



# Bringing Home the Word

*The Epiphany of the Lord (A)*  
January 5, 2020

## Wise Humility

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

An amazing thing happens in today's Gospel: Representatives from the farthest ends of the earth follow a heavenly light and end in a humble cave in Bethlehem.

The Wise Men first consult with King Herod, Galilee's civil authority. He checks with the high priest and rabbis to determine when and where the Messiah is to be born. The Jewish leadership is able to read the Scriptures and give Herod and the Wise Men all the information they need. Yet only the Eastern travelers go to adore the Lord.

The priest and lawyers lack faith to see in those Scriptures a fulfillment of their hopes, while King Herod is blinded to Christ's salvific mission and moved by a will to power, as the killing of the Innocents will make clear. They all have ears to hear and eyes to see but few pay heed to the signs of the times.

The Wise Men from the East, merely following their study of the stars and asking help from others, travel months in search of Jesus. Raphael's painting *Adoration of the Magi* shows the moment when they finally find what they have been looking for. The band of travelers—complete with horses, guards, and royalty—arrives at a broken-down stall. One of the Wise Men kneels, removes his crown, and offers Jesus his treasure. This small gesture shows an internal attitude that Herod and the chief priests were missing: the humility to lay aside power, wealth, and status to bend the knee before the king born in their midst. +

### A Word from Pope Francis

Do we know how to dream, to long for God, ...or do we let ourselves be swept along by life, like dry branches before the wind? The Magi were not content with just getting by, with keeping afloat. They understood that to truly live, we need a lofty goal and we need to keep looking up.

—Epiphany homily, January 6, 2018



## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise! Shine, for your light has come, / the glory of the LORD has dawned upon you.

### Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

### Matthew 2:1-12

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

*The priests, lawyers,  
and King Herod  
all have ears to hear  
and eyes to see,  
but few pay heed.*

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I willing to humbly accept Jesus for who he is: the Son of God?
- From what must I detach myself in order to accept Jesus more fully?

# God Calls Us to His Banquet Because He Loves Us

By Richard Rohr, OFM

God does not love us because we deserve it but because we need it. Does that sound startling? It shouldn't. If there is one prime idea in the Bible, it is God's undeserved love for what he has created. There is no accounting for God's love. It is not earned. There is nothing we can do to attain it or lose it. All we can do is surrender to it, trust it, and let it flow through us.

The main difference in this world is not between those who are worthy of God's love and those who are not. We are all unworthy to various degrees. The major difference is between those who know and enjoy God's love and those who don't. God doesn't love us because we are good. We are good because God loves us. That is a major transformation of consciousness! It moves us from life as an obstacle course to life as a banquet to be eaten and shared.

This truth may make us uncomfortable, especially if we think in terms of a merit system where we can change God's feelings about us by doing good or evil. We can't absorb this good news through conventional thinking, but rather the gospel must eliminate our attitudes of merit, reward, and punishment.

Before conversion, we often view God

as a parent who controls, punishes, and rewards according to legitimate criteria. But God's love doesn't work that way. We can never keep our side of the bargainor be good enough. But that does not keep God from loving us.



## Covenant of Love

This is what makes the Bible extraordinary and different from other literature. It conveys the great, central theme of grace: God's unearned favor is his steadfast covenant of love. The merit system has been destroyed forever!

Human love depends upon the merits of something or someone. Is a person worthy of my love? Is he or she attractive? We are attracted to something or someone for reasons. Goodness, beauty may be among them. That's the only way we know how to love. God's love, however, is different because the object does not determine it. It is determined by the subject, by God's self. By loving us, God is being true to God's self—not working out some arithmetic about our degree of worthiness.

Perhaps nowhere in the Bible do we see God's covenant love manifested more than in the recurring theme of the free but resented banquet. For example, in one parable a king sends his servants to call everyone to a wedding feast, a symbol of loving union. But one by one,

the invited guests make excuses. They are not interested.

The master becomes furious and sends out his servants again, this time into the main roads to invite anyone, bad or good. The banquet hall is finally filled—not with the "worthy" but with the willing!

## God's Inclusiveness

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus invokes banquet symbolism on many occasions. Along with the little child, it seems to be his primary metaphor. He eats with sinners, invites outcasts to share a meal, does not wash his hands or the food, and allows a woman to dine at a symposium for men. He always expands the meaning of the table, even breaking social conventions to communicate the hospitality and inclusivity of God.

