

The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels

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Sunday by Sunday throughout the globe, the vast majority of the world's Christians hear the same passages from the Gospels proclaimed and preached as they celebrate in Church. The two lectionaries (books of Bible passages to be read on particular days in the Christian year) which are behind this remarkable phenomenon are the product of the renaissance of Christian scholarship and the renewed desire for Christian unity which flourished in the twentieth century. They are the revised *Roman Lectionary* of 1969 and the *Revised Common Lectionary* of 1992. *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* provides commentaries on each of these Sunday Gospels from some of the greatest early Christian writers and preachers, the 'Fathers of the Church'. There are also some commentaries from later writers who wrote in the same style. The authors come from all parts of the ancient and medieval Christian world, including Britain and Ireland, and they wrote in Greek, Latin, Syriac and Anglo-Saxon. The writings of these Christians experienced in the life of the Spirit help us understand the central doctrines and stories of our faith – their often surprising insights will be of use to preachers, teachers and all who wish to go deeper in their understanding of the Gospel heard in Church. As most of the text of the four Gospels is read over the three years of the liturgical cycle, this book also provides a commentary from the early Church on the four Gospels.

Reading the Gospel in Church

The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels was compiled in Scotland, a country with a long and famous Christian history. Among the first books that have survived from Scotland are Gospel Books such as *Book of Kells*, which was probably at Iona Abbey, the tenth-century *Book of Deer* from Aberdeenshire and the *Gospels of St Margaret*, which belonged to Queen Margaret of Scotland (c.1045–93). These books are all related to worship, either used in the liturgy or, as in the case of Margaret's book, containing Gospel passages read in the liturgy for personal use. The original Gospels

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themselves were written in the first decades of Christianity primarily as liturgical texts to be proclaimed in the Christian assembly, and it is hard for us, with our private copies of the New Testament, to understand this. Before going on to speak about the Fathers, this introduction to *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* thus needs to begin by looking at how the Gospels are read in Church and by examining the history of the lectionaries which contain the Sunday Gospels.

From the beginning the Scriptures have been read in the Christian assembly and the Church gradually accepted writings from the first Christians, what we call the 'New Testament', as inspired in the same way as the Jewish Scriptures which Christians call the 'Old Testament'. The Gospels and the rest of the New Testament thus, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, came to be recognized as Scripture because of their use in the worship of the Church. In the middle of the second century AD the Christian writer St Justin Martyr wrote of this liturgical use of the Gospels in his account of the Sunday Eucharist:

The Apostles, in the memoirs composed by them which are called Gospels, have handed on to us what they were given; that Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, said, 'do this in remembrance of me, this is my body'; and likewise having taken the cup and given thanks, he said, 'This is my blood'; and he gave it to them alone ... On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has finished, the President teaches and exhorts us to imitate these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president offers prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability. The people then assent, saying 'Amen', and there is a distribution to those who participate in that over which thanks have been given. (*First Apology*, 66–67)

The phrase 'as long as time permits' suggests that the sacred books were read in sequence, with the reading at one service taking up where the reading had ended at the last. This continuous reading (called *lectio continua* in Latin) later came to be replaced by lectionaries where certain readings were appointed to be read on certain days. This is a practice already found in Judaism and it seems to have been linked to the development of the liturgical year in the second century AD with certain readings seen as appropriate in certain seasons, such as Acts and Revelation being read between Easter and Pentecost and Genesis in Lent. In Christianity dif-

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ferent lectionaries for the Eucharist developed in the different liturgical families of East and West and a standard one-year cycle of Sunday Gospel passages became common in the Latin West. After the Reformation, this one-year cycle continued to be used with certain variations in Anglican, Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches while some Protestant Churches reverted to a form of *lectio continua*.

But what are the Gospels? The four Gospels, which contain the ‘memoirs of the Apostles’, tell us about the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of God to humanity who, by the mystery of his cross and resurrection, enabled men and women to pass from death to life and become adopted as sons and daughters of God just as Jesus is the Son of God by nature. It is this mystery of Christ which we share in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, mentioned in the extract from Justin, where material things become the bearers of grace, a sign of the transformation of the universe in Christ Jesus. The Gospels thus proclaim the heart of the Christian message which is also performed in the sacraments and it is for this reason that the reading of the Gospel in Christian worship is often surrounded by ceremony, for example in many Churches the sacred text is sung and the Gospel-book is kissed, revered and accompanied by candles and incense. The Gospels are thus not primarily texts to be read by people in private, they are books to be read out loud in the Christian assembly, to be listened to and talked about so that we can hear Jesus speak and meditate together on his life and teaching in community. This is the teaching of the sixteenth-century Reformers as well as of the saints of all ages, and our personal meditation of the Gospels draws from and feeds into this communal listening.

All this means that the Gospels do not reach us today in a sealed packet from the first century AD, they are handed on to us by the Christian community in a continuous tradition of preaching, meditation and celebration which goes back to the days before the stories and teaching in the Gospels were written down. This is what is called ‘tradition’, which for Christians is not an idolatry of the past but rather the ongoing life of the Spirit in the Church. To read the Gospels outside this living tradition is to court the danger of turning them into dead historical documents – though, of course, we know that the Holy Spirit can make even the dry bones live. The passages in *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* help us read the Gospels within this Spirit-filled stream of sacred tradition.

We experience this tradition in different ways. One is the tradition of preaching, of reflecting on the sacred text, interpreting it and applying it to our lives. Another is the way in which the Gospel story is ‘unpacked’ and celebrated in the liturgical year, the way in which the Church moves

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from the expectation of Advent to the celebration of Christ's birth and revelation at Christmas and Epiphany, and then to the desert of Lent and the glory of Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. The liturgical year really is a 'year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4.19) in which the sequence of Gospel passages read takes us on a sustained and systematic tour of the Christian gospel. The way that biblical studies have sometimes been taught in universities, with a close attention to words and language and the use of historical-critical analysis, is thus only part of the task of interpreting the Gospels. It is really only a preparation for engagement with the sacred text in the context of the prayer of the Christian assembly and the application of its teaching to our lives. Early and medieval Christian teachers often had a better grasp of this truth than we do today: as well as its literal and historical sense, Scripture has a spiritual sense which can transform our lives and lead us beyond ourselves to the mystery of Christ and the final destiny of the cosmos in God. We need to read holy Scripture, the word of God in human words, with the help of the same Holy Spirit who inspired it.

The recovery of this way of reading the Scriptures and the rediscovery of the ancient practice of spiritual reading (*lectio divina*) have been part of the great renewal of Christian life in the last century which produced the new ways of reading Scripture in the Church-assembly on which *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* is based. Some of the books recommended in the Further Reading section on page 299 can help lead us into this Christian way of interpreting the Bible, but what is this new way of reading the Bible in public in the Christian assembly?

Our Common Sunday Lectionary

Behind the readings in *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* is a series of Gospel passages read on Sundays over a three-year period which has an interesting history. The century from about 1870 saw a tremendous growth of Christianity throughout the world and a number of exciting developments in Christian scholarship which have continued to influence the Church. The liturgical movement, the renewal of biblical studies, the rediscovery of the Fathers of the Church and a renewed sense of the mystery of the Church all bore fruit in a new appreciation of Christian worship. Part of this involved reflection on the way the Bible was read in church and a desire to feed the Christian community with more of the sacred text than the very selective traditional one-year lectionaries could supply. The Second Vatican Council, an assembly of Roman Catholic

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bishops from all over the world which met in Rome between 1962 and 1965, was influenced by this renewal and decided that the biblical lectionary used at Mass should be reformed.

The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer share in God's word may be provided for the faithful. In this way a more representative portion of the Holy Scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 51)

As was the practice in the early Church, the volumes of the Lectionary with their Bible readings were to be separated from the Sacramentary (the book of prayers used at Mass) with which they had been combined in the Middle Ages to form a book called the Missal.

