

Guide to *Lectio Divina*

Choose a word or phrase of the Scriptures you wish to pray. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as you have no set goal of “covering” a certain amount of text. The amount of text covered is in God’s hands, not yours.

Read. Turn to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says, “I am for you today.” Do not expect lightning or ecstasies. In *lectio divina*, God is teaching us to listen, to seek him in silence. God does not reach out and grab us but gently invites us ever more deeply into his presence.

Ponder. Take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Do not be afraid of distractions. Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself that, when they rise up during *lectio divina*, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

Pray. Whether you use words, ideas, or images — or all three — is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Give to God what you have discovered during your experience of meditation. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

It is not necessary to assess the quality of your *lectio divina*, as if you were “performing” or seeking some goal. *Lectio divina* has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures. Fr. Luke Dysinger

Lectio Divina

Sunday, January 2, 2022

Epiphany of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Merciful Father, you have called me to meet you in this word of the Gospel, because you wish that I may have life, you wish to give me yourself. Send, I pray you, your Holy Spirit upon me so that I may let myself be led along the holy way of this passage of Scripture. May I, today, get out of my prison to set out on a journey to seek you. May I recognize the star that you have lit as a sign of your love on my journey to follow it tirelessly, intensely, committing my whole life. May I, finally, enter your house and there see the Lord; may I bend low humbly before you to adore you and offer my life to you, all that I am and all that I have. Lord, by your grace, may I return by a new route, without ever passing through the old paths of sin.

Gospel Reading: Mt. 2: 1-12

Placing the Passage in its Context:

This passage belongs to the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel, which constitute a kind of prologue to the whole work. Here we are presented with the historical origin of the Messiah as son of David, as well as his divine origin as Jesus Christ, God-with-us. Matthew immediately leads us into a very deep and engaging meditation, placing before us a precise choice through the persons he introduces in his story: we either recognize and welcome the Lord who is just born, or we remain indifferent even to wanting to eliminate him, kill him. This passage offers us the beautiful story of the journey of the Magi, who come from afar because they want to seek and welcome, love, and adore the Lord Jesus. But their long journey and tireless search, the conversion of their heart are facts that speak of us, facts already written on the scroll of our own sacred story.

An Aid to the Reading of the Passage:

The passage may be divided into two main parts, determined by the locality where the scenes take place: the first part (2: 1-9a) takes place in Jerusalem, whereas the second part is focused around Bethlehem (2: 9b-12).

- **Mt 2: 1-2:** The passage begins with precise indications as to the place and time of the birth of Jesus: in Bethlehem of Judea, at the time of king Herod. Within this quite specific description, the Magi suddenly appear, who, coming from afar, arrive in

Jerusalem under the guidance of a star. It is they who announce the birth of the Lord king. They ask where they might find him because they wish to adore him.

- **Mt 2: 3-6:** On hearing the words of the Magi, king Herod, and with him all of Jerusalem is disturbed and afraid. Rather than welcoming the Lord and opting for him, they seek to eliminate him. Herod calls the authorities of the Jewish people and the experts in Scripture. It is they, by the help of ancient prophecies, who speak and reveal Bethlehem as the place to find the Messiah.
- **Mt 2: 7-8:** Herod calls the Magi in secret because he wants to use them for his own evil ends. His detailed interest is entirely directed towards the elimination of Christ.
- **Mt 2: 9a:** The Magi, urged by strength of faith and led by the star, leave again, and go towards Bethlehem.
- **Mt 2: 9b-11:** The star reappears, moves with the Magi and leads them to the exact spot where the Lord Jesus is. Full of joy, they enter the house and prostrate themselves; they offer precious gifts because they recognize that he is king and Lord.
- **Mt 2: 12:** When they have contemplated and adored the Lord, the Magi receive a revelation from God; it is He who speaks to them. They are new men; they have in them a new heaven and a new earth. They are free of the deceits of Herod and, therefore, they go back to their lives by an entirely new way

The Text:

1 After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, suddenly some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east 2 asking, 'Where is the infant king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.'

3 When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. 4 He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, 'At Bethlehem in Judaea, for this is what the prophet wrote: 6 And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the leaders of Judah, for from you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.'

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared 8 and sent them on to Bethlehem with the words, 'Go and find out all about the child, and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' 9 Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And suddenly the star they had seen rising went forward and halted over the place where the child was. 10 The sight of the star filled them with delight, 11 and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

12 But they were given a warning in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

I listen deeply to the silent voice of the Lord and let the breath of the Spirit come to me and infuse me. In this silence I seek the Lord and repeat in my heart: "Where are you, my God?"