If we're grateful and confident in God's grace, we will spend our lives trying to give back to others what has been so graciously given to us and invite all of God's children to God's table. +



*Lord, your light gives us strength and shows us the way to God. Remove my blindness that I may see the light of goodness, peace, and love within myself and others.*

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

January 6–11

**Monday**, Christmas Weekday:  
1 Jn 3:22–4:6 / Mt 4:12–17, 23–25

**Tuesday**, Christmas Weekday:  
1 Jn 4:7–10 / Mk 6:34–44

**Wednesday**, Christmas Weekday:  
1 Jn 4:11–18 / Mk 6:45–52

**Thursday**, Christmas Weekday:  
1 Jn 4:19–5:4 / Lk 4:14–22

**Friday**, Christmas Weekday:  
1 Jn 5:5–13 / Lk 5:12–16

**Saturday**, Christmas Weekday:  
1 Jn 5:14–21 / Jn 3:22–30



# Bringing Home the Word

The Baptism of the Lord (A)  
January 12, 2020

## Signal of a New Beginning

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In the sacrament of baptism, we stress that the person is no longer bound by original sin; rather, despite still retaining the wounds caused by original sin, he or she becomes free to live as a child of God, embracing the will of God through discipleship in Jesus Christ. We're free to live not as the world dictates but as those who know, love, and serve God in this world and look forward to being with him in the next.

Adults who go through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults have time to reflect on the conversion necessary for such transformation, but for many of us, the significance of our baptism as

infants gets lost in the long years between childhood and adulthood. We stop being mindful of the power of grace and the necessity of turning our lives over to God regardless of the work we do or the community we belong to.

We may have wondered why Jesus presented himself for baptism. Wasn't he God, born without sin? Of course, the answer is yes. But Jesus came to his baptism as a public witness of the need to turn over our lives to God. Like us in all things, Jesus approached John for the ritual washing that signaled a new beginning. It was a sign for us and a wonderful way to mark the beginning of his ministry.

Matthew records that he heard the voice of God saying, "This is my beloved Son." In baptism, God welcomes all of us as beloved children. Out of gratitude and praise, we, in turn, follow Jesus. And so we submit our lives to God—proclaiming justice, doing good, and loving God and others as we love ourselves. +

## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Here is my servant whom I uphold,  
/ my chosen one with whom I am pleased.

### Acts 10:34-38

He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

### Matthew 3:13-17

John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?"

*For many, the significance of our baptism as infants gets lost in the long years between childhood and adulthood.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

In baptism, your life was already immersed in the mystery of the Trinity and you belong to Jesus. And if one day you should be taken by fear, or you think that evil is too great to be challenged, simply consider that Jesus lives within you.

—General audience,  
September 20, 2017



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What is my baptismal anniversary date?
- How might I commemorate that anniversary of my rebirth in Christ?

# Doubling Our Love

By Joyce Rupp

The parable of the talents is a call to look at what we have done—or have not done—with God’s gifts. Today “talent” refers to a natural ability or gift. The word has its roots in the Greek *talanton*, meaning a weighted amount of money of significant worth. A talent in Jesus’ time was a valuable coin. Invested wisely, its worth could greatly increase.

I can imagine Jesus looking at the people he taught and noticing the differences in age, physical features, and social conditions. He knew that beneath these externals there was a treasure of love in each. He longed for them to recognize and share their goodness. Then he thought of the talent, the precious coin, as a way to teach them.

In this parable three servants are each given talents “according to his ability.” They are expected to use them so the value will be multiplied. Two of the three do so and are praised for being “faithful servants.” Not so the fearful servant who did nothing with what he was given. He feared displeasing the master, getting hurt by doing the wrong thing, and doubted he could meet the challenge. In doing so his gift lay unused, so he was reprimanded severely.

## Guaranteed to Grow

The greatest talent we all have is our capacity to give and receive love. This gift in all of us, like the parable’s coin, has immense value. Love has the potential of growing in worth when invested in

others. It has the ability of increasing in strength, depth, and quality.

Like the fearful servant, we can let this treasure of love lay idle. When we are in situations that challenge us to invest our love, we can hold back. Who wants to forgive someone who has done harm, do a kind deed if there will be no gratitude, or visit a lonely person when the day’s schedule is already full? At these times we would rather hoard our love, keeping it to ourselves.