A group of learned scholars under the leadership of the Benedictine monk Cyprian Vaggagini was formed to revise the Lectionary and they began by studying most of the eucharistic lectionaries that had survived from the history of the Church together with various suggestions that had been made for lectionary reform springing from the renewal of liturgical and biblical studies and catechetics. Most of the work of the group was done between 1964 and 1967. In 1967 a draft Lectionary was sent out to over 800 experts and their suggestions were collated and used to refine the draft. The final text of the new Lectionary, the *Ordo lectionum missae*, was approved by Pope Paul VI on 3 April 1969. It was to be used in the Roman Catholic Church from the first Sunday in Advent 1971 and was slightly revised in 1981. The Gospel readings of this new lectionary include about 60 per cent of the text of each of the four Gospels. The scriptural texts of the revised *Roman Lectionary* are found in the many Roman Catholic Missals that are on sale and also in separate lectionary volumes.

This new Roman Catholic Lectionary came to influence the lectionaries of other Churches who shared its liturgical inheritance from pre-Reformation Western Europe. The one-year Sunday Lectionary of the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England largely followed the standard Western one-year cycle as used in the pre-Reformation Sarum (Salisbury) rite used in Britain and Ireland and this, or variants of it, was adopted by many Reformed Churches. Until the twentieth century, then, most Western Churches, apart from those which had opted for a *lectio continua*, had a similar series of Sunday Gospel readings. The Lutheran Churches had largely retained a modified version of the pre-Reformation Sunday Lectionary and in Germany the Protestant Churches from the nineteenth

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century have developed a series of cycles of biblical ‘sermon texts’ which run alongside it, as found in the *Evangelische Gottesdienstbuch* of 1999. Similar lectionaries are also used in some of the Scandinavian and Baltic Lutheran Churches which are in full communion with the British and Irish Anglican Churches.

Outside the Roman Catholic Church in the English-speaking world there have been two main movements of lectionary reform. First in 1967, before the publication of the revised *Roman Lectionary*, the liturgical scholars of the British Joint Liturgical Group (JLG) produced a two-year Sunday Lectionary, emphasizing themes in the set of readings for each Sunday, which was adopted by a number of Anglican, Methodist and Reformed Churches. The JLG also produced an experimental four-year Lectionary in 1990 with each year devoted to one of the four Gospels but this has not proved popular. Second, in North America a number of Anglican, Methodist and Reformed Churches adopted the 1969 Roman Lectionary, sometimes with variants, but there was a growing desire to have a common Lectionary. The liturgical scholars of the North American Consultation on Common Texts (CCT), which had been set up in the mid-1960s, met in 1978 to discuss this common Lectionary and formed the North American Committee on Calendar and Lectionary (NACCL), composed of Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic scholars. In 1983 it offered the Churches of North America a three-year *Common Lectionary* based on the revised Roman Lectionary. They invited comments on this text and took these into account in revising the text in collaboration with the international English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC). The group responsible for the revision included Anglican, Congregationalist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic scholars from all over the English-speaking world. The result of this remarkable ecumenical and international collaboration was the 1992 *Revised Common Lectionary*.

The *Revised Common Lectionary* has subsequently been adopted by many English-speaking Protestant denominations such as the Church of Scotland and various Methodist, Lutheran and Reformed Churches. It has also been adopted by some Old Catholic Churches and is widely used throughout the Anglican Communion, for example by the Church of Ireland, Scottish Episcopal Church, Church in Wales, the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Churches of Canada, Australia, Aotearoa/ New Zealand and Polynesia, Melanesia, the West Indies, Central Africa, and Southern Africa. In the Church of England the two-year Sunday Lectionary of the *Alternative Service Book 1980* was replaced in 2000 by an adapted version of the *Revised Common Lectionary* in *Common Wor-*

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ship. We have thus now returned to a series of Sunday Gospel readings which are almost the same in most of the world's Christian Churches. *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* has been constructed so that its commentaries on the Sunday Gospels can be used by all these Churches, whether they follow the *Roman Lectionary*, the *Revised Common Lectionary* or the *Revised Common Lectionary* as modified by the Church of England, which will be referred to as the *Common Worship Lectionary* (CWL).

Wisdom from the early Church

The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels consists of passages from the writers of the early Church, the 'Fathers of the Church', together with some later writers, commenting on the Sunday Gospels of the lectionaries discussed above. Many of these come from the Fathers' sermons preached in church but such patristic commentaries ('patristic' is a word from the Latin for father, *pater*) were also read as part of the liturgy itself.

In the sixth century St Benedict wrote in the ninth chapter of his Holy Rule:

Let the books which have divine authority, from both the Old and the New Testaments, be read at the night office of Vigils, as also the expositions of them which have been made by well-known orthodox and catholic Fathers.

Benedict seems to have been the first monastic writer to allow readings from non-biblical authors in the liturgy and they have never been allowed in the Roman liturgy at the Eucharist. What Benedict is speaking of are not any writings by the Fathers but specifically their commentaries on Scripture (in Latin *expositiones*). Benedict lived in a time of political and doctrinal turmoil and he was concerned that the authors read to his monks were sound and reliable expositors of the sacred text. This tradition has continued in the Western Church not only in monasteries but also among the clergy in general who were given readings from the Fathers in their daily prayer book, the Breviary. On Sundays for monks, nuns and clergy throughout the Western Church, and in the Roman Catholic Church up to the 1960s, the Third Nocturn (the third and final part of the night office of Mattins or Vigils, each part of which consists of psalms and readings) ended with the Gospel passage read at the Sunday Mass together with readings from the Fathers commenting on it. This is the direct inspiration for *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels*. But who do we mean by the Fathers?

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First it is necessary to correct a misconception. A friend who is a Roman Catholic priest once went to a meeting called by a fundamentalist body to protest about a visit by the Pope to Scotland. At the end he stood up to ask a question and identified himself as 'Father James'; a voice from the platform thundered, 'Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven, Matthew 23.9'; the priest replied quietly, 'What did you call your Daddy?' It is clear to anyone with a sound grasp of Scripture that Jesus' words in Matthew 23 on the uniqueness of the divine paternity do not prohibit Christians from calling a respected teacher, let alone one's male parent, 'father' because St Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 'Although you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers; for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel' (1 Corinthians 4.15). One could compare the relationship of Mark to his teacher Peter in 1 Peter 5.13, where Peter writes of 'my son Mark', and also note the reference to the first generation of Christians as 'the fathers' in 2 Peter 3.4. Christian bishops and priests have thus frequently been called 'Father' (or, in certain churches in modern times, 'Mother') and it is from this use in ancient times that we start to get the idea of a body of well-known and authoritative teachers who were to be known as the 'Fathers of the Church'. These were at first only bishops, but later presbyters (priests), deacons and layfolk were added, as Augustine included among 'the Fathers' the priest St Jerome because of the excellence of his teaching (*C. Julian.* 1.7.34), and the deacon St Ephrem the Syrian and the layman Tertullian were also later recognized as Fathers.

In the Christian West, St John Damascene (c.676–749) and St Bede (672–735) are often said to be the last of the Fathers of the Church but Bernard of Clairvaux is also at times called the last of the Fathers and he and many other medieval monastic writers continued to write in the same patristic style. It is commonly said that the Eastern Orthodox Churches hold that the patristic age has not ended and later writers such as St Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) or even modern writers are considered as 'patristic'. The Reformers of the sixteenth century, both Catholic and Protestant, frequently appeal to the Fathers and the period saw a revival of patristic scholarship with new editions of their works being produced by Erasmus (1469–1536) and others. The use of the historic creeds by all the main Churches of the world is a sign that they all accord a special value to the Fathers of the Church, in whose era these creeds were drawn up, although among the Churches there are various views of the authority given the Fathers in interpreting Scripture and mediating tradition. John Calvin's 1559 French *Confession of Faith* has a high view of the Fathers:

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We confess that which has been established by the ancient councils, and we detest all sects and heresies which were rejected by the holy doctors, such as St Hilary, St Athanasius, St Ambrose and St Cyril.