A Few Questions

- I take the first words that come from the mouths of the Magi and make them my own: *"Where is the infant king of the Jews?"* Do I really feel attracted to the place where the Lord is because I desire to be with him? Am I ready to leave the dark and old places of my habits, of my comfort, to undertake a journey of faith in search of Jesus?
- *"We have come to adore him"*. Here the Word of the Lord tests me, puts me through a crucible: do I really live in a relationship of love with God? Am I able to open my life in his presence and allow him to enter into my very heart-beats?
- *"From you will come a leader who will shepherd my people"*. Am I capable of placing and giving my whole existence to the guidance of the Lord, to trust in him, in his love, in his so real presence even though he remains invisible?
- *"Going into the house they saw the child"*. It is precisely because they accept to go into the house, to enter into communion, to give themselves fully and truly that their eyes can see, contemplate and recognize. Why is it that I am not aware of the fact that the more I stay outside, the more I am distant from the life of my brothers and sisters and the more I become sad and empty?

A Key to the Reading

I look for some key words, some basic themes, that may guide and help me better penetrate the meaning of this passage of the Gospel, so that my life may be enlightened and changed by this Word of the Lord.

- **The Journey:**

This passage seems to be shot through with the grand theme of a journey, an exodus, a going out. The Magi, these mysterious characters, get moving, go far away from their land and go seeking the king, the Lord. Matthew presents this fact by means of some verbs that proceed along development of the event: came, we have come, sent them, go, set out, went before them, going into, not to go back, returned. The physical journey of the Magi hides a much more important and meaningful journey, the journey of faith. This is the movement of the soul born from a desire to meet and know the Lord. At the same time, it is God's invitation, who calls and attracts us with his own power; it is he who gets us to stand up and sets us in motion, who offers us signs and does not cease to walk with us. Scripture gives us many important examples, and these help us enter into this path of grace and blessings. To Abraham God said: "Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you" (Gen 12: 1). Jacob too was a pilgrim of faith and conversion; in fact, of him is written: "Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran" (Gen 28: 10) and: "Moving on, Jacob went to the land of the sons of the East" (Gen 29: 1). Many years later, the Lord spoke to him and said: "Go back to the land of your forefathers and to your kindred; and I will be with you" (Gen 31: 3). Moses too was a man on a journey; God himself showed him the way, the exodus, in his heart, in his depths, and made of his whole life a long march of salvation for him and for his brothers and sisters: "So come, I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt!" (Ex 3: 10). Also, the new people of God, we the children of the promise and of the new covenant, are called to go out all the time and to set out on a journey in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. The exodus never ceased; the liberation that comes from faith is still always active. Let us look at Jesus, at his apostles, at Paul: not one of them

stands still, not one of them hides. All these witnesses speak to us today by their deeds and they repeat: "Blessed is he who finds in you his strength and one who decides in his heart to go on the holy journey" (Ps 83: 6).

- **The Star:**

This is a very important and central element in this passage because the star has the role of guiding the Magi to their destination, of enlightening their nights along the journey, of indicating precisely the place of the presence of the Lord, of giving great joy to their hearts. Throughout the Bible, stars appear as signs of blessing and glory, almost a personification of God, who does not abandon his people, and, at the same time, a personification of the people that does not forget its God and praises and blesses him (cfr. Ps 148: 3; Bar 3: 34). The word star appears for the first time in Scripture in Genesis 1: 16, when, on the fourth day, the story of creation tells us of the appearance in the heavens of the sun, the moon and stars, as signs and as light, to set order and give light. The Jewish term for "star" *kokhab* is very beautiful and full of meaning. In fact, the letters that make up the word reveal the immensity of the presence that these celestial elements bring with them. We find two letters *caf*, which signify "hand" and which enclose the letter *waw*, which means man, understood in his vital structure, in his backbone, which keeps him erect, which makes him rise towards heaven, towards contact with his God and Creator. Thus, within the stars there are two hands, *caf* and *caf*, that lovingly hold within them *waw*, man: these are the hands of God that never cease to hold us, if only we entrust ourselves to them. Then appears the letter *bet*, which means house. Thus, the stars speak to us of our journey towards our house, of our constant migrating from and returning there, whence we have come, from the day of our creation and even from all eternity. Often God compares the descendants of Abraham to the stars in the heavens, almost as if each person is a star, born to give light in the night: "Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can" and then he adds: "Such will be your descendants" (Gen 15: 5). Jesus also is a star, the star that takes its rise from Jacob (Num 24: 17), that rises from on high, that is the radiant morning star, as the Apocalypse says (22: 16). In fact, in him has taken flesh the infinite love of God, which bends itself down towards us, his children, and opens the palms of his hands to gather and welcome us. Only such love can give our infinite weakness the capacity and courage, the perseverance and joy of accepting to leave, to go on the long and arduous journey of faith, which takes us to Bethlehem, to the place where God appears to us.