One good deed can generate many more if we are willing to share our love. Kyle Sawyer, a ten-year-old boy, decided to raise money for a spinal disease affecting his sister. Kyle’s dedication and enthusiasm led him to find people who would help him make 2,000 paper cranes as a fundraiser. They were sold as decorations for a hospital lobby, and after much hard work fueled by love, his efforts brought in \$12,000. Amazing what a young boy can do with one talent!

Many times we invest our love by extending simple, genuine kindnesses to others. A local pastor asked parishioners to describe loving deeds others had done for them that had made a difference. The responses he received were not about grandiose gestures. They were about simple, loving actions, like visiting a

grieving widow, helping a senior citizen buy groceries, offering child care when a single parent was seeking work, listening to a confused teenager, and hugging someone who was crying.

## Learning from Loss

Often the wounded share the fullest amount of love. Parents whose young children have died reach out to

others with similar loss. Recovering alcoholics spend long hours supporting others struggling with sobriety. Disabled persons volunteer as receptionists for charitable organizations. We are never too old or young, too wounded or busy to significantly share ourselves with others.

Large or small, our deeds of love can make an immense difference. We might ask ourselves: How can I loosen my tight grip on the precious coin of my love? What keeps me from sharing this valuable God-given talent? How can my love grow and multiply? +



## PRAYER

*Lord, unblock the ears of my heart  
that I may hear your comforting  
voice of love, compassion,  
and peace.*

—From *Peaceful Meditations for  
Every Day in Ordinary Time*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

January 13–18

**Monday**, Weekday: 1 Sm 1:1–8 / Mk 1:14–20

**Tuesday**, Weekday:  
1 Sm 1:9–20 / Mk 1:21–28

**Wednesday**, Weekday:  
1 Sm 3:1–10, 19–20 / Mk 1:29–39

**Thursday**, Weekday:  
1 Sm 4:1–11 / Mk 1:40–45

**Friday**, St. Anthony:  
1 Sm 8:4–7, 10–22a / Mk 2:1–12

**Saturday**, Weekday:  
1 Sm 9:1–4, 17–19; 10:1 / Mk 2:13–17



# Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
January 19, 2020

## New Life

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

An elaborate fresco titled *Baptism of Christ* by Perugino, Michelangelo's art teacher, is found on the wall of the Sistine Chapel. Like the other frescoes in this sacred space, this panel contains multiple scenes. The central scene is the baptism of Jesus. The viewer clearly sees Jesus standing in the water, with John the Baptist next to him, pouring water over his head.

God the Father is above, ready to declare that this is his beloved Son. The Holy Spirit comes down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. It was the Spirit

who helped John know that this was the Messiah, the one sent by God to baptize with the Holy Spirit.

After his baptism, Jesus is sent out to preach and teach. The fresco reveals that Perugino has read his Bible: in the scene to the right Jesus is shown preaching to the multitudes. John the Baptist's mission changes, too. He goes from preparing for the coming of the Messiah to following and testifying about him. This is what the baptized do: the new life we are given calls and strengthens us to offer that new life to others.

At our baptism, we were sanctified, forgiven our sins, incorporated into the body of Christ, and given a mission to share this baptism with others. In fact, the last words of Jesus before his ascension were, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20). +

***This is what the baptized do: the new life we are given calls and strengthens us to offer new life to others.***

## A Word from Pope Francis

"What about you?" It is significant that these words of the elderly Pope [Leo XIII] were also addressed to a laywoman [Katharine Drexel]. We know that the future of the Church in a rapidly changing society will call, and even now calls, for a much more active engagement on the part of the laity.

—Mass with bishops, clergy,  
and religious of Pennsylvania,  
September 26, 2015



## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 49:3, 5–6

I will make you a light to the nations,  
/ that my salvation may reach to the  
ends of the earth.

### 1 Corinthians 1:1–3

Grace to you and peace from God  
our Father and the Lord Jesus  
Christ.

### John 1:29–34

[John the Baptist said,] "Now I have  
seen and testified that he is the Son  
of God."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- How willing am I to share about Jesus and what he means to me?
- Do I have family or friends in doubt about baptizing their child? How can I kindly encourage them?

# Fairness vs. Generosity

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

My three children, now teenagers, have always insisted that my wife and I be fair in our dealings with them. By fair, of course, they mean that we treat them absolutely equally.

“That’s not fair,” they point out with great regularity when one of them gets something the others didn’t: “He got to eat out and I didn’t. She got to stay out late and I had to come home early.” These minor injustices seem to be the ultimate in unfairness to them.