Anglicanism has traditionally given great respect to the writers of the early Church. Archbishop Cranmer appealed to the 'ancient Fathers' in his preface to the *Book of Common Prayer* and Queen Elizabeth I wrote to the Roman Catholic Princes of Europe concerning the Church of England as reformed in the sixteenth century:

There was no new faith propagated in England, no new religion set up but that which was commanded by Our Saviour, practiced by the Primitive Church and approved by the Fathers of the best antiquity.

At the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church likewise emphasized the important place of the Fathers in the handing on of divine revelation through history in the Church:

The tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit, for there is a growth in understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down ... For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her. The words of the Holy Fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, continues to speak with the bride of his beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church and through her in the world, leads those who believe into all truth and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them. (*Dei Verbum* 8)

The Fathers are thus truly ecumenical and *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* has endeavoured to have a balance between writers from the Greek Christian East, about 43 per cent, and the Latin Christian West, about 54 per cent, with 6 Eastern writers who wrote in Syriac. A couple of the readings were written in Anglo-Saxon and English. The most used Fathers are St Augustine from the West and SS John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria from the East, who between them contribute almost

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half of the commentaries. The vast majority of writers quoted are from the patristic period but about 15 per cent are from later periods, although the only modern writer is Blessed John Henry Newman (1801–90) who was himself deeply influenced by the Fathers. Newman is commemorated in the calendars of both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches; the passage used in *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* is from one of his Anglican sermons and it is commenting on a reading only used by Roman Catholics. Greek writers of the second Christian millennium are included such as St Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) and St Nicholas Cabasilas (c.1322–after 1391), who are primarily venerated by the Greek Orthodox Churches although their teaching is known in the West. Some of the Syrian writers such as St Ephrem the Syrian are venerated by all Churches but others such as St Jacob of Serugh and St Philoxenus of Mabbug opposed the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which was accepted as orthodox by the Latin and Byzantine Churches. I have followed the custom of using the title ‘Saint’ as it is used in the writer’s own Church. The incorporation of writers who have been criticized by one side or the other as schismatic or heretical is justified by the excellence and orthodoxy of their teaching, but also by the inclusion of Origen of Alexandria. Origen was one of the greatest theologians and exegetes of the early Church but, despite his holy death after persecution, he was never recognized as a saint and his adventurous theological and philosophical speculations led to him being posthumously condemned by Church Councils in the sixth century. His Scriptural commentaries were, however, read in the Divine Office in the West during the Middle Ages because they were deemed to be orthodox and of great value. The commentaries in *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* are thus offered to the whole Church as examples of the unity-in-diversity of our common tradition.

As well as the fact that they are called ‘father’, another problem some people might have with the Fathers is that they are men. Recent scholarship has done much to uncover the hidden voices of women in the early Church but the inescapable maleness of the Fathers remains. Some get round this by speaking of the ‘Fathers and Mothers of the Church’ and this is accurate, given the important role played by women in Christianity from its beginning. One thinks of Jesus’ female disciples, and, just to take one example related to some of the writers in this book, St Macrina the Younger, sister of SS Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, whom we meet as a holy woman, community leader and highly educated Christian teacher in Gregory’s *Life of Macrina* and *On the Soul and Resurrection*. But even from a woman of the intellectual calibre of Macrina we do not have sermons or commentaries on the Gospels. Most of the commentaries

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in *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* are from the first millennium of Christianity and all the suitable texts are by male writers. It might have been possible to have extracted certain texts by or related to female voices and to have added medieval texts such as passages from Julian of Norwich that reflect on the Gospels, but this could not avoid an impression of tokenism. One needs to step back from these questions and join the women and men who were the audience for most of these commentaries in engaging with the teaching of the Fathers as a way of understanding the Gospel message in our own time.

The patristic commentaries on the Gospels which were part of the Third Nocturn of the night office of Mattins or Vigils in the traditional Roman and monastic offices have not been retained in the 1970 revised Roman *Liturgy of the Hours*, although this does retain a daily non-scriptural reading. The reform of the Divine Office in the Church of England at the Reformation, which resulted in Mattins and Evensong found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, excluded non-scriptural readings but some Anglican religious communities restored them and more recently they come into general use in books such as *From the Fathers to the Churches* (1983), compiled by Brother Kenneth CGA, which largely used the new Roman daily patristic readings adapted for use with the *Alternative Service Book* 1980. Other similar volumes have been printed, most notably *Celebrating the Seasons* (1999) and *Celebrating the Saints* (2004), compiled by Robert Atwell and published by Canterbury Press, which have daily readings taken from throughout Christian history for the seasons and saints of the Christian calendar but do not provided commentaries on the Scripture readings of the liturgy. It is the provision of commentaries from the early Church on the Sunday Gospel readings from the *Revised Common Lectionary* and the *Roman Lectionary* that is the distinctive feature of *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels*.

The genesis of *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* and acknowledgements

This book began when Abbot Hugh Gilbert OSB, now Roman Catholic Bishop of Aberdeen, asked me to revise the patristic readings for the night office of Vigils used at Pluscarden Abbey in the North of Scotland. The aim was to create a patristic Lectionary where the readings were closely related to the Bible text for the day and to ensure that most of the non-biblical readings were from the Fathers of the Church and not from later periods of Christian history. For the daily readings the monastic community uses

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the Roman two-year cycle of Bible readings and a series of patristic readings was constructed as a commentary on this which is available online on the website of the Durham University Centre for Catholic Studies as, *A Two-year Patristic Lectionary for the Divine Office*, edited by Stephen Mark Holmes, www.centreforcatholicstudies.co.uk/?page_id=765. *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* is based on the Third Nocturn commentaries on the Sunday Gospels from this Lectionary which are not on the Durham University website.

I thank Bishop Hugh Gilbert for his encouragement of this project and his support for the publication of *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels*. His inspiring teaching as Novice Master and Abbot has influenced profoundly my understanding of Christian history and theology. I am grateful to the Benedictine community of Pluscarden where I learned to live the rhythm of the Christian year in the changing seasons of the Morayshire countryside. I would also like to thank Mrs Eileen Grant for her secretarial assistance in the production of the Pluscarden Lectionary. A number of the readings in this book were originally in the two volumes entitled, *Christ our Light: Patristic readings on Gospel themes, Volume 1, Advent to Pentecost* and *Volume 2, Ordinary Time*, edited by The Friends of Henry Ashworth and published in 1981 and 1985 by Exordium Books, but now out of print. I thank The Friends of Henry Ashworth for permission to use their translations and especially Dame Anne Field OSB of Stanbrook Abbey, Yorkshire. I also thank Sr Benedicta White OSB and the community of Stanbrook. The other readings are either translated directly from the original languages or adapted from old out-of-copyright translations. The suggestion that I publish this set of patristic commentaries on the Sunday Gospels came from Canon Dr Mark Harris and Fr Pip Blackledge, fellow presbyters of the Diocese of Edinburgh. I would also like to thank Canon Ian Paton of Old St Paul's Church, Edinburgh, Dr Sara Parvis of Edinburgh University and Professor Lewis Ayres of Durham University for advice in the preparation of this book, and Mrs Christine Smith of Canterbury Press for her encouragement and help in seeing this project through to completion. All responsibility for the final text and for any imperfections is mine. Finally I would like to thank Professor Jane Dawson of Edinburgh University for encouraging this project, and my wife Rachel for her invaluable love and support.

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How to use this book

The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels provides a commentary by a writer from the early or medieval Church on the Gospel passages read every Sunday in the year in churches that use the *Roman Lectionary*, the *Revised Common Lectionary* or the *Common Worship Lectionary*. These readings may be used for private meditation by those who are preparing for Sunday worship in their church; by preachers as they prepare their sermons; for reading at Morning Prayer on Sundays in parishes and other communities such as monasteries; or simply by someone who wants to see what some of the most profound thinkers of the Christian tradition have said on a particular passage from the Gospels. The great advantage of these readings is that by mediating the Great Tradition they take us out of the limitations of our own time and can challenge our prejudices about what the gospel means. The Fathers are privileged witnesses to the great mysteries of the faith and I would dare to suggest that, although some of what they say is limited by their own culture, there can be no authentic renewal of Christianity where their teaching and example is ignored. As Pope John Paul II said in 1982, ‘placing oneself in the school of the Fathers means learning to know Christ better and to know the human person better’.¹

Stephen Mark Holmes
School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh
Feast of St Duthac of Tain, March 2012

¹ Address to the professors and students of the Augustinianum, 8 May 1982, AAS 74 (1982), 798.

