

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 1st Sunday of Advent

### **First reading:**

(Jeremiah 33.14-16)

*The Branch for David*

At the darkest moment of Israel's history, when the storm clouds of invasion were gathering, and the Babylonian conquest and exile seemed inevitable, comes this prophecy that the promise made long ago to David will not fail. Jerusalem will be sacked, but the promise remains that the city will be named 'the Lord is our Saving Justice'.

The justice of God is not like human justice, conformity with the law. It is God's fulfilling his promises made to Abraham, Moses and David. So at this dire moment Jeremiah renews those promises that the stock of David will never fail, and gives a corresponding symbolic name to the city of David.

Today's gospel speaks of another destruction of Jerusalem, that wrought by the Romans in 70AD, and looks beyond it to the final coming of Christ. So several layers are envisaged: the seeming loss of the promise at the Sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which will be restored by the coming of Christ at the incarnation, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which is the prelude to, and promise of, the final coming of Christ. In all these, the Lord is our Saving Justice.

### **Question:**

*If Jesus is the 'righteous branch' promised to David, did he bring saving justice to the world?*

### **Second reading:**

(1 Thessalonians 3.12-4.2)

*The Coming of the Lord Jesus*

Paul gives instructions about living in holiness while waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Each year the Church reminds us of the final coming of the Lord, which is to be the end of the world as we know it.

In the Old Testament, the 'Day of the Lord' is the day on which God will come to re-establish all things, to put wrongs right, to punish the wicked and reward the righteous. In the New Testament, from this earliest letter of Paul onwards, this Day of the Lord is the Day of the Lord Jesus. It is pictured as a day on which the Lord Jesus will come in a triumphal procession 'with all his holy ones', to be joined first by those who have died in the Lord, and then by those who are still living.

For Paul, the triumph of the Lord is so dominant that he does not even mention or envisage punishments for the wicked. The Lord will triumph over all evil, sweeping all before him, and will carry all with him in his triumphal procession. Writing to the Corinthians he envisages that Christ will put all things under his feet, even the last enemy, death, and will then hand over the Kingdom to his Father.

### **Question:**

*Is everything subject to Jesus, even the last enemy, death?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 21.25-28, 34-36)*

### *Your Liberation is Near at Hand*

With this reading, we begin the Year of Luke, for his gospel provides the readings for almost all the Sundays of the liturgical year that begins today. We begin at the end, for Luke sees the destruction of Jerusalem as the symbol and foretaste of final liberation at the coming of Christ. The horror of this day is represented by the cosmic disturbances, the collapse of all we regard as most stable and reliable, the eruption of the ocean and the collapse of the solar system.

The Sack of Jerusalem by the Romans was certainly a decisive moment in the history of the Church, when the possibility vanished forever of the Church remaining a branch of Judaism. In this sense, it was a liberation for the gentile Churches for which Luke was writing his gospel. It is also a symbol of the final liberation from the toils of evil in which humanity is embroiled, and so of the final triumph of Christ.

It is a day for which we must prepare by our whole life, for revelation gives us no hint of when it will occur. The only hints are images of unexpected suddenness, like a trap being sprung (as here), a thief in the night or the pains of labour coming on a pregnant woman.

## **Question:**

*If these prophecies are not to be taken literally, what do they mean?*

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# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

### ***First reading:***

(Baruch 5.1-9)

*High Mountains Laid Flat*

This part of the Book of Baruch is a meditation on Isaiah's promises for Jerusalem at the return of Israel from Exile in Babylon. It is, of course, taken up by John the Baptist in his proclamation that the high mountains will be flattened and the valleys filled in to make a smooth road for the Messiah to cross the desert to Jerusalem.

There were many aspects of the expected Messiah, the harbinger of God's Kingship. For Isaiah, it was a conquering hero, his garments stained with the blood of his victories. In this prophecy, the reign of God is more peaceful, a heartfelt dedication to God and the values of the divine sovereignty, for at this coming of God the names of Jerusalem shall be 'Peace through Justice' and 'Glory through Devotion'.

True peace is possible only through the saving justice of God, when the people of God truly act as God's representatives, made in the image of God, and the envoys of his saving values. The ideal of God's Kingdom appears in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, when his representatives, Adam and Eve, lived in perfect harmony with one another and with God's whole creation.