“Which would you rather have, fairness or generosity?” I often ask them. For many years they consistently chose fairness, but lately they have begun to consider the positive aspects of generosity.

There are many. For one thing, fairness implies a minimal, lowest-common-denominator kind of arrangement. If each child has to have exactly the same amount of everything—money, time, attention—then it seems that all parents can do is dole out their resources with one eye on the balance scale and the other on the bottom line.

Generosity, on the other hand, allows for the spontaneous gesture, the extravagant expenditure, the once-in-a-lifetime experience. Generosity is more fun, exciting, and unexpected

than fairness—and therefore more interesting. Fairness, on the other hand, is predictable, uninspiring, and subject to a lot of boring recordkeeping.

At work, too, most of us would settle for simple fairness. There is so much injustice, inequality, lying, and cheating in the workplace that the idea of a fair wage or an evenhanded employer has great appeal.

## Operating by New Rules

Consider a job where fairness was assumed

and generosity was the goal. In such an environment, “How generous can we afford to be?” would be the driving force. Rather than minimizing salaries or benefits, employers would try to find ways to share with employees whatever wealth or profit was available. Customers would not be asked to pay the maximum the market would bear for minimum-quality products. Parties in negotiation would not try to win the best deal possible for themselves but would attempt to fashion win-win situations for all involved.

“That’s ridiculous,” you might say. “That’s not the way the world works.” But today’s parable of the workers in the vineyard suggests that generosity is the way God would have things. In



describing God’s reign, Jesus told the story of the workers who were hired at various times of the day and yet were paid the same.

Just as my children did earlier, the workers who were hired early in the day complained that the owner was not being fair. He pointed out, however, that each of them had been paid a just wage—one they had agreed to—but that he was free to be generous. “Are you envious because I am generous?” he asked.

Exactly. Many of us think that fairness is the best that we can get, and we’re not eager to give generosity a try.

## Living the Kingdom—Now

But God’s reign is supposed to be “on earth as it is in heaven,” as Jesus prayed in the Our Father. That means that the way things are in heaven—in this case, generosity over fairness—is the way things should also be on earth. If we want the reign of God in our families and workplaces, then we must at least try to operate this world by the rules of the next, where “the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

That’s lucky for all of us because, as my friend, Fr. Bill Burke, has observed, “We were all hired at 5 in the afternoon.” +

## PRAYER

*Lord, may your light of love and peace shine brightly in my heart so that others may come to know of your goodness.*

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

January 20–25

**Monday, Weekday:**  
1 Sm 15:16–23 / Mk 2:18–22


**Tuesday, St. Agnes:**  
1 Sm 16:1–13 / Mk 2:23–28

**Wednesday, Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children:**  
1 Sm 17:32–33, 37, 40–51 / Mk 3:1–6

**Thursday, Weekday:**  
1 Sm 18:6–9; 19:1–7 / Mk 3:7–12

**Friday, St. Francis de Sales:**  
1 Sm 24:3–21 / Mk 3:13–19

**Saturday, Conversion of St. Paul:**  
Acts 22:3–16 or Acts 9:1–22 / Mk 16:15–18

Bringing Home  
the **Word** 

January 19, 2020

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# Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
January 26, 2020

## His First Followers

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

We began the Church year with the foundations of our Christian life. We focused on our baptismal call to preach the word of God. Now we focus on the call of the first apostles.

The last part of today’s Gospel reading, about Jesus calling his first disciples, is displayed in a painting in the Sistine Chapel, *Calling of the Apostles* by Domenico Ghirlandaio. In the artwork, The Sea of Galilee spreads out behind Jesus, who is front and center. Several towns line the shore and remind us of Capernaum, where Jesus lived and near the area where he called his first followers.

Two apostles kneel in front of Jesus; another pair stand behind him. Their gestures and postures reveal their interior attitudes. One apostle crosses his arms in acceptance while another prayerfully looks up at Jesus. The third apostle, behind Jesus, has his hand at his chest as if to say, “Are you sure you want me?” The fourth seems to look away. Many others surround Jesus, but not all of them are called to be apostles.