ABBREVIATIONS

Bareille	<i>Oeuvres complètes de Saint Jean Chrysostome, d'après toutes les éditions faites jusqu'à ce jour</i> , ed. and tr., J. Bareille, 21 vols (Paris, 1865–78)
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum series Latina</i> (Turnhout, 1953–)
CSCO Script. Syri	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> (Leuven, 1903–), <i>Scriptores Syri</i>
CSCO Script. Arm.	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> (Leuven, 1903–), <i>Scriptores Armeniaci</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> (Vienna, 1864–)
CWL	<i>Common Worship Lectionary</i>
Edit. Maurist.	<i>Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi Operum ... Opera et studio monachorum ordinis S. Benedicti à congregatione S. Mauri</i> , 13 vols (Paris, 1679–1705).
GCS	<i>Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller</i> (Berlin, 1891–)
Guéranger	Prosper Guéranger, <i>L'année liturgique</i> , 16 vols (Tours, 1904–20)
Jaeger	Werner Jaeger (ed.), <i>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</i> , (Leiden, 1921–)
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857–58)
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844–45)
PLS	<i>Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum</i> , ed. A. Hamman (Paris, 1958–)
RCL	<i>Revised Common Lectionary</i> (1992)
RL	<i>Roman Lectionary</i> (1969, revised 1981)
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> (Paris, 1942–)
Whitman	<i>The Christ of Cynewulf: A Poem in Three Parts</i> (Boston, 1900)

TABLE OF READINGS

The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels is designed for use with the 1969 Roman Lectionary (RL), the 1992 Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) and adaptations of this lectionary for use in Churches such as the Church of England (*Common Worship Lectionary* – CWL). Where there is divergence, the Roman titles for the Sunday readings are given first followed by the titles from the 1992 Revised Common Lectionary, but the names for the Sundays used in different Churches are not all noted. Where there are certain slight differences in the length of the Gospel passages used, the RCL additions are given in square brackets. The Church of England occasionally substitutes a different Gospel reading and these are noted and given their own patristic commentary.

Advent Sunday 1A	Matthew 24.37-44	St Paschasius Radbertus, <i>On Matthew</i> 2.24: PL 120, 799-800
Advent Sunday 1B	Mark 13.33-37 [24-37]	Godfrey of Admont, <i>Festal Homilies</i> 23: PL 174, 724-726
Advent Sunday 1C	Luke 21.25-28, 34-36 [25-36]	St Bernard, <i>Advent sermons</i> 4.1, 3-4: <i>Opera omnia</i> , Ed. Cist. 4 (1966) 182-5
Advent Sunday 2A	Matthew 3.1-12	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 109.1: PL 38, 636
Advent Sunday 2B	Mark 1.1-8	Origen, <i>Homilies on Luke</i> , 22.1-4: SC 67, 300-2
Advent Sunday 2C	Luke 3.1-6	Origen, <i>Homilies on Luke</i> 21: PG 13, 1855-6
Advent Sunday 3A	Matthew 11.2-11	St Ambrose, <i>On Luke</i> 5.93-5, 99-102, 109: CCSL 14, 165-6, 167-8, 171-2
Advent Sunday 3B	John 1.6-8, 19-28	John Scotus Eriugena, <i>Homilies on the Prologue of John</i> , 13: SC 151, 275-7

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Advent Sunday 3C	Luke 3.10-18 [7-18]	Origen, <i>Homilies on Luke</i> 26.3-5: SC 87, 340-2
Advent Sunday 4A	Matthew 1.18-24	Ven. Bede, <i>Homily 5 on the Vigil of the Nativity</i> : CCSL 122, 32-6
Advent Sunday 4B	Luke 1.26-38	Ven. Bede, <i>Homily 2 on Advent</i> : CCSL 122, 14-17
Advent Sunday 4C	Luke 1.39-45 [or 39-55]	Bd Gueric of Igny, <i>Advent Sermons</i> , 2.1-4: SC 166, 104-16
Christmas I (midnight)	Luke 2.1-14 [or, 1-20]	Theodotus of Ancyra, <i>Homily 1 on the Nativity of the Lord</i> : PG 77, 1360-1
Christmas II (dawn)	Luke 2.15-20 [1-20, or 8-20]	St Aelred, <i>Sermon 2 on the Birth of the Lord</i> : PL 195, 226-7, 1471-4
Christmas III (day)	John 1.1-18 [1-14]	St Basil the Great, <i>Homily 2 on the Holy Birth of the Lord</i> : PG 31, 1459-62
Holy Family/Christmas 1A	Matthew 2.13-15, 19-23 [13-23]	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily on the Day of Christ's Birth</i> : PG 56, 392
Holy Family/Christmas 1B	Luke 2.22-40 or 2.39-40	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Homily 12</i> : PG 77, 1042, 1046, 1047, 1050
Holy Family/Christmas 1C	Luke 2.41-52	Origen, <i>Homilies on Luke</i> 18.2-5: GCS 9, 112-13
Mary, Mother of God, OR, The Naming and Circumcision of Jesus, OR, The Holy Name, Years A, B & C	Luke 2.16-21	Bd Gueric of Igny, <i>Sermon 1 on the Assumption of Mary</i> , 2-4: PL 185, 187-9
	Luke 2.16-21	St Basil of Seleucia, <i>Sermons</i> , 39.4, 5: PG 85, 438, 442, 446
	Luke 2.16-21	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Homilies on the Incarnation of the Word of God</i> , 15.1-3: PG 77, 1090-1
Christmas 2A	John 1.1-18 or 1.1-5, 9-14	St Leo the Great, <i>Sermon 6 on the Nativity of the Lord</i> , 2-3, 5: PL 54, 213-16
Christmas 2B	John 1.1-18 or 1.1-5, 9-14	Bd Gueric of Igny, <i>Sermon 5 on the Nativity of the Lord</i> , 1-2: SC 166, 223-6
Christmas 2C	John 1.1-18 or 1.1-5, 9-14	Julian of Vézelay, <i>Sermon 1 on the Nativity</i> : SC 192, 45, 52, 60