### **Question:**

*In what sense has the coming of Christ brought peace to the world*

### ***Second reading:***

(Philippians 1.3-6, 8-11)

*Filled with the Fruits of Uprightness*

Paul always begins his letters with a commendation and a blessing. The Philippians to whom he is writing were Paul's favourite community. The letter is full of friendship and affection. Here he commends the Philippians for their partnership with him in the gospel, and prays that God's work in them may be completed. So they may be ready for the Day of the Lord, which he envisaged to be imminent.

The passage is chosen as a preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus at Christmas. It serves as a reminder that the traditional three comings of Christ cannot be separated. The coming in history was the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. The coming in mystery is the coming of Christ into our hearts as we endeavour to mould ourselves as his faithful followers and to live out his values. The coming in majesty is the final coming of Christ in glory to gather his elect to himself, either at our homecoming in death or at the end of all things. The three comings lead on, one to another: the coming in history gives a new impetus to the Kingdom of God, the coming in majesty brings it to its climax, and the coming in mystery is our own repeated response.

### **Question:**

*Which of these three comings of Christ is the most important for us?*

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## Gospel:

*(Luke 3.1-6)*

### *The Baptist's Message*

Each year the two middle Sundays of Advent centre on John the Baptist, preparing the way for Jesus. John came to prepare a community of repentance who would be ready for the Messiah. This was to be a community not of those who went around moping about their sinfulness, but a community of those who had changed their ways and their whole system of values and priorities. The Hebrew concept that he proclaimed was a matter of turning round and going in the opposite direction. To be ready for the Messiah meant - and still means - such a radical change of attitude. J

John himself had prepared by going out into the desert, for the Messiah was to come striding across the desert, as did Israel at the exodus. John's clothing and his whole way of life showed his rejection of current materialism and his single-minded dedication. It is not primarily a negative point of view, for his quotation of Baruch (as in today's first reading) or of Isaiah shows that the flattening of the hills and the filling of the valleys is a preparation for the Kingdom of Peace and Justice. A good deal of positive planning and of spadework is needed if we are to be ready to welcome that Kingdom.

## Question:

*What sort of change in my lifestyle is needed for me to welcome Jesus at Christmas?*

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# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

***First reading:*** (Zephaniah 3.14-18)

*Rejoice, Daughter of Jerusalem!*

Zephaniah prophesies that Jerusalem, the Holy City, sacked by the Babylonians, will be restored. It will be a day of overwhelming joy, when the Lord will truly be king in Jerusalem.

After the Exile in Babylon, the Jews returned to Jerusalem, but they were continually dominated by one set of foreign rulers after another, tossed from one to another as the plaything of their powerful neighbours. They longed more and more to be free, to have God as their only ruler.

When Jesus came, the kingship of God dominated his whole horizon, but they failed to recognize the kingship of God in his proclamation and his way of life. He was not the conquering hero they expected, and the citizens he gathered into his kingdom were the hungry, the poor, the persecuted, the disadvantaged, the alienated, the lost, the despised, the crippled and the sick. It was to these that he brought joy and rejoicing 'as on a day of festival'. If they failed to see God at work in his life, it was because they were looking for the wrong sort of God. If we want to share Christ's joy at Christmas, we must focus on the right kind of Kingship of God.

**Question:**

*Am I ready to rejoice at the coming of the Lord Jesus into our midst?*

***Second reading:*** (Philippians 4.4-7)

*Be joyful in the Lord!*

The encouragement that begins this reading, 'Be joyful!', gave the third Sunday of Advent, halfway through the preparation for Christmas, its traditional name of Gaudete Sunday.

However, it is all very well for Paul to tell us not to worry but to place all our desires before God. In the same vein, the Letter of James tells us that prayer must be made with faith, without a trace of doubt. Nevertheless, are our prayers always answered? How can they be, if you pray for rain while I pray for sunshine?

The true prayer of petition is Jesus' own prayer, an embrace of the Father in loving confidence that God is just that, our loving Father. We can think we know what will make us happy, but the only true receipt for happiness is to leave it to God, in the knowledge that our human perception is short sighted and incomplete. Any further prayer must be provisional. It is almost a game: I think I know what will make me happy, but on another level I know that I don't know, that only God knows best. All I can do is to cast my worries onto the Lord and leave the rest to him.

