his friends attend a wedding in the town of Cana. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine" (v. 3). At his mother's request Jesus turns water into wine, thus sparing the host the humiliation of running out of wine. This is Jesus' first miracle—a miracle that went unnoticed except for Jesus' friends, his mother and the servers.*

Even Jesus needed a gentle push from his mother to embark on his mission. When she mentions the problem of the wine, Jesus tells her it isn't his time yet. Mary, ignoring his protest, instructs the servers to do whatever he tells them. She knows her son. After all, she raised him, and she taught him the virtue of compassion.

I don't often think of Jesus as a child, but when I do I have to remind myself that he was a regular little boy. We know he never sinned, but if he was human he must have made mistakes. Like all good parents, Jesus' mother and father had to teach him to face his problems, deal with them and, if possible, fix them. It's obvious from this story of the wedding at Cana that they also taught him to be aware of other people's problems too.

Compassion, caring about others, is an essential quality for Christians. Help your children notice the little things: to see when their sibling or friend needs help. Open their eyes to the details of life. Help them develop empathy for those who are hurting, including the unspoken hurts of frustration, embarrassment, humiliation or defeat. Teach them to ask themselves: How would I feel? What

can I do? Answer those questions with them when they are young.

Jesus' first miracle happened at a party because his mother pointed out that someone was in need. There was no big fanfare, no huge audience. Jesus responded, as he knew he should, as his parents had taught him. And his public ministry was launched.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Have each family member name a talent that each other family member has. The same talent cannot be named more than once.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

Compassion is feeling the pain of another. Acting compassionately is doing something in a positive way about it. How compassionate are you? Think of something that happened this week where you showed (or could have shown) your compassion.

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

January 23, 2022 • 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time • Luke 4:14-21

## Jesus Teaches in the Synagogue

*When Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth, the town in which he grew up, he was handed a scroll of Isaiah and invited to read. He began, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives..." (v.18).*

Jesus had left the desert following his baptism. He was feeling great. He had faced his temptations and was eager to begin his ministry. He went to the synagogue to pray. Imagine his surprise when he was given this particular Scripture to read. The words spoke to his experience. He was aware that the spirit of God was upon him. He felt he had been anointed to bring wonderfully good news wherever he went.

The words from Isaiah must have confirmed for Jesus what he had discerned in the desert: He had a mission that would eventually be shared by all those who truly came to know him. On that day in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus takes Isaiah's words and proclaims them as his own. He will open the eyes of those who cannot see and work his whole life to free those who are oppressed.

Jesus is aware that many people can see the trees but be blind to the forest. He knows that someone can be held captive and still walk freely in the world. His mission is to open people's eyes to God's love so they can love in the same way. His mission is to free those who are oppressed by fear and loneliness as well as greed and prejudice.

Jesus invites all people to be a part of the kingdom of God, and to bring justice to those who are poor, suffering and physically oppressed. He gave his life in faithfulness to this mission, and he offers us the same invitation. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has freed us from oppression if we are willing to open ourselves to the new life he offers.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Ask family members to talk about one thing they are afraid of. Talk about why they think they have that fear.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

What are some of your fears? Do they hold you back? Do they keep you from being the best you can be? Are you willing to let go of those fears by asking for God's help?

# BRINGING HOME THE GOSPEL

January 30, 2022 • 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time • Luke 4:21-30

## Jesus Is Rejected in Nazareth

*After Jesus reads the passage from Isaiah, he tells those listening, “Today those words are fulfilled in your hearing.” The people are shocked at his apparent audacity. After all, they know him. They watched him grow up. He is just a carpenter’s son. In their fury they drive Jesus out of town. “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown” (v. 24).*

The people who have known Jesus the longest, and who should be his staunchest supporters, reject him. And Jesus’ reply to them becomes a classic quote familiar to even non-Christians. The line, “a prophet is never accepted in his own place” is used today to refer to any person of ability who goes unappreciated by those who know him best.

As a mom, I have certainly felt that way. I remember a chocolate jellyroll ice cream cake I made for one of my sons’ birthdays. It was covered in whipped cream and made to resemble a covered wagon complete with horses and little carved marshmallow people. My masterpiece was wolfed down in seconds without a single “wow” from the birthday boy, his siblings or his father.

I have also been on the other side of the equation and done my share of not appreciating family members. I’ll make a point of telling a friend what a fine meal he has served, but forget to compliment my husband on his newest smoked sausage creation. It’s even worse when I treat complete strangers better than I do my own family.

There have been times when I was in a really grumpy mood, and somehow managed to be pleas-

ant to the cashier or even a stranger in the street. Yet when I came home, I’d find myself barking at my children. Today’s reading from Luke reminds us to pay attention to how we treat those who are closest to us. We need to open our eyes and really see them—recognize their talents and efforts and appreciate them for the terrific people they are.

### FAMILY RESPONSE

Ask each family member to talk about a time when he did not feel appreciated. Have each person thank him or affirm him individually. Talk about ways you can show someone you appreciate him.

### PERSONAL RESPONSE

Here is your chance to get your gripes out. Do you feel you are not appreciated by your family or coworkers? In what ways? Are you as appreciative of your family or coworkers as you should be?