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Epiphany A	Matthew 2.1-12	St Basil the Great, <i>Homily 2 on the Holy Birth of the Lord</i> : PG 31, 1472-6
Epiphany B	Matthew 2.1-12	St Odilo of Cluny, <i>Sermon 2 on the Epiphany of the Lord</i> : PL 142, 997-8
Epiphany C	Matthew 2.1-12	St Bruno of Segni, <i>Sermon 1 on the Epiphany of the Lord</i> : PL 165, 863-4
Baptism of the Lord A/ Epiphany 1A	Matthew 3.13-17	St Gregory the Wonderworker, <i>Homily 4 on the Holy Theophany</i> : PG 10, 1181, 1183
Baptism of the Lord B/ Epiphany 1B	Mark 1.7-11 [4-11]	St Gregory of Antioch, <i>Homily 2 on the Baptism of Christ</i> 5, 6, 9, 10: PG 88, 1876-7, 1880-4
Baptism of the Lord C/ Epiphany 1C	Luke 3.15-16, 21-22	St Hippolytus (attr.), <i>Sermon on the Holy Theophany</i> , 6-9: PG 10, 858-9
Ordinary Time 2A/ Epiphany 2A	John 1.29-34 [29-42]	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 2: PG 73, 191-4
Ordinary Time 2B (RL)	John 1.35-42	St Basil of Selucia, <i>Exhortatory Sermon</i> , 3-4: PG 28, 1104-6
Epiphany 2B (RCL)	John 1.43-51	St Augustine, <i>Tractates on John</i> , 7.16, 17, 20, 21
Ordinary Time 2C/ Epiphany 2C	John 2.1-12	St Maximus of Turin, <i>Homily 23</i> : PL 57, 274-6
Ordinary Time 3A/ Epiphany 3A	Matthew 4.12-23 or 4.12-17	St Gregory the Great, <i>Forty Gospel Homilies</i> , 1.5: PL 76, 1093-4
Ordinary Time 3B/ Epiphany 3B	Mark 1.14-20	St Caesarius of Arles, <i>Sermon 144.1-4</i> : CCSL 104, 593-5
Ordinary Time 3C/ Epiphany 3C	Luke 1.1-4; 4.14-21	Origen, <i>Homilies on Luke</i> , 32.2-6: SC 87, 386-392
Ordinary Time 4A/ Epiphany 4A	Matthew 5.1-12	St Chromatius of Aquileia, <i>Sermon 39</i> : SC 164, 216-20
Epiphany 4A (CWL)	John 2.1-11	See Ordinary Time 2C
Ordinary Time 4B/ Epiphany 4B	Mark 1.21-28	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily 5 on Hebrews</i> : Bareille 20, 158
Ordinary Time 4C/ Epiphany 4C	Luke 4.21-30	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On Isaiah</i> , 5.5: PG 70, 1352-3
Epiphany 4C (CWL)	Luke 2.22-40	See the Presentation of Christ

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Presentation of Christ A	Luke 2.22-40	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Sermon 4 on Luke</i> , 28-9
Presentation of Christ B	Luke 2.22-40	St Augustine, <i>Sermon 13 de Tempore</i> , from the old Roman Breviary
Presentation of Christ C	Luke 2.22-40	St Ambrose, <i>Sermons on Luke</i>
Ordinary Time 5A/ Epiphany 5A	Matthew 5.13-16 [13-20]	St John Chrysostom, <i>Baptismal Catecheses</i> 4.18-21, 26, 33; SC 50, 192-3, 196, 199
Ordinary Time 5B/ Epiphany 5B	Mark 1.29-39	St Peter Chrysologus, <i>Sermon 18</i> : PL 52, 246-9
Ordinary Time 5C/ Epiphany 5C	Luke 5.1-11	St Augustine, <i>Sermon 43.5-6</i> : PL 38, 256-7
Ordinary Time 6A/ Epiphany 6A	Matthew 5.17-37 [21-37]	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily 2</i> : Bareille, 3, 655-6
Ordinary Time 6B/ Epiphany 6B	Mark 1.40-45	St Paschasius Radbertus, <i>On Matthew</i> , 5.8: PL 120, 341-2
Ordinary Time 6C/ Epiphany 6C	Luke 6.17, 20-26 [17-26]	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily 12.4</i> : Bareille, 17, 480-1
Ordinary Time 7A/ Epiphany 7A	Matthew 5.38-48	St Cyprian, <i>On Jealousy and Envy</i> , 12-13: CSEL 3/1, 427-30
Ordinary Time 7B/ Epiphany 7B	Mark 2.1-12	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on Matthew 29.1</i> : Bareille, 12, 87-9
Ordinary Time 7C/ Epiphany 7C	Luke 6.27-38	St Augustine, <i>On the Psalms 60</i> , 9: CCSL 39, 771
Ordinary Time 8A/ Epiphany 8A [Proper 3A]	Matthew 6.24-34	St John Chrysostom, <i>Baptismal Catecheses</i> 8.19-21, 23-5: SC 50, 257-60
Ordinary Time 8B/ Epiphany 8B [Proper 3B]	Mark 2.18-22 [13-22]	St Paschasius Radbertus, <i>On Matthew 10.22</i> : PL 120, 741-2
Epiphany 8B (CWL)	John 1.1-14	See readings for Advent 3B, Christmas III or Christmas 2 A-C
Ordinary Time 8C/ Epiphany 8C [Proper 3C]	Luke 6.39-45 [39-49]	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On Luke</i> , 6: PG 72, 602-3
Epiphany 8C (CWL)	Luke 8.22-25	See reading for Ordinary Time 12B

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Ordinary Time 9A/ Epiphany 9A [Proper 4A]	Matthew 7.21-27	St Philoxenus of Mabbug, <i>Homily 1</i> : SC 44, 27-31
Epiphany 9A (alternative)	Matthew 17.1-9	See reading for Lent 2A
Ordinary Time 9B/ Epiphany 9B [Proper 4B]	Mark 2.23 - 3.6 or 2.23-28	Unknown Greek author, <i>Sermon</i> 6.1-2, 6: PG 86/1, 416, 421
Epiphany 9B (alternative)	Mark 9.2-9	See reading for Lent 2B
Ordinary Time 9C/ Epiphany 9C [Proper 4C]	Luke 7.1-10	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 62.1, 3-4: PL 38, 414-16
Epiphany 9C (alternative)	Luke 9.28-36 [28-43]	See reading for Lent 2C
Ash Wednesday A-C	Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21	I. St John Chrysostom, <i>Oration 3</i> <i>Against the Jews</i> : PG 48, 867-8 II. St Peter Chrysologus, <i>Sermon</i> 43: PL 52:320, 322 III. St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 205.1: PL 38, 1039-40
Ash Wednesday (CWL alternative)	John 8.1-11	See reading for Lent 5C (RL)
Lent Sunday 1A	Matthew 4.1-11	St Gregory Nazianzen, <i>Oration</i> 40.10: PG 36, 370-1
Lent Sunday 1B	Mark 1.12-15 [9-15]	John Justus Landsberg, <i>Sermons</i> : <i>Opera omnia 1</i> [1888], 120
Lent Sunday 1C	Luke 4.1-13	Origen, <i>On the Song of Songs</i> , 3.13: GCS 8, 221, 19 - 223, 5
Lent Sunday 2A	Matthew 17.1-9	St Ephrem the Syrian, <i>Sermon</i> 16 on the Transfiguration of the Lord, 1, 3, 4
Lent 2A (RCL alternative)	John 3.1-17	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Commentary on John</i> , 2.3
Lent Sunday 2B	Mark 9.2-10	St Ambrose, <i>On Psalm 45</i> , 2: CSEL 64, pars 6, 330-1
Lent 2B (RCL alternative)	Mark 8.31-38	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Commentary on Luke</i> , 49-50.
Lent Sunday 2C	Luke 9.28b-36	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Homily</i> 9 on the Transfiguration of the Lord: PG 77, 1011-14

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Lent 2C (RCL alternative)	Luke 13.31-35	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Commentary on Luke</i> , 100
Lent Sunday 3A	John 4.5-42 <i>or</i> 4.15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42	St Augustine, <i>Tractates on John</i> , 15.10-12, 16-17: CCSL 36, 154-6
Lent Sunday 3B	John 2.13-25	St Augustine, <i>On the Psalms</i> 130: CCSL 40, 1899-1900
Lent Sunday 3C	Luke 13.1-9	St Symeon the New Theologian, <i>Catecheses</i> , 3.347-70: SC 96, 308-10
Lent Sunday 4A	John 9.1-41 <i>or</i> 9.1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38	St Ambrose, <i>Letter</i> 80.1-5: PL 16, 1326-7
Lent Sunday 4B	John 3.14-21	St John Chrysostom, <i>On</i> <i>Providence</i> , 17.1-8: SC 79, 225-9
Lent Sunday 4C	Luke 15.1-3, 11-32	St John Chrysostom, <i>On</i> <i>Repentance</i> , 1.3-4: PG 49, 282-3
Lent Sunday 5A	John 11.1-45 <i>or</i> 11.3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45	St Peter Chrysologus, <i>Sermon</i> 63: PL 52, 375-7
Lent Sunday 5B	John 12.20-33	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Commentary on Numbers</i> , 2: PG 69, 617-24
Lent Sunday 5C (RL)	John 8.1-11	St Ambrose, <i>Letter</i> 26, 11-20: PL 16, 1044-6
Lent Sunday 5C (RCL)	John 12.1-8	St Augustine, <i>Tractates on John</i> , 50.6, 12, 13
Palm/Passion Sunday A	Matthew 21.1-11	St Gregory Palamas, <i>Homily</i> 15: PG 151, 184-5
Palm/Passion Sunday B	Mark 11.1-10 [<i>or</i> John 12.12-16]	Bd Gueric of Igny, <i>Sermon</i> 3 <i>on Palm Sunday</i> , 2, 3: SC 202, 190-3, 198-201
Palm/Passion Sunday C	Luke 19.28-40	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On</i> <i>Isaiah</i> , 4.2: PG 70, 967-70
Good Friday A	Matthew 27.1-2, 11-56	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 12.19: PG 74, 650-4
Good Friday B	Mark 15.1-41	St Augustine, <i>Tractates on John</i> , 37.9-10: CCSL 36, 336-8
Good Friday C	Luke 23.1-49	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 12: PG 74, 667-70