**Question:**

*Should I pray for any specific thing, or leave it all to God?*

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## Gospel:

*(Luke 3.10-18)*

### *John the Baptist's Counsels*

In this second of the two Sunday gospels about John the Baptist, we first hear details about how to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Luke is always aware of the dangers of wealth and money, so he concentrates on avoiding its misuse. First, he teaches equal sharing with the needy, no hoarding but generosity. Then he turns to financial exploitation; tax collectors had to pay for the right to collect taxes, and would be tempted to extort a nice margin to cover their own needs. In the same way, soldiers could be tempted to abuse their power of intimidation by bullying those they were meant to protect.

The second half of John's task is to point away from himself towards Jesus, who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Luke's gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are full of the Holy Spirit. Luke must have been vividly aware of the working of the Spirit in the Church, in its ministers of all kinds and in the life of the Christian communities. He warns also of the fierce fire that will purge away impurities; for John the Messiah is a stern figure who will burn away the rubbish in human hearts to make room for the Spirit.

## Question:

*How would John the Baptist tell me to clean up my life?*

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# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

### ***First reading:***

(Micah 5 .1-4)

*The Ruler from Bethlehem*

On this final Sunday of Advent all the concentration is on Mary as she prepares to give birth to her Son. The prophecy of Micah reminds us that God's standards are utterly different from human standards.

Bethlehem was an insignificant little hilltop town, the home of the smallest clan of Judah, in an insignificant and oppressed country. Yet it had two moments of greatness, one when David was anointed king there, the other when Jesus was born. David was the youngest of his father's sons, left to look after the sheep when all the others were summoned. He stands in the long tradition in the Bible that God chooses the younger or less distinguished: Abel instead of Cain, Jacob instead of Esau, Joseph the youngest of all Jacob's sons. Jesus seemed to have no visible father at all, and Mary no roof over her head for the birth of her first child.

We cannot dare to estimate any person's value in God's eyes, but amid all our striving, all the pushing and shoving for priority, we do have a lurking suspicion that those nearest to God, most marked by the image of God, are the humblest and least distinguished of people. Mary was among them.

### **Question:**

*Does the Church give special honour to the poor?*

### ***Second reading:***

(Hebrews 10.5-10)

*'I am coming to do your will.'*

As we prepare for Christmas we are reminded that Jesus came to overtrump the disobedience of Adam by his own perfect obedience. It was not the suffering of Jesus itself that redeemed the world, as though suffering had some value in itself, or paid some penalty. The medieval theology that suggested this tied itself in knots about the recipient of this payment: God or the devil? Neither recipient works out!

In Romans, Paul is quite clear that the redemptive factor was Jesus' obedience even to the point of suffering on the Cross: 'Just as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience are many to be made upright.' Adam is the image of human disobedience, the disobedience of us all.

Today's reading from Hebrews tells us that Jesus was given a body to express his obedience. By his bodily obedience, the guarantee and expression of his full humanity, he brought all bodily men and women back to God. By our bodies, we express our obedience, in sickness and in health. Jesus, too, in his baby's body, his child's body, his youthful body, his fully mature body, expressed his obedience to his Father. In so doing, he prepared for the ultimate expression of loving obedience on the Cross.

### **Question:**

*What is lacking in my obedience to God?*

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## Gospel:

*(Luke 1.39-44)*

### *The Visitation*

Luke's account of the birth and infancy of Jesus is built on the comparison and contrast of the two stories of John the Baptist and Jesus: the Annunciation to the parents, the birth of each, the joy on earth and in heaven, the circumcision, the growth of the child.

In each incident, John is shown to be great, but Jesus greater still. Only in this incident do the two families meet, the two stories cross. The two mothers meet each other to marvel at the destiny of their children. The journey from Nazareth to even the nearest of the towns in the hill country of Judah (traditionally Elizabeth's home is located at Ain Karim, now on the outskirts of Jerusalem) would have been arduous, a week's walk for a fit young woman. This special exertion and generosity shows her love and care for her elderly relative, as well as the natural excitement of the two in sharing their motherhood.