The call of Jesus is real. He may not ask us to leave behind our business or family, but he does ask for the same totality of trust and following. The result of fully saying yes to this call is what the first reading proclaims: “You have brought them abundant joy / and great rejoicing; / They rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest...” (Isaiah 9:2). The Joy of the Gospel that Pope Francis proclaimed in his 2013 apostolic exhortation is exactly this: that joy that comes from a sincere and generous yes to Jesus’ call to be a disciple. +

*Jesus may not ask us to leave behind our business or family, but he asks for the same totality of trust.*

### A Word from Pope Francis

It deeply troubles me when I see a timetable in a parish: “From such a time to such a time.” ...Don’t worry about the timetable: have the courage to look past the timetable. In this way, dear deacons, if you show that you are available to others, your ministry will not be self-serving, but evangelically fruitful.

—Jubilee of deacons, May 29, 2016



## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 8:23—9:3

The people who walked in darkness / have seen a great light.

### 1 Corinthians 1:10–13, 17

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

### Matthew 4:12–23 or 4:12–17

From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Jesus asks us to leave all and put him first. How can I do that better this week?
- Am I listening for God’s call in my day-to-day life?

# Elected By God

By Richard Rohr, OFM

God is always selecting people in the Bible, but in disconcerting ways. There seems to be no previous preparation or proven holiness—often not even willingness among those specially chosen.

Biblical chosenness does not seem to mean that we are anything special; instead, it reminds us of the specialness all creatures share. It is seldom saying we are especially good; it is always saying God is good. It is never saying that we are inherently qualified for chosenness but that God wants

to give us an experience of unearned chosenness or “beloved” status. That way we can know what chosenness really feels like and can better communicate that experience to others.

Starting with the Chosen People themselves, beloved status prepares them to communicate it to the whole world. God chose the Jews not because he loved them better than anybody, but to lead them through a forty-year training exercise so they could be a transformative template that would challenge all religion in every age.

Yet the history of religion is that most of us refuse to go on the full journey and, instead, stay deadlocked at early-stage superiority. We somehow believe that we are chosen, right, saved. But often, this

belief does not progress into a generative journey for others—a sympathy for others’ journeys or a belief in the beauty of other religions.

Biblical election is an inclusive chosenness because it is dealing with an infinite God in whom all things cohere. Egocentric chosenness is always exclusive and arrogant, as if there wasn’t enough to go around.



## Mary: Archetype of Chosenness

All the chosen figures I know from the Bible—Moses, Jacob, Joseph, Esther, Judith, Peter,

Paul—are flawed individuals unprepared for God’s call. They are chosen in their lowliness. There is only one case where the pattern is seemingly different, although it is not really different as much as distilled, concise, and utterly clear.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is the archetype of chosenness. The Greek word that is used when Gabriel visits Mary (Luke 1:29) is a rare verb form that could be translated: “Hail, Chosenness Itself!” Favor says much more about the one doing the favoring than the one receiving the favor. All we can do is receive chosenness. All we can do is accept that we are accepted, which is harder than we think! This becomes the central biblical theme of grace.

## Ideal Vessel

Until Mary, most of the central chosen Bible figures were men. In Mary we have the ideal vessel, who personifies the state of perfectly received favor from God.

There is nothing in the biblical text that says she was worthy, prepared, or had earned this favor. It is given by God, and her glory is that she accepts being used as a “handmaid.”

Mary knows her Jewish tradition, and knows how God works. She knows how Yahweh, the God of Israel, consistently chooses an enslaved race, forgotten sons, barren women, and unprepared laypeople so they can revel in their totally gratuitous election. And God gets all the glory! Mary knows that it is always a statement of God’s goodness, not ours. As some later mystics put it, it is almost as if God was waiting for a perfectly receptive bride—and God found her in Mary of Nazareth. She receives the Divine Kiss, and swoons in gratitude and fertility: Jesus. That is all. That is everything.

“The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49) becomes her motto. Mary looked at God’s goodness and refused to be preoccupied with her own. +



*Lord, you are the source of peace and unity. Fill me with the desire and courage to be your instrument of peace and love.*

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

January 27–February 1

**Monday, Weekday:**

2 Sm 5:1–7, 10 / Mk 3:22–30

**Tuesday, St. Thomas Aquinas:**

2 Sm 6:12b–15, 17–19 / Mk 3:31–35

**Wednesday, Weekday:**

2 Sm 7:4–17 / Mk 4:1–20

**Thursday, Weekday:**

2 Sm 7:18–19, 24–29 / Mk 4:21–25

**Friday, St. John Bosco:**

2 Sm 11:1–4a, 5–10a, 13–17 / Mk 4:26–34

**Saturday, Weekday:**

2 Sm 12:1–7a, 10–17 / Mk 4:35–41