

# Reflecting

## On Sunday's Readings

January 2026

The following series is free, downloadable small-group materials based on each week's Mass readings and the seasons of the liturgical year. Each study provides an introductory reflection on some aspect of the readings or on personal spirituality. Each of the readings is provided along with a few questions designed to engage the heart and stimulate the group's discussion. These small-group materials will be provided on a continuing basis in monthly segments.

We would suggest the following 60-to-90 minutes format for the small group:

1. Open with a moment of quiet reflection and prayer.
2. Discuss the introductory reflection with a question or comment like, "What do you feel is important for us to grasp in this introduction?" or "What stood out to you from these opening paragraphs?" As the facilitator of the discussion be ready to share one or two things which were important to you from the introduction.
3. Have someone read the First Reading and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions. **Effective group-dynamic techniques should be used to further stimulate the discussion and affirm the participation.** (The booklet *A Facilitator's Guide* is available from Emmaus Journey to provide additional practical training for leading lively and informative small-group discussions.)
4. The Responsorial Psalm provides a reflective transition from the First Reading to the Gospel Reading, so have the Psalm read aloud. You may do this without additional comment, or you may want to draw their attention to something you feel is pertinent.
5. You can either read this week's Second Reading next and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions, or cover the Second Reading after you cover the Gospel Reading. The Second Reading does not always have a clear connection to the other Sunday Mass readings, **so do not feel like you need to force a connection.** However, you can provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to draw a connection by asking, "How do you see that this passage ties into the theme of the readings?"
6. Move on to the Gospel Reading, repeating the process by asking several people to share their answers to the reflection questions.
7. Approximately equal time for discussion should be given to each of the sections: Introduction, First Reading, Second Reading and the Gospel Reading. Obviously, if one section is especially stimulating, you should give some additional time to discussing it.
8. Close the discussion with group prayer, using various prayer formats.

We trust that God will use these materials to make His Word more meaningful to you, both within the small group environment and during Mass as you hear Scripture read and taught. **We would appreciate knowing if you are using the *Reflecting on Sunday's Readings*, and would welcome your feedback, either through the Emmaus Journey web page form, or by direct e-mail.**

Sincerely,

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# Reflecting

On Sunday's

## Readings

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD SUNDAY—January 4, 2026

**Introduction:** During these past several weeks of Advent we have been conscious of Christ's light penetrating our darkened world. We have celebrated God's grace manifested through his Son, Jesus, and gloried in this heavenly visitation. In the book *On Being Human*, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen explains, "But Christmas is not a man making himself a god, but God becoming a man, without ever ceasing to be God. In the first instance, there is exaltation or self-inflation by which man makes himself what he is not. In the second instance, there is humiliation, for God takes on the form and habit of man." What a glorious truth!

During Epiphany we celebrate the manifestation of Jesus the Christ to the Magi, which in turn represents the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. About these Gentiles Paul later says "you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." No wonder the Magi fell down in praise and worship. Paul later explains, "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ." No wonder they experienced such joy.

For many of us who have not experienced ostracism because of our race or social standing it is difficult to fathom the importance of this early and inclusive manifestation. Perhaps only a country like India where the caste system is so pronounced between the "untouchables" and the elite can we find a modern day parallel. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, though God chose and blessed the nation Israel, he always maintained the witness that the salvation of ALL MANKIND was at the heart of his concern and plan. Consequently, right from the beginning of Jesus' earthly existence God chose to manifest the Savior to both Jew and Gentile. He was to be, and is, the Light of the World for all people for all time.

In the midst of our rejoicing at the significance of this wonderful truth we must recognize that it also calls forth a gift response from us as it did the Magi. Not merely a gift of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but one of cooperation and participation in God's concern and plan that all mankind might be united in Christ. "This is a task I wish to invite all local churches to undertake," writes Pope John Paul II in *At the Beginning of the New Millennium*. "In each of them, gathered around their Bishop, as they listen to the word and 'break bread' in brotherhood, the 'one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative.' It is above all in the actual situation of each local church that the mystery of the one People of God takes the particular form that fits it to each individual context and culture.

"In the final analysis, this rooting of the Church in time and space mirrors the movement of the Incarnation itself. Now is the time for each local Church [and each individual] to assess its fervor and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities, by reflecting on what the Spirit has been saying to the People of God ..." The Epiphany of the Lord, falling as it does at the beginning of a new year, provides an ideal reminder and opportunity to reassess our commitment to our Lord's concerns and plans, and to align our lives and gifts with his. Begin this process by making a gift to Christ of a block of your time, where you can sit and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you through this realignment process. Every child adopted into a family receives not only the privileges and joys of belonging, but also the responsibilities. As Gentiles we should rejoice that we have been adopted into God's family, and we also should rejoice that we can affirm our significance by sharing in its responsibilities and purposes.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

**First Reading — Isaiah 60:1-6**

1. In what ways has Christ's light been manifested to you?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13**

**Second Reading — Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6**

2. What different aspects of our salvation are emphasized by the following terms; "fellow heirs," "members" of Christ's body, and "partakers of the promise"?