Luke has already told us that Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit. Now Elizabeth, too, is filled with the Holy Spirit as they share and exchange the praise of God for the gift of their child.

## Question:

*Is there anyone to whom a visit from me would bring special joy at Christmas?*

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# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## Christmas Day – the Nativity of the Lord

### Mass during the Night

#### ***First reading***

(Isaiah 9 .2-4, 6-7)

*The Hope of Israel*

This prophecy of Isaiah promises a joyful reversal after the threats of the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem in 732Bc. The devastating Assyrian armies had plundered the northern kingdom of Israel and seemed certain to repeat this exploit on Judah and Jerusalem in the south. Amazingly, they turned away.

At the same time Isaiah promises a son of the royal line of David, who will bring peace with justice and righteousness. This son is described in exaggerated terms that we Christians see to be fulfilled only in Jesus, the Second David, the true Son of God. He will be Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, each pair of titles having a marvellous, transcendent air. Such promises sustained the hopes of the nation through the grim period of the Exile and the succession of foreign rulers which dominated the return from Exile. As the hated Roman occupation became more burdensome, the hopes of delivery through this promised heir of David became more and more vivid in Israel, as we see from the Jewish literature of the years immediately preceding the birth of Jesus. It is in terms of the heir to David and Son of God that Mary received the message of the angel at the Annunciation.

#### **Question:**

*What would life be like without God?*

#### ***Second reading:***

(Titus 2.11-14)

*The Appearing of Our Saviour*

The author of the letter sees God primarily as the Saviour, who wishes all people to be saved through Christ, also our Saviour. In the Old Testament, God is often called the Saviour of his people, but in the letters to Timothy and Titus this title is with equal frequency transferred to Jesus our Saviour, perhaps as a divine title.

This reading is chosen to celebrate Christmas because it speaks twice of the appearing or manifestation (the same word in Greek) of our Saviour, and the Church Fathers often consider the moment of this Appearing at the Incarnation rather than the Resurrection to be the moment of salvation. It is celebrated as the moment when God became man so that man might be raised to the divine. Accordingly, the Eastern Church celebrates rather the Epiphany (or Appearing) of the Lord. However, the letter stresses that we must respond to this Appearing of the grace of God by preparing for the final Appearing. Thus the classic formulation speaks of the threefold coming of Christ: in history (at Bethlehem), in mystery (coming into our hearts) and in majesty (at the final coming in glory).

#### **Question:**

*What is the basic difference between pagan and Christian sacrifice?*

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 2.1-16)*

### *The Birth of Jesus*

Luke's account of the birth of Jesus stresses especially the poverty of the family: Christ comes to the poor and is greeted by the poor. Mary and Joseph are displaced persons, and can find no decent place for the baby to be born. There is no space in the living quarters and he has to be put in a feeding trough among the animals. He is greeted not by the rich presents of the magnificent Wise Men from the east, but by impoverished hired shepherds, guarding flocks in the winter night. He is born to be the patron of the homeless and of displaced persons.

But Jesus is also the fulfilment of the hopes of the Old Testament. The families of both John the Baptist and Jesus are eminently faithful to the prescriptions of the Law, waiting for the salvation promised to Israel. In the Temple, Jesus will be greeted by Simeon and Anna, the representatives of fidelity to the Old Law. The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem shows that he is born as the heir to the promises to David, that God would build David a house of everlasting sovereignty, whose king would be the son of God and would call God his Father.

## **Question:**

*What can I do for someone poor or unhappy this Christmas?*

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# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## Christmas Day – the Nativity of the Lord

### Mass during the Day

***First reading:*** (Isaiah 52.7-10)

*All the Ends of the Earth shall see Salvation*

This reading, from the second part of Isaiah, written on the eve of the ending of Israel's exile in Babylon, is full of the joys of the impending return to Jerusalem. After the years of waiting and doubt, the author envisages a messenger coming into view on the mountains with the announcement of the good news of peace, salvation and the return to the ruins of Jerusalem. When the city was sacked and its people dragged (literally, on meat hooks) across the desert into exile, it had seemed that their God could not protect them. Now comes the confirmation that, after all, God is king and overcomes all opposition.