- **The Adoration:**

The act of adoration is as old as humankind itself, because since the beginning, the relationship with the divinity has been accompanied by this demand of love, of humility, of self-offering. Before the greatness of God, we, little people, feel and discover that we are nothing, a speck of dust, a drop from a bucket. In the Old Testament, the act of adoration appears as an act of deep love towards the Lord, an act that demands the involvement of the whole person: the mind, the will to choose, love full of desire and a body that bows and prostrates itself even to the ground. It is said in several places that the act of adoration is accompanied by a prostration with the face touching the ground; the face of man, his gaze, his breath returns to the dust whence he has his origin and there he recognises himself as creature of God, as a breath of God's nostrils. "Come in, let us bow, prostrate ourselves, and kneel in front of Yahweh our maker" (Ps 94: 6): this is the invitation of Scripture to us every day, showing us the way to walk so that we may again and again come to the truth and so live fully.

- The New Testament goes even deeper in its spiritual reflection on this fact and seems to want to accompany us on a pedagogical journey of conversion and of maturity in our interior life. In the Gospels we see the disciples, men and women, adoring the Lord Jesus after his resurrection (Mt 28: 9; Lk 24: 52), because they recognize him as God. Jesus' words in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman give us a deep insight into the truth of this act, which, after all, involves the whole of life and is an attitude of the heart: adoration is for God the Father and does not happen here or there but in Spirit and in truth, that is, in the Spirit and the Son, Jesus. We must not deceive ourselves; it is not by moving from one place to another, nor by seeking this or that spiritual person that we can adore our God. The movement, the journey is an interior one and takes place in our deepest being and is a complete surrender of ourselves, our life, our whole being, to the wings of the Holy Spirit and into the arms of Jesus, wide open on the cross and ever ready to attract all things to himself. St. Peter says clearly: "Simply reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts" (1 Pt 3: 15). The act of bowing to the ground, of prostrating ourselves before the Lord comes from the heart. If we let ourselves be touched and reach into our hearts, if we allow the Lord to enter our hearts, that sacred space, then He will change us completely, transform the whole of our person and make of us new men and women.

A Moment of Prayer: Psalm 84

A hymn concerning the trust of man on his journey to the house of God

Res. I have seen your star, Lord, and I have come to adore you!

How lovely are your dwelling-places, Yahweh Sabaoth. My whole being yearns and pines for Yahweh's courts, My heart and my body cry out for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, the swallow a nest to place its young: your altars, Yahweh Sabaoth, my King and my God.

How blessed are those who live in your house; they shall praise you continually. Blessed those who find their strength in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of the Balsam, they make there a waterhole, and -- a further blessing -- early rain fills it. They make their way from height to height; God shows himself to them in Zion. Yahweh, God Sabaoth, hear my prayer, listen, God of Jacob.

God, our shield, look, and see the face of your anointed. Better one day in your courts than a thousand at my own devices, to stand on the threshold of God's house than to live in the tents of the wicked. For Yahweh God is a rampart and shield, he gives grace and glory; Yahweh refuses nothing good to those whose life is blameless. Yahweh Sabaoth, blessed is he who trusts in you.

Closing Prayer

Lord, my Father, I have really seen your star, I have opened my eyes to your presence of love and salvation and I have received the light of life. I have contemplated the night changed into light, pain into joy and solitude into communion; yes, all this happened before you, in your Word. You have led me through the desert; you have led me to your house and opened the door for me to enter. There I saw you, your Son Jesus, Savior of my life; there I prayed and adored, I cried and found your smile, I kept silence and learnt to speak. In your house, merciful Father, I have found life once more!

And now I am going back, I have resumed my journey, but the way is not the one I took before and my life is not what it was before. Your Word has left me with a new heart, capable of opening itself to love, to listen, to welcome and become home to so many brothers and sisters whom you have placed in my way. I was not aware, Lord, but you have made me into a child again, you have given birth to me with Jesus. Thank you, Father, my Father!



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

02JAN2022 - SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

The sanctity of home

"Home is where the heart is" is an ancient proverb. Many folks find their deepest level of satisfaction and fulfillment in family life. But home is also where the *hearth* is: the place to which we come in from the cold to restore ourselves, where we put up our feet, sigh, and relax. Our homes are sacred to us; why not commend them to God? On Epiphany, we're invited to gather with our loved ones to bless the door, walls, and table of our dwelling. Compose your own blessing together or visit the USCCB's [Blessing of the Home and Household on Epiphany](#) for the rite of home blessing.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12 ([20](#)).