**Gospel Reading — Matthew 2:1-12**

3. Where do you feel you are in your journey to make Jesus your Ruler and King?
4. What do the titles "Ruler" and "King" imply to you about Jesus and our responsibilities as members of his kingdom?
5. What precious gifts can you bring to Jesus as tokens of your love and worship?

# Reflecting

On Sunday's

## Readings

BAPTISM OF THE LORD SUNDAY—January 11, 2026

**Introduction:** The Baptism of our Lord was made newly visible to me through an icon at a retreat in Mount Angel Abbey in Oregon, the icon showed a loincloth clad Jesus being helped by an angel into a flowing stream, surrounded by the faces of humanity. With one foot on the bank and the other submerged well into the stream the icon depicted Jesus' willingness to enter into our humanity and identify with us in our need. Imagine, he who knew no sin allowed himself to be numbered among sinners, among those who responded to John's call for confession of, and repentance from their sins.

During this act of humiliation and solidarity with humanity the Father testifies about his Son and anoints him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Catechism explains, "The messianic consecration reveals his divine mission, for the name 'Christ' implies 'he who anointed,' and 'the very anointing with which he was anointed.' The one who anointed is the Father, the one who was anointed is the Son, and he was anointed with the Spirit who is the anointing." Thus, in this baptismal event his earthly ministry as the Messiah was inaugurated. His baptism was a twofold witness, first the witness of Jesus testifying of those he came to save, and secondly by the Father testifying that Jesus was in fact the Savior.

The Lord's baptism, like his incarnation and crucifixion definitively answers for all time the question of the Father's love for us. For in each of these salvation events, the incarnation, baptism, and crucifixion, Jesus identifies with us in our stained humanity. In each instance as Jesus identifies with us the Father reaffirms that he is "well pleased" with Jesus, for he knows that Jesus is making possible that which has been impossible. "So, it happened not only that the Lord was being baptized—he also was making new the old creation. He was bringing the alienated under the scepter of adoption. For straight-way 'the heavens were opened to him.' A reconciliation took place between the visible and the invisible. The celestial orders were filled with joy, the diseases of the earth healed, secret things made known, those at enmity restored to amity. . . . So, when the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and the Father's voice spread everywhere, it was fitting that 'the gates of heaven should be lifted up.'" (Hippolytus in "The Discourse on the Holy Theophany," from *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Vol. II.*)

As we worship and reflect together on the Baptism of the Lord, we should take hope and receive challenge. Our hope rests in the witness of the Father, and of the Scriptures that Jesus has fully entered into our humanity and into our spiritual dilemma. The book of Hebrews says that he was "tempted as we are, yet without sin." As we slog our way through the muck and mire of life it is easy to get discouraged not only with our own sinfulness and disobedience but also with that of the world around us. How easy it would be to choose to give up, or to wallow in guilt and discouragement at our spiritual and practical shortcomings. But the baptism of our Lord should give us hope that by entering into our humanity he also understands our battles. Hebrews encourages us that Jesus is "a high priest, who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses," and encourages us to "then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Where does his humility and obedience in baptism leave us? How are we to identify with him? In what ways does his mission now rest on us who are his body? Jesus later refers to his death on the cross as a baptism with which he is to be baptized. Does not our gratitude for his identification with us both in the baptism of water and the baptism of the cross demand our identification with him in life and mission? We should be challenged by the grace which Jesus' humility bestows on us to also willingly identify with others in their humanity by bestowing his grace on them.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

**First Reading — Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7**

1. Why do you think that justice is such an important issue with God?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10**

**Second Reading — Acts 10:34-38**

2. What are some of the ways in which we can demonstrate that God shows no partiality?

**Gospel Reading — Matthew 3:13-17**

3. How do you view not only Jesus' willingness to be baptized, but also his insistence on being baptized?



# Reflecting

On Sunday's

## Readings

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—January 18, 2026

**Introduction:** Each year thirty-three or thirty-four weeks are designated as Ordinary Time. This designation is not intended to be ordinary in a qualitative sense, but simply Sundays wherein a particular mystery of Christ is not designated for celebration. However, for us, each week of Ordinary Time can be extraordinary as we experience and worship the risen Lord.

That which makes our life extraordinary is not the rare sudden blaze of glory, but the cumulative affect of living day-in and day-out with Christ, united and nourished by him. It was said of Peter and John that they were “uneducated and ordinary men” whose amazing boldness was attributed to being “companions of Christ.” So, we too, through his indwelling Spirit and through his presence, can dwell with him and see our “ordinary” lives take on extraordinary meaning.

One aspect of nourishing ourselves on him is beautifully expressed by Francis De Sales in *Introduction to the Devout Life*: “People who have been walking about in a beautiful garden do not like to leave without gathering in their hands four or five flowers to smell and keep for the rest of the day. In the same way, when our soul has carefully considered by meditation a certain mystery we should select one, two, or three points that we liked best and that are most adapted to our improvement, think frequently about them, and smell them spiritually during the rest of the day.” And so, our consciousness of Christ is awakened and maintained.