Furthermore, a new dimension has opened out, for God brings salvation not merely to Israel but to the whole world, to 'the ends of the earth'. This is especially significant for Christians, since it was the expression used by the Risen Lord before the Ascension as his apostles are about to set out on their worldwide mission of bringing the good news to all nations. It is, therefore, a valuable reminder on the day of Christmas that the festival is not merely a family celebration but is the beginning of the Christian mission to bring God's hope and promise to the whole world.

**Question:**

*How can I be a messenger of good news announcing peace?*

***Second reading:*** (Hebrews 1.1-6)

*The Heir of All Things*

The Letter to the Hebrews concentrates on the true humanity of Christ, who is also uniquely exalted, and also on Christ's priesthood. Here, at the opening of the letter, both these themes are sketched. Christ is higher than the angels, the very powers of God who accomplish the works of God and are the highest of all created beings. It is through these powers of God that God's will is accomplished, but Christ is incomparably higher than the angels.

As 'the reflection of God's glory' and 'the imprint of God's being', Christ is spoken of in terms of God's Wisdom. In the Old Testament, God's Wisdom is seen as the image, the reflection, the emanation of God through which God creates, and by which God is mirrored in the world, the way in which God's power and goodness is perceived. At the same time, in history as man, Christ has made purification for sins and has been exalted to the right hand of God. The whole history of salvation is hinted in these phrases, which express both the approach of God to human beings by the incarnation, and the exaltation of humanity by- the vindication of Christ at his Resurrection and Ascension.

**Question:**

*In this reading, which to you is the most powerful expression of the divinity of Christ?*

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## **Gospel:**

*(John 1.1-18)*

### *The Word made Flesh*

The Prologue of St John has a special place in Christian theology, and for centuries was recited at the end of the Mass as summing up the whole work of redemption. It begins with God's creation by the Word, and ends with the completion of the purpose of creation through the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

In the centre, comes the incarnation, which enables and invites those who accept Christ to become children of God. The gospel story of Mark begins at the baptism of Jesus, and the voice from heaven declaring that he is God's son. Matthew and Luke add the infancy stories to show that Jesus possessed and manifested these divine qualities right from his birth. John goes back beyond this, to meditate on the ultimate part in both creation and its fulfilment of the Word who became flesh.

Perhaps the most exultant cry of all is 'we have seen his glory', for glory belongs rightly to God alone. This statement contains the paradox that Christ as a human being made visible this divine glory, and that it was his own glory, witnessed by the followers among whom he lived and moved. It is their tradition that will be expressed in the gospel story that follows and is celebrated through the year.

## **Question:**

*What does 'we have seen his glory' mean?*

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# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## Epiphany of the Lord

***First reading:*** (Isaiah 60.1-6)

*The Glory of the Lord has risen upon You*

Many of the most glorious passages in the liturgy are taken from this third part of Isaiah, written after the return of Israel from captivity in Babylon. They are full of optimism and a new self-confidence. What is more, they show an awareness of Israel's mission to the world. This had already been included in the promise to Abraham that 'all nations will bless themselves in' him - picked up by Mary in her Magnificat.

But now there is a new consciousness that the choice of Israel was not just for themselves, but so that they could bring light to all the nations. This is expressed in terms of the sunrise that suddenly brings light to a grey world. All they need to do is simply to lift up their eyes and see the throngs of peoples eagerly coming from the remote deserts to draw salvation from Israel. How aware are we that our mission too is to bring light and salvation to a darkened world, that the message of God's love entrusted to us is given to us not only for ourselves but for all?

Question:

*Does the church bring light to all those around? If not, whose fault is it?*

***Second reading:*** (Ephesians 3.2-3a, 5-6)

*The Climax of Creation*

The message of the Letter to the Ephesians is that the mystery hidden from the beginning of the ages has in Christ at last been revealed. In the first century there was great expectation of a defining and transforming event. In Christ, this event had taken place. In the earlier letters, Paul had already referred to it. Now two other dimensions have become clear.