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Holy Saturday A	Matthew 27.57-66	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 12.19: PG 74, 679-82
Holy Saturday B	Mark 15.42-47	Origen, <i>On Romans</i> , 5.10: PG 14, 1048-52
Holy Saturday C	Luke 23.50-56	St Augustine, <i>Sermons</i> , Mai 146: PLS 2, 1242-3
Easter Day A-C	John 20.1-9 [1-20]; Matthew 28.1-10; [Mark 16.1-8]; [Luke 24.1-12]	I. St John Chrysostom, <i>Easter Homily</i> , 10-11, 12: PG 88, 1859-66
		II. Bd. Gueric of Igny, <i>Sermon 3 On the Resurrection</i> , 1-2 (PL 185, 148-9)
		III. St Hippolytus (attr.), <i>Paschal Homily</i> : SC 27, 116-18, 184-90
Easter Sunday 2A	John 20.19-31	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 12: PG 74, 704-5
Easter Sunday 2B	John 20.19-31	St Gregory the Great, <i>Forty Gospel Homilies</i> , 26.1-2: PL 76, 1197-8
Easter Sunday 2C	John 20.19-31	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 88.1-2: Edit. Maurist. 5, 469-70
Easter Sunday 3A	Luke 24.13-35	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 234.1-2: Edit. Maurist. 5, 987-8
Easter Sunday 3B	Luke 24.35-48	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily 4 on the beginning of Acts</i> , 6: PG 51, 106-7
Easter Sunday 3C	John 21.1-19 or 21.1-14	St Augustine, <i>Sermons</i> , <i>Guelferbytanus</i> 16.2-3: PLS 2, 580-1
Easter Sunday 4A	John 10.1-10	St Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paedagogus</i> , 9.83.3 - 85.a: SC 70, 258-61
Easter Sunday 4B	John 10.11-18	St Peter Chrysologus, <i>Sermon</i> 6: PL 52, 202-4
Easter Sunday 4C	John 10.27-30 [22-30]	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 7: PG 74, 20
Easter Sunday 5A	John 14.1-12	St Ambrose, <i>On Death as a Blessing</i> , 12.52-55: CSEL 32, 747-50
Easter Sunday 5B	John 15.1-8	St Augustine, <i>Tractates on John</i> , 80.1; 81.1, 3, 4: CCSL 36, 527, 530-1

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Easter Sunday 5C	John 13.31-33a, 34-35 [31-35]	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 9: PG 74, 161-4
Easter Sunday 6A	John 14.15-21	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on John</i> , 75.1: PG 59, 403-5
Easter Sunday 6B	John 15.9-17	St Thomas More, <i>A Treatise upon the Passion</i> , 1
Easter Sunday 6C	John 14.23-29	St Leo the Great, <i>Sermon</i> 77.5: CCSL 138A, 490-3
Ascension A	Matthew 28.16-20 [Luke 24.44-53]	St Leo the Great, <i>Sermon</i> 74.1-2: CCSL 138A, 455-7
Ascension B	Mark 16.15-20 [Luke 24.44-53]	St Augustine, <i>Homilies on 1 John</i> , 4.2-3: SC 75, 220-4
Ascension C	Luke 24.46-53 [44-53]	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 9: PG 74, 182-3
Easter Sunday 7A	John 17.1-11	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily on 'Father, if it is possible ...'</i> : PG 51, 34-5
Easter Sunday 7B	John 17.11b-19 [6-19]	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 11.9: PG 74, 516-17
Easter Sunday 7C	John 17.20-26	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 11.11: PG 74, 553-60
Pentecost Sunday A	John 20.19-23	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on Pentecost</i> , 2.1: PG 50, 463-5
Pentecost Sunday A (RCL alternative)	John 7.37-39	St Augustine, <i>Tractates on John</i> , 32.6-8.
Pentecost Sunday B	Jn 15.26-27; 16.12-15 [4-15]	St Aelred of Rievaulx, <i>Sermons</i> : Talbot 1, 112-14
Pentecost Sunday C	John 14.15-16, 23b-26 [8-17, 25-27]	St Leo the Great, <i>Sermons</i> , 75.1- 3: CCSL 138A, 465-9
Trinity Sunday A	John 3.16-18 [Trinity B]	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on Genesis</i> , 27.1-2: PG 53, 241
Trinity Sunday B	Matthew 28.16-20 [Trinity A]	St Nicholas Cabasilas, <i>The Life in Christ</i> , 2: PG 150, 532-533
Trinity Sunday C	John 16.12-15	St Hilary of Poitiers, <i>On the Trinity</i> , 12.55-6: PL 10, 468-72
Corpus Christi A	John 6.51-59 [RCL A-C]	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 272: Edit. Maurist. 5, 1103-4
Corpus Christi B	Mark 14.12-16	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on Matthew</i> , 82.1: PG 58, 737-9

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Corpus Christi C	Luke 9.11-17	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on 1 Corinthians</i> , 24.4: PG 61, 204-205
Sacred Heart A (RL)	Matthew 11.25-30	St Bruno of Segni, <i>Sermon 1 on Good Friday</i> : PL 165, 1007-8
Sacred Heart B (RL)	John 19.31-37	St Augustine, <i>Sermon 213</i> , 8: Edit. Maurist. 5, 942
Sacred Heart C (RL)	Luke 15.3-7	St Ambrose, <i>Sermons on Psalm 118</i> , 22.3, 27-30: CSEL 62, 489, 502-4
Ordinary Time 6A (RL)	Matthew 5.17-37	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 6B (RL)	Mark 1.40-45	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 6C (RL)	Luke 6.17, 20-26	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 7A (RL)	Matthew 5.38-48	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 7B (RL)	Mark 2.1-12	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 7C (RL)	Luke 6.27-38	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 8A/ Proper 3A	Matthew 6.24-34	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 8B/ Proper 3B	Mark 2.18-22 [13-22]	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 8C/ Proper 3C	Luke 6.39-45 [39-49]	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 9A/ Proper 4A	Matthew 7.21-27	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 9B/ Proper 4B	Mark 2.23-3.6	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 9C/ Proper 4C	Luke 7.1-10	See Ordinary Time before Lent
Ordinary Time 10A/ Proper 5A	Matthew 9.9-13 [8& 18-36]	St Augustine, <i>On the Psalms</i> 58, 1.7: CCSL 39, 733-4
Ordinary Time 10B/ Proper 5B	Mark 3.20-35	Unknown Greek author, <i>Paschal Homilies</i> , 5.1-3: SC 187, 318-22
Ordinary Time 10C/ Proper 5C	Luke 7.11-17	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 98, 1-3: PL 38, 591-2
Ordinary Time 11A/ Proper 6A	Matthew 9.36 - 10.8 [or 9.36 - 10.23]	St John Chrysostom, <i>Last Homilies</i> , 10.2-3: Bareille, 20, 562-4
Ordinary Time 11B/ Proper 6B	Mark 4.26-34	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily</i> 7: PG 64, 21-6