It is this conscious awareness of Christ’s presence that changes the ordinary into the extraordinary. Christ’s abiding presence affects the way we think and act toward others and toward life’s circumstances and events. When that consciousness is not there we respond very selfishly, concerned primarily with what makes our life more enjoyable. When we are conscious of being in Christ’s presence and his presence being in us, our whole perspective changes. We tend to see the ordinary as an opportunity to manifest Christ’s presence and to see ordinary circumstances and difficulties become moments of transformation in which his grace is seen in us, and shines through us, to make the ordinary a divine encounter.

Perhaps that should be one of our primary objectives during these times of weekly reflections; to carry away one or two points and to daily savor them during the following week. For instance, in this week’s readings three phrases stand out to me: “my God has become my strength,” “called to be saints together,” and “I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” What affect would it have on our week if we frequently thought about one of these concepts each day and how it would contribute to our improvement? I believe the passage would come alive for us, and that we would see the Holy Spirit amplify our understanding of the phrase and help us apply it on more than one occasion during the week. Let’s try it, and report back next week regarding its effect. We hope that as you reflect on these three passages that you will gather a bouquet to enjoy and to transform your week into an extraordinary experience.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

**First Reading — Isaiah 49:3, 5-6**

1. How do you respond emotionally to being called a servant?
2. What do you understand are the roles and responsibility of being a servant?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-10**

**Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 1:1-3**

3. With which of the words St. Paul used to describe people in this passage do you most identify? Why?
4. What does it mean to be an "apostle," a "brother," "church," a "saint"?

**Gospel Reading — John 1:29-34**

5. What truths about Jesus are revealed in John's statements?
6. What are the characteristics of a lamb? Why do you think John used this term to identify Jesus?
7. How do you understand the significance of Jesus' taking away the "sin of the world"?

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# *Reflecting* On Sunday's Readings

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—January 25, 2026

**Introduction:** The contrast of light and darkness was made real for us one fall in Maine, sitting on Cadillac Mountain. Dozens of people, huddled under inadequate blankets, clustered in units of two or three in the cold, damp darkness, sat shivering against hard granite, isolated, uncommunicative, and alone. Each was drawn there to catch the sun's warm penetrating rays of light as it first touched U.S. soil. Simultaneously, everyone cheered as the light appeared and the darkness was transformed. Cameras clicked and clicked to capture the ever-changing warmth and beauty which the light brought as it seemingly emerged from the ocean's coldness. Not only was nature transformed but people also were transformed from reclusive pockets of darkened isolation to smiling animated individuals who for a few moments shared something bright and wonderful.

Perhaps there is neither a deeper, nor more impenetrable darkness, or any greater scandal than the hostility and disunity that sometimes exists among Christians. We too often huddle around the cold, granite-like distinctives of our disunity. The Father proclaims in Ephesians that he has united all humanity, Jews and Gentiles, "in one body through the cross ... thus making peace." Yet, we often drive wedges of division into that unity by exalting some unique distinctive in a spirit of hostility toward others who disagree with us, thus obscuring THE Light. Jesus, the Light of the world, is still ready to transform the darkness of our disunity, if we are ready to share the One Thing we have in common, Jesus himself. This is what Pope John Paul II stressed in *Be Not Afraid* by Andre Frossard, "The very realization that in spite of everything, what unites us is stronger than what divides us and deeper than what separates us, obliges us to look deeper." He further affirms that, "In the last analysis, the union of Christians can only be a mature gift of the Holy Spirit, accepted by the intelligence, the heart and the will, and translated into acts from year to year."

This week's second reading by Paul contrasts the Corinthian's experience of dissensions, quarreling and religious factions, with the increased joy, rejoicing, and communal sharing of this week's first reading by Isaiah. What is the difference? In Corinth the people did not unite and accept with intelligence, heart and will the unity which exists in Jesus, the Light of the world. Instead, they united around their various founders and made that their distinctive.

Unfortunately, we can know the truth that "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light," and that for "those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned," and still not experience the Light's warmth and beauty. We can stay huddled under the blanket of our cold indifference, and seek the eluding warmth of a lesser light, or we can, through the repentance of which Jesus speaks in the gospel reading, abandon our icy position and move toward THE Light. He alone offers us lasting warmth and beauty as he brings us together.

Christ came to shatter the darkness, and he did. Yet in our humanity we often harbor little areas of darkness where we have not allowed his light to penetrate. So, as we reflect on this coming Sunday's passages, may two things happen. First, may Jesus our Light reveal those areas where he desires to shine and eliminate the remaining visages of darkness. Secondly, may we see ourselves as Light-bearers reflecting his grace, warmth, and oneness to those around us who are still sitting in darkness.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

**First Reading — Isaiah 8:23-9:3**

1. In what ways do you see gloom, anguish, and darkness in our culture?
2. Please share an example where darkness and oppression were shattered by light, and resulted in joy.

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14**

**Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17**

3. In this passage how would you describe the "cause" of disunity, and what is the "effect"?

**Gospel Reading — Matthew 4:12-23**

4. How do you feel when you see how the fishermen responded to Jesus' call to "follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"?

5. Compare and contrast the two messages; “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” and “follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”
  
6. What would it take to have you drop all and follow Christ? What would that mean for you?

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