The division between Jews and gentiles is no longer valid, for in Christ all nations are summoned to the salvation promised to Abraham. This was only the completion of the promise that in Abraham all nations would bless themselves. Second, in Christ creation was brought to its completion. Just as all creation was created in Christ, the Word and Wisdom of the Father, just so all creation was summed up and brought to a head in Christ.

As Christians we believe this, but to what extent do we live by it? Do we see all creatures, and especially all human creatures, as united with us and making sense only in Christ, even if they do not realize it. What confidence and joy this should give us!

Question:

*Do I see all human beings as chosen by God?*

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## Gospel:

(Matthew 2.1-12)

### *The Coming of the Magi*

The contrast is overwhelming: Herod, the King of the Jews, the nation prepared since all ages to welcome the coming of God to set all things right, fails to recognize the coming of the Lord. He is so blind as even to make every attempt to liquidate this herald of the completion of history and of Jewish hopes.

By contrast, the trio of Wise Men from the east, the traditional home of natural wisdom, show their conviction of the turning point of history by journeying over desert and mountain to welcome and pay homage to the Lord.

The evangelist is clear that this is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of the coming of peoples from the East to pay homage to the Lord. Especially in eastern Christianity is the festival of the Epiphany (rather than the birthday of Jesus) seen as the manifestation of Christ to the world. This is the meaning of the Greek word 'epiphany': it was first used of the manifest coming of the Roman emperor on a state visit, for he was regarded as a deity to whom worship and adoration were due.

## Question:

*Which is the more important day, Christmas or Epiphany?*

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# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## Baptism of the Lord

**First reading:** (Isaiah 42.1-4, 6-7)

*My Chosen One in whom my Soul Delights*

In the Book of Isaiah occur four songs about a Servant of the Lord. The fourth is familiar from Good Friday's liturgy, for it is about the servant's triumph through rejection and suffering. Today we are given the first of the four songs.

The servant is the Lord's Chosen One, on whom the Lord confers his Spirit, with the mission of bringing true justice to the nations. Jesus refers to himself frequently as servant. He must have had these poems in mind. In his human mind, the opening of the first song must have echoed in his head as he set off after his baptism on his mission to bring the sovereignty of God to a new degree of realism. The coming of the Spirit and the voice from heaven constitute a sign that determines his way.

In so many ways, this prophecy is echoed in his behaviour, his gentleness, his light to the blind, his freeing so many captivities of human distortion, his zeal for God's will, and finally in his supreme act of service and love. Is this our programme too?

**Question:**

*What are the chief obstacles today to the mission of the Church?*

**Second reading:** (Acts 10.34-38)

*Jesus Begins in Galilee*

In this reading, we are given Peter's address to Cornelius the centurion, the first gentile to be received into the community of the followers of Jesus, a decisive step in the opening of God's blessing on the world. Each of Peter's addresses, however, begins the history of Jesus' mission at the Baptism. In the selection of a successor to Judas, the chief conditions were discipleship, company with Jesus from this first moment of baptism, and witness to the Resurrection.

The example of Jesus' life and activity must be familiar to enable us to see what the implications of living out the sovereignty of God must be, how we too can be the servants of the Lord. That is why familiarity with the four gospels is so important. These four different faces of the prism that make up the gospel of Jesus Christ all have their contribution to make to our intimate knowledge and love of Jesus.

**Question:**

*In what sense is Christ the Lord of the Church?*

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 3.15-16, 21-22)*

### *The Coming of the Spirit*

Luke does not tell us who baptized Jesus. In Luke, the story of John the Baptist ends with his promise of one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit - then John is arrested. At the baptism itself all Luke's concentration is on the coming of the Spirit. Indeed, it is hardly an account of the baptism at all, for the baptism is only a time marker for the coming of the Spirit 'when Jesus, after his own baptism, was at prayer'.

Jesus' mission begins with the coming of the Spirit. In the same way, in Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, the mission of the apostles begins with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. It is as if Luke wants to show the importance of the Spirit from beginning to end of the Christian life. And this is the case: in both writings, the part played by the Spirit directs all the action. The same is still true in the Church today, although often human stubbornness and blindness do their best to retard or impede this leadership and guidance by the Spirit. Most of us are artistes at blocking the Spirit when the Spirit's promptings are inconvenient.

## **Question:**

*Is the dove a good symbol of the Spirit?*

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