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Ordinary Time 11C/ Proper 6C	Luke 7.36 – 8.3 <i>or</i> 7.36–50	Anon Syrian writer: <i>Homily: Orient Syrien</i> 7 [1962], 180–1, 189, 193, 194
Ordinary Time 12A/ Proper 7A	Matthew 10.26–33 [24–39]	St Augustine, <i>On the Psalms</i> 69: CCSL 39.930–931
Ordinary Time 12B/ Proper 7B	Mark 4.35–41	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 63, 1–3: PL 38, 424–425
Ordinary Time 12C (RL)	Luke 9.18–24	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Homily</i> 49: ed. R. M. Tonneau, CSCO Script. Syri 70, 110–15
Proper 7C (RCL)	Luke 8.26–39	St Jerome, <i>Life of Hilarion</i> , 1, 23–4
Ordinary Time 13A/ Proper 8A	Matthew 10.37–42	St Hilary of Poitiers, <i>On Matthew</i> , 10.25–7: S 254, 246–251
Ordinary Time 13B/ Proper 8B	Mark 5.21–43 <i>or</i> 5.21–24, 35–43	St Peter Chrysologus, <i>Sermon</i> 34: PL 52, 296–9
Ordinary Time 13C/ Proper 8C	Luke 9.51–62	St Hilary of Poitiers, <i>On Psalm</i> 39, 12: CSEL 22, 784–5
Ordinary Time 14A/ Proper 9A	Matthew 11.[16– 19] 25–30	St John Chrysostom, <i>Sermon on St Bassus</i> : Bareille, 4, 509–10
Ordinary Time 14B/ Proper 9B	Mark 6.1–6 [1–13]	St Symeon the New Theologian, <i>Catecheses</i> , 3.19: SC 113, 165–9
Ordinary Time 14C/ Proper 9C	Luke 10.1–12, 17–20 <i>or</i> 10.1–9	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 101, 1–2, 11: PL 38, 605–7, 610
Ordinary Time 15A/ Proper 10A	Matthew 13.1–23 <i>or</i> 13.1–9	St Gregory the Great, <i>Forty Gospel Homilies</i> , 1.15.1–2, 4
Ordinary Time 15B (RL)	Mark 6.7–13	St Theophylact of Ohrid, <i>On Mark</i> : PG 123, 548–9
Proper 10B (RCL)	Mark 6.14–29	St John Chrysostom, <i>Commentary on Matthew</i> , 48.2, 4, 8
Ordinary Time 15C/ Proper 10C	Luke 10.25–37	Origen, <i>Homilies on Luke’s Gospel</i> , 34.3, 7–9: SC 87, 402–10
Ordinary Time 16A/ Proper 11A	Matthew 13.24–43 <i>or</i> 13.24–30	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 73A
Ordinary Time 16B/ Proper 11B	Mark 6.30–34 [53–56]	Didymus the Blind, <i>On Zechariah</i> , 2.39–42: SC 84, 446–9

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Ordinary Time 16C/ Proper 11C	Luke 10.38-42	St Gregory the Great, <i>Homilies on Ezekiel</i> , 2.2.7-11: SC 360, 105-13
Ordinary Time 17A/ Proper 12A	Matthew 13.[31-33] 44-52 or 13.44-46	Origen, <i>On Matthew</i> , 10.9-10: SC 162, 173-7
Ordinary Time 17B/ Proper 12B	John 6.1-15 [1-21]	St Augustine, <i>Tractates on John</i> , 24.1, 6, 7: CCSL 36, 244, 247-8
Ordinary Time 17C/ Proper 12C	Luke 11.1-13	Ven. Bede, <i>Homily 14</i> : CCSL 122, 272-3, 277-9
Ordinary Time 18A/ Proper 13A	Matthew 14.13-21	St Ephrem the Syrian, <i>Commentary on the Diatessaron</i> , 12.1.305: CSCO 145 Script. Arm., ii, 115-17
Ordinary Time 18B/ Proper 13B	John 6.24-35	St Theophylact of Ohrid, <i>On John</i> : PG 123, 1297-1301
Ordinary Time 18C/ Proper 13C	Luke 12.13-21	St Basil the Great, <i>Homélie sur la richesse</i> (1935), ed. Yves Courtonne, pp. 15-19
Ordinary Time 19A/ Proper 14A	Matthew 14.22-33	St Augustine, <i>Sermon 76.1</i> , 4, 5, 8, 9: PL 38, 479-83
Ordinary Time 19B/ Proper 14B	John 6.[35] 41-51	St Eutychius of Constantinople, <i>On Easter</i> , 2-3: PG 86/2, 2394-5
Ordinary Time 19C/ Proper 14C	Luke 12.32-48 [32-40]	St Gregory of Nyssa, <i>Homilies on the Song of Songs</i> , 11: Jaeger vi, 317-19
Ordinary Time 20A/ Proper 15A	Matthew 15.21-28 [10-28]	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily on the words, 'That Christ be proclaimed'</i> , 12-13: Bareille 5, 595-6
Ordinary Time 20B/ Proper 15B	John 6.51-58	St Theophylact of Ohrid, <i>Commentary on John</i> : PG 123, 1309-12
Ordinary Time 20C/ Proper 15C	Luke 12.49-53	Denis the Carthusian, <i>Commentary on Luke</i> : Opera omnia, xii, 72-4
Ordinary Time 21A/ Proper 16A	Matthew 16.13-20	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily on SS Peter and Elias</i> : PG 50, 727-8
Ordinary Time 21B/ Proper 16B	John 6.60-69 [56-69]	St Cyril of Alexandria, <i>On John</i> , 4.4: PG 73, 613-17

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Ordinary Time 21C (RL)	Luke 13.22-30	Bd John Henry Newman, <i>Parochial & Plain Sermons</i> , v, 254-6, 267-9
Proper 16C (RCL)	Luke 13.10-17	Origen, <i>Against Celsus</i> , 8.54
Ordinary Time 22A/ Proper 17A	Matthew 16.21-27	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 96, 1-4: PL 38, 584-6
Ordinary Time 22B/ Proper 17B	Mark 7.1-8, 14-15, 21-23	St Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i> , 4.12.1-2: SC 100, 508-14
Ordinary Time 22C/ Proper 17C	Luke 14.1, 7-14	St Bruno of Segni, <i>Commentary on Luke</i> , 1.14: PL 165, 406-7
Ordinary Time 23A/ Proper 18A	Matthew 18.15-20	St John Chrysostom, <i>Catecheses</i> , 6.18-20: SC 50, 224-5
Ordinary Time 23B/ Proper 18B	Mark 7.31-37 [24-37]	Ven. Bede, <i>Homilies on the Gospels</i> , 2.6
Ordinary Time 23C/ Proper 18C	Luke 14.25-33	St John Cassian, <i>Conferences</i> , 3.6-7: SC 42, 145-7
Ordinary Time 24A/ Proper 19A	Matthew 18.21-35	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 83.2, 4: PL 38, 515-16
Ordinary Time 24B/ Proper 19B	Mark 8.27-35 [27-38]	St Caesarius of Arles, <i>Sermon</i> 159, 1, 4-6: CCSL 104, 650, 652-4
Ordinary Time 24C/ Proper 19C	Luke 15.1-32 <i>or</i> 15.1-10 [15.1-10]	St Peter Chrysologus, <i>Homily</i> 168: PL 52, 639-41
Ordinary Time 25A/ Proper 20A	Matthew 20.1-16	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 87.1, 4-6: PL 38, 530-33
Ordinary Time 25B/ Proper 20B	Mark 9.30-37	St Theophylact of Ohrid, <i>On Mark</i> : PG 123, 588-9
Ordinary Time 25C/ Proper 20C	Luke 16.1-13	St Gaudentius of Brescia, <i>Sermon</i> 18: PL 20, 973-5
Ordinary Time 26A/ Proper 21A	Matthew 21.28-32 [23-32]	St Clement of Alexandria, <i>Who is the rich person who shall be saved?</i> , 39-40: PG 9, 644-5
Ordinary Time 26B/ Proper 21B	Mark 9.38-43, 45, 47-8	St Symeon the New Theologian, <i>Catecheses</i> , 1.3: SC 96, 299-305
Ordinary Time 26C/ Proper 21C	Luke 16.19-31	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily 2 on Lazarus</i> , 5: Bareille 2, 582-3
Ordinary Time 27A/ Proper 22A	Matthew 21.33-43 [33-46]	St Basil the Great, <i>Homilies on the Hexameron</i> , 5: SC 27, 304-7
Ordinary Time 27B/ Proper 22B	Mark 10.2-16	St Jacob of Serugh, <i>Homily on the Veil of Moses</i> : Guéranger, iii, 1023-5

