

# 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

# Sunday, January 7, 2024

*The 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 – Matthew 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. 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 choice about the people 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 and 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, and the conversion of their hearts, 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 location where the scenes take place: the first part (2: 1-9a) takes place in Jerusalem, and the second part is focused around Bethlehem (2: 9b-12).

- Mt 2: 1-2: The passage begins with 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, coming from afar, and arriving 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 joining Him, they seek to eliminate Him. Herod calls the authorities of the Jewish people and the experts in scripture. It is they, with the help of ancient prophecies, who 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:**

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel." Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another 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 and 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 and 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 heartbeats?
- "*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 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. Am I 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 given the 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 with the 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 which calls and attracts us with His own power. It is He who gets us to stand up and sets us in motion and 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. God said to Abraham: "Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you" (Gen 12: 1). Jacob was also a pilgrim of faith and conversion. It is written about him: "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 was also a man on a journey. God Himself showed him the way, the exodus, in his heart, and made 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). As the new people of God, we are the children of the promise and of the new covenant and are called to go out, setting out on a journey in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. The exodus never ceased. The liberation that comes from faith is 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, enlightening their nights along the journey, indicating precisely the place of the presence of the Lord, and giving great joy to their hearts. Throughout the Bible, stars appear as signs of blessing and glory, almost as a personification of God, who does not abandon His people, and at the same time, is 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. 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 kaf, which signify "hand" and which enclose the letter waw which means man. Thus, within the stars there are two hands, kaf and kaf, 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 of our journey towards our house, our constant migration, from 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 is also a star, the star that takes its rise from Jacob (Num 24: 17), which rises from on high and is the radiant morning star as the Apocalypse says (22: 16). By taking on flesh the infinite love of God, which bends itself down towards us, His children, 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 and 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 divine has been accompanied by this demand of love, humility, and 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. It involves 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 recognizes 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 which shows us the way to walk so that we may again and again come to the truth and therefore 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 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, which 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, and our whole being, to the wings of the Holy Spirit and into the arms of Jesus which are 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, transforming the whole of our person to 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, YHWH 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,  
YHWH 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 water-hole,

and -- a further blessing -- early rain fills it.  
They make their way from height to height,  
God shows himself to them in Zion.

YHWH 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.

YHWH 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 learned 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!



*Please note: The weekly "Take Five for Faith" has changed to a weekly question and reflection. I have included "Take Five Weekly" for January 7<sup>th</sup> in this packet. Please let the Parish Office know if you would like to continue to receive this weekly reflection or just the Lectio Divina section, at the beginning of this packet. Thank you!*

07 January 2024

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## WORD OF THE WEEK

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### Preparation of the Gifts

\pre-pə-'rā-shən |  
'gifts\

The set of ceremonial actions at Mass preceding the Eucharistic Prayer and Holy Communion. Includes dressing of the altar; bringing forward the bread and wine; and the community's personal sacrifices taken up in the collection. Formerly called the Offertory. The community offers a song of praise for all these gifts as the priest washes his hands in a purification rite.

*Pronunciation:* <https://tinyurl.com/Take5-preparation-gifts>

### CONTEXT

The **Preparation of the Gifts** allows time for the preparation of our hearts. Like the Magi bearing gifts and doing homage to Majesty, we bring our gifts and our praise to the Table.

—Father Paul Boudreau

God has first blessed us with the gift of creation. Humans take those gifts given, wheat and grapes, and, using our creativity, make bread and wine. Then, we bring those gifts we have received and labored over to present them at the Altar/Table that they might be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Finally, we receive them back in Communion. The procession of the **Gifts** says, in essence, "Behold the gifts God has given us!"

—Father Roc O'Connor, S.J.

### WHY IT MATTERS

We take great care preparing other festive tables for our most cherished gatherings. Could we do less for the table where the Real Presence of Christ will be made tangible for us?

From the General Instructions of the Roman Missal: The altar or Lord's table, which is the center of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist, is made ready. . . . The offerings are then brought forward. It is a praiseworthy practice for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful (73).

### RELATED WORDS

Corporal | purificator | Missal | Chalice

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## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

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### Is Epiphany about giving or getting gifts?

"We three kings of Orient are/ bearing gifts we traverse afar." Nowhere in the gospels does it claim there are three kings. They are magi, hereditary priests of the ancient Medes and Persians. At least the carol gets one thing right: this wise group does bear gifts. Gold symbolizes wealth and power. Frankincense, used in prayer, represents the divine Presence. Myrrh prepares bodies for burial. It's an ominous sign that would make a startling gift. . . . But they were appropriate honors for the King of the Universe, the Divine Son, and the crucified Lord.

We also bear Jesus gifts at every Eucharist: bread, wine, and our financial sacrifice. "Made by human hands," these gifts are transformed and returned to us as the Body and Blood of Christ, and then redistributed for those in need.

More gifts come to us by way of this shared Table. Grace pours out on the assembly. Grace forgives sin, and rescues us from every evil. This is one gift you don't want to put at the bottom of a closet.

—Alice Camille, from *Questions Catholics Ask* <https://tinyurl.com/QCA-presentation-gifts>

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## REFLECTION OF THE WEEK

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SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD (JANUARY 7)

### Remember our migrant roots

America was once renowned as the land where people could come to breathe freely. Scripture reminds us of the considerable gifts that migrant people bring with them. Whether king or commoner, each person offers what they have to make the community more dynamic.

READINGS: saiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12 (20 <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/010724.cfm>). "Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you."

### FAITH IN ACTION

Let's welcome the newcomer and remember that the infant Jesus was once a migrant, too.