"The star they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was."

03JAN2022 - MEMORIAL OF THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

Initial reflections

Do you have anything monogrammed with your initials, perhaps towels or clothing? While monogramming is decorative, it also marks your belongings as yours. Jesus has a monogram too: "IHS," which stands for the first three letters of the Greek spelling of the name of Jesus. Later the monogram was associated with the Latin phrase *Iesus Hominum Salvator* (Jesus Humankind's Savior). There is power in the very name of Jesus and so Catholics venerate it. Perhaps you've seen this monogram on altars or vestments. Jesuits use the IHS monogram as the emblem of their society. You can bear his monogram too—by calling on his name and showing to the world that you belong to him.

Today's readings:

1 John 3:22-4:6; Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25 ([212](#)).

"And great crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan followed him."

04JAN2022 - MEMORIAL OF ELIZABETH ANN SETON, RELIGIOUS

Fed by the bread of life

Raised Episcopalian, Elizabeth Ann Seton knew about Jesus multiplying loaves. On Sundays, she was a devout communicant at historic Trinity Church on Wall Street. But it wasn't until Elizabeth went to Italy with her children and husband in 1803, attending Mass with Catholic friends, that she was drawn to the Real Presence in the Eucharist. "How happy would we be, if we believed what these dear souls believe," she wrote, "that they possess God in the sacrament, and that He remains in their churches and is carried to them when they are sick!" In honor of Mother Seton, the first U.S.-born saint, resolve to receive Communion more often this year.

Today's readings:

1 John 4:7-10; Mark 6:34-44 ([213](#)).

"He said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people."

05JAN2022 - MEMORIAL OF JOHN NEUMANN, BISHOP

Get to know your neighbors

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint John Neuman, the first Redemptorist priest ordained in the United States and the first male U.S. citizen named a saint. Neumann, who emigrated to the United States from Bohemia as a young man desirous of being a missionary, is revered for his tireless work among immigrants in the Northeast. He had a

talent for understanding people and knowing what would bring them peace and comfort. Seek to emulate this holy man, who one of his fellow bishops observed, "had a solution for every question posed," and an "unruffled composure, which betokened deep humility and perfect self-control. I always regarded him as a saint."

Today's readings:

1 John 4:11-18; Mark 6:45-52 ([214](#)).

"If we love one another, God remains in us, and [God's] love is brought to perfection in us."

06JAN₂₀₂₂ - MEMORIAL OF ANDRÉ BESSETTE, RELIGIOUS

The comeback kid of Québec

Saint André Bessette's remarkable life began when he was born into poverty in 1845. Orphaned by age 12, considered a failure in school, he practiced unskilled trades until his pastor encouraged him to join the Congregation of the Holy Cross. The congregation reluctantly admitted him, concerned about his frail health. Brother André defied expectations, living to age 91 and becoming famous throughout Québec for the many healings people experienced after visiting him in his role as a humble doorkeeper. Why not ask Brother André for his intercession, be it for mental, spiritual, relational, or physical healing?

Today's readings:

1 John 4:19—5:4; Luke 4:14-22 ([215](#)).

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor."

07JAN₂₀₂₂ - MEMORIAL OF RAYMOND OF PEÑAFORT, PRIEST

Make straight your path

Through its long history, the church has been careful to make a distinction between the canons, or rules, of the church and the laws of the state. The canons, from the Greek *kanon* for "straight," were meant to guide Catholics toward the mission of the church—to keep them on the straight and narrow of faith, so to speak. There are 1,752 canons, many that pertain to all of us. For example, Canon 210: "All the Christian faithful must direct their efforts to lead a holy life and to promote the growth of the church and its continual sanctification, according to their own condition." In honor of the patron saint of canon lawyers, Saint Raymond of Peñafort, do your best to follow the rules of the church and give witness to God's saving love.

Today's readings:

1 John 5:5-13; Luke 5:12-16 ([216](#)).

"God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

08JAN₂₀₂₂ - SATURDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Increasing Christ

Tomorrow, the Baptism of the Lord, marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. The days, dates, and seasons of the church's liturgical calendar focus the whole People of God on the same celebrations. During Advent we prepare. In Christmas we welcome. Lent is a time of reflection and repentance. Easter is new life. In Ordinary Time we celebrate the ongoing effects of God's grace. So when "Silent Night" or "We Three Kings" is sung throughout the world, the air fills with the grace generated by God in our hearts. Sing a Christmas hymn today and know that the stars are singing with you.

Today's readings:

1 John 5:14-21; John 3:22-30 ([217](#)).

"He must increase; I must decrease."