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Ordinary Time 27C/ Proper 22C	Luke 17.5-10	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 115: PL 38, 655
Ordinary Time 28A/ Proper 23A	Matthew 22.1-14	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 90, 1, 5-6: PL 38, 559, 561-3
Ordinary Time 28B/ Proper 23B	Mark 10.17-30	St Clement of Alexandria, <i>Who is the rich person who shall be saved?</i> , 4, 6, 8-10
Ordinary Time 28C/ Proper 23C	Luke 17.11-19	St Augustine, <i>Questions on the Gospels</i> , 2.40: CCSL 44B, 97-102
Ordinary Time 29A/ Proper 24A	Matthew 22.15-21	St Ambrose, <i>On Luke</i> , 9.34-6
Ordinary Time 29B/ Proper 24B	Mark 10.35-45	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily 8 against the Anomoeans</i> : Bareille, 2, 253-4
Ordinary Time 29C/ Proper 24C	Luke 18.1-8	St Gregory of Nyssa, <i>Homily on the Lord's Prayer</i> : PG 44, 1119, 1123-6
Ordinary Time 30A/ Proper 25A	Matthew 22.34-40 [34-46]	St Augustine, <i>Sermons</i> , Mai 14.1-2: PLS 2, 449-50
Ordinary Time 30B/ Proper 25B	Mark 10.46-52	St Clement of Alexandria, <i>Protrepticus</i> , 11: SC 2, 181-183
Ordinary Time 30C/ Proper 25C	Luke 18.9-14	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 115
Dedication Festival A (CWL)	Matthew 21.12-16	Origen, <i>Homilies on Joshua</i> , 9.1-2: SC 71, 144-6
Dedication Festival B (CWL)	John 10.22-29	St Augustine, <i>Sermon</i> 336.1, 6: PL 38, 1471-5
Dedication Festival C (CWL)	John 2.13-22	See reading for Lent 3B
Ordinary Time 31A/ Proper 26A	Matthew 23.1-12	St Paschasius Radbertus, <i>On Matthew</i> , 10.22: PL 120, 769-70
Proper 26A (CWL)	Matthew 24.1-14	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on Matthew</i> , 75.1-2, 5.
Ordinary Time 31B/ Proper 26B	Mark 12.28-34	St Basil of Caesarea, <i>Asceticon</i> , Longer Responses 1-3 (abridged)
Ordinary Time 31C/ Proper 26C	Luke 19.1-10	St Philoxenus of Mabbug, <i>Homilies</i> , 4.78: SC 44, 96-97
All Saints' Day A (RCL & RL)	Matthew 5.1-12	St Augustine, <i>Explanation of the Sermon on the Mount</i> , 3.10.
All Saints' Day B (RCL)	John 11.32-44	See reading for Lent 5A

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All Saints' Day C (RCL)	Luke 6.20-31	St Clement of Rome, <i>Letter to the Corinthians</i> , 46, 48.
Ordinary Time 32A/ Proper 27A	Matthew 25.1-13	St Gregory Nazianzen, <i>Oration</i> 40, 46: PG 36, 425
Ordinary Time 32B/ Proper 27B	Mark 12.38-44	St Paulinus of Nola, <i>Letter</i> 34.2-4: CSEL 29, 305-6
Proper 27B (CWL)	Mark 1.14-20	See Ordinary Time 3B
Ordinary Time 32C/ Proper 27C	Luke 20.27-38	St Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i> , 4.5.2-4
Ordinary Time 33A/ Proper 28A	Matthew 25.14-30	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily</i> 78: Bareille, 93-5
Ordinary Time 33B	Mark 13.24-32	Cynewulf, <i>The Christ</i> , Part 3: Whitman, 33-6, 59
Proper 28B	Mark 13.1-8	See Proper 26A (CWL)
Ordinary Time 33C/ Proper 28C	Luke 21.5-19	St Nilus of Sinai, <i>Letters</i> , 3.35: PG 79, 401-4
Christ the King A	Matthew 25.31-46	St Hippolytus, <i>On Christ and the Antichrist</i> , 1-43: PG 10, 944-5
Christ the King B	John 18.33-37	St Augustine, <i>Tractates on John</i> , 115.2: CCSL 36, 644-5
Christ the King C	Luke 23.35-43	St John Chrysostom, <i>Homily on the Cross and the Thief</i> , 1.3-4: PG 49, 403-4

ADVENT

PREPARE a way for the Lord by living a good life and guard that way by good works. Let the Word of God move in you unhindered and give you a knowledge of his coming and of his mysteries. To him be glory and power for ever and ever, Amen.

Origen

I LOOK from afar, and behold I see the power of God coming, and a cloud covering the whole earth. Go out to meet him and say, ‘tell us if you are the one who is to reign over the people of Israel’.

Matins responsory for the first Sunday of Advent, *Aspiciens a longe*

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for the first Sunday of Advent, *Book of Common Prayer*

O WISDOM, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

Advent Magnificat antiphon, *O Sapientia* (Ecclesiasticus 24.3 and Wisdom 8.1)

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‘Now we give you thanks because you sent Jesus Christ to redeem us from sin and death and to make us inheritors of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may with joy behold his appearing and in confidence may stand before him.’² Advent is the season of preparation both for the coming of Christ in the flesh at Christmas and for his coming in glory at the end of time. In addition to these two comings of Christ in past and future, St Bernard and the Cistercian Fathers also speak of a present, intermediate, coming of Christ in grace to the waiting soul. Advent is a preparation for Christmas and in some ways it is like Lent which is a preparation for Easter. It shares with Lent certain distinctive marks in worship such as purple vestments and the omission of the *Gloria in excelsis* at the Eucharist, but the penitential character of Advent is much less marked and the dominant note is one of joyful expectation.

The name Advent is from the Latin ‘*adventus*’ which means an approach, a coming or an arrival. It was a technical term for the official arrival or manifestation of a King or a God and has a similar meaning to the name of the feast of Epiphany, in Greek ‘*epiphaneia*’, on the other side of Christmas. The celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas is the real *adventus Domini* (‘coming of the Lord’) but the season of Advent is a preparation for this. For over a thousand years Advent has marked the beginning of the Christian year for Western Christians.

Advent begins on the Sunday nearest the feast of St Andrew (30 November) and includes four Sundays. It seems to have had its remote origin in Spain and Gaul as a preparation for the feast of Epiphany with a penitential character like Lent. Our current Advent, however, has its direct roots in the Roman liturgy of the sixth century when it included six Sundays before Christmas, although by the seventh century these had been reduced to the current four. Advent is a distinctively Western Christian season but the Eastern Christian liturgies also have their own periods of preparation for the feast of the Nativity.

The Sunday Gospels of the three-year cycle of the *Revised Common Lectionary* and the *Roman Lectionary* are broadly the same and follow a thematic plan in which John the Baptist and the Blessed Virgin Mary have a central role: staying awake to wait for the Lord (Advent 1); John the Baptist and the message of repentance (Advent 2); John the Baptist and Jesus Christ (Advent 3); Mary, Mother of the Lord (Advent 4). It is interesting to note that these three series of Gospels present time in reverