

# THE LITURGICAL YEAR

## Cycle A – The Year of Matthew

### The Liturgical Year

The Liturgical Year is the way Mother Church places before us the main events and teachings in the life of Jesus. When we remember the events and stories in the life of Jesus, we make them as real to us as they were to those who first experienced them. We bring past events into the now. Thus, the Liturgical Year is not an historical look at past events, but the way that our Church invites us to enter and experience Christ who continues to be present and active in the events of our lives in the here and now.

### Cycle A – The Year of Matthew

Our liturgical calendar has three cycles: A, B, and C. A new cycle of readings begins each Advent. This year, we will be listening mainly to the Gospel according to Matthew. During the seven Sundays of the Easter season, we will be hearing the Good News according to St. John.

The authors of *Living Liturgy 2011* offer the following helpful introduction to the Gospel of Matthew.

*What each gospel writer put into his account was governed by the needs, the problems, and the trials and challenges of the community for which they were writing. The Gospel of Matthew was probably written by a Jewish scribe, a person who was very familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. He was writing for the Jewish followers of Jesus who had continued to attend the synagogue regularly – their religion was still the Jewish religion, with belief in Christ and his teachings a further revelation of their inherited beliefs and traditions. Then around the year AD 70 (when the city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans and the Pharisees took over as the ruling group), the Jewish Christians were expelled from the synagogue and treated like enemies of the Jewish God. These Jewish Christians did not understand why God had allowed their city and temple to be completely destroyed so that “not a stone remained on a stone.” They were told by these same Pharisee leaders that not only was Jesus of Nazareth not the Son of God but he was a sinner who violated the Sabbath and other Jewish practices. Matthew “answers” this charge by **presenting Jesus as the new Moses** who, for example, came out of Egypt to lead his people and who gave a new covenant on the Mount of the Beatitudes.*

*Matthew’s gospel addresses these issues in an anecdotal literary form. Matthew presents Jesus by having him do “Moses-like” things. Like Moses, he comes into Israel from Egypt to lead the people out of slavery. Like Moses, he goes up on a mount to give the people new rules of behavior (the Beatitudes). He is the Son of God who, like Moses, had miraculous powers (for Jesus, especially, to heal, cure, and forgive), and who brought hope to many people. Unlike Moses, he is also the Messiah who would be tortured and killed but who would rise from the dead and whose Spirit would continue to live in those who follow him. This Jewish Scribe gospel writer backs up what he says about Jesus by frequently quoting passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, passages that foretold the different things that would happen to the Messiah – things that did not always fit the image of the messiah that the people had....*

*...Matthew’s gospel begins with a statement from Isaiah: “Emmanuel...God is with us” (1:23). The gospel ends with a similar statement of God’s continuing presence – after the resurrection the gospel writer brackets the entire story when he records Jesus’ final words: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (28:20). Matthew’s gospel invites us to hear and believe the word of God, beginning with the apostles and continuing down to us and to the end of time. We are to open ourselves to God’s continuing presence – “Emmanuel...God is with us...always, to the close of the age.” Jesus’ “great commission” (28:19-20) makes clear that we who hear and believe are invited to go out and share this marvelous Good News with “all nations.”*

### The Advent Season

We begin the Church’s “Year of Grace” with the season of Advent, a time when the Church focuses first on the Lord’s coming at the end of time, then on his coming in history through his miraculous birth through the Virgin Mary. That mysterious birth unfolds during the Christmas season revealing its meaning for our salvation over the course of a series of feasts that include the Holy Family, Mary, Mother of God, Epiphany, and Baptism of the Lord. Each Sunday of Advent/Christmas, and each text on any given Sunday, is a doorway into the world of God’s unbounded love, a love revealed in the Word-made-flesh, the Word made present throughout all of history each and every time the Church proclaims “The word of the Lord!”

# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

November 27, 2016 A

**Opening prayer:** *God of history, present, past and future, be with us as we begin our Advent journey in this new liturgical year. Make us aware of your presence in one another and in all creation. Prepare us to celebrate your birth and to anticipate your coming at the end of time. Protect us from deeds of darkness and shed your light upon us. Help us to be spiritually awake to your comings in the events and encounters of daily life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Sharing life:** What do you like and dislike most about this season of the year?

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** This weekend we begin a new Liturgical Year with the Advent/Christmas season. Four weeks of *Advent* prepare us to celebrate the First Coming of Jesus in Bethlehem. But they also urge us to be ready for his Second Coming and for his comings into our daily lives. During the *Twelve Days of Christmas*, we celebrate the manifestation of Jesus to the Jewish and Gentile world.

In this week's Gospel and second reading, we observe a strong note of urgency concerning *readiness* for Christ's Second Coming. In the first reading, Isaiah offers a *word of hope* to his people who are living through a very difficult time.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider going over the commentary after each reading, if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

## FIRST READING: Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah lived at a time when Israel was divided into two kingdoms—both of which were being threatened by the powerful Assyrians.

Commenting on today's first reading, the authors of *Living the Word 2014* write:

*Today's first reading introduces the vision of God for Jerusalem as recounted by the prophet Isaiah. During the eighth century BCE (before the Common Era), Isaiah, a court prophet serving under the kings of Judah, announced numerous oracles indicting Jerusalem for its moral decline. The nation is filled with "people laden with wickedness, evil offspring, and corrupt children! They have forsaken the Lord, spurned the Holy One of Israel, apostatized" (Isaiah 1:4). But God anticipates a better future, a time when the house of Jacob will walk in the light of the Lord and nations will stream to the city of Jerusalem. The once unfaithful people will beat their swords into plowshares and peace will reign (Isaiah 2:4).*

## RESPONSORIAL PSALM 122

In this song of joy and praise, the pilgrim proclaims the centrality of Jerusalem in Israel's life.

## SECOND READING: Romans 13:11-14

We detect here a note of urgency, as with Jesus in today's Gospel. Even though Paul is writing to a Christian community which has accepted Christ, their total conversion to his ways is far from complete. Hence, he urges them to "throw off deeds of darkness,"—naming six such deeds—and to put on "the armor of light."

During this season of Advent, the Church urges us to do the same. We too must look into our hearts and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, name those things in our lives that are preventing us from a wholehearted commitment to Jesus.

## GOSPEL: Matthew 24:37-44

Jesus instructs his disciples on the importance of readiness for his *Second Coming*. To drive home his lesson, Jesus draws on what happened to the people who did not prepare for the Great Flood. They knew it was coming but they were so consumed with the affairs of everyday life that they failed to prepare. One exception was Noah who did get ready and was saved.

Like Noah we, as followers of Jesus, should be prepared for his Second Coming. The reference to the "two men" and "two women" is one of contrast. Externally, they seem alike, but internally, one is

prepared for God's coming and the other is not. The clear message in this Gospel is: "Be ready!"

By selecting this reading for the first Sunday of Advent, the Church urges us to live our lives in *readiness* for the Lord's coming at the end of time, whether that *end time* is the culminating event of our individual lives or of all of human history.

### FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse or image spoke to you most? Why?
2. Why do some people think that "weapons of war" are the only way or *main way* to achieve peace?
3. What can help you to "stay awake" to Christ's comings in our daily life?
4. Name ways that can help you to live vigilantly.

### RESPONDING TO THE WORD

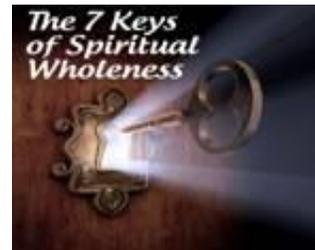
Name one way you can act on this Sunday's Word. Suggestion: If there is conflict and unforgiveness in your life, consider preparing for the coming of the Prince of Peace by turning your "sword into plow-share" and by trying to create an atmosphere of peace.

### CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for the grace to know what attitudes and spiritual exercises can help you to stay awake to God's presence and activity in your life. Pray for our leaders that they may find peaceful ways to resolve conflicts. ©

### Begin the New Year Energized!

Julianne Stanz Presents



Joy; Gratitude; Simplicity; Mercy; Prayer;  
Mission and Christ at the Heart

### A Day of Reflection

January 7, 2017, 8 am – 3 pm

Holy Name of Jesus Parish Indialantic, FL

**Tickets:** \$12 include breakfast & lunch

Contact: [sccspacecoast@gmail.com](mailto:sccspacecoast@gmail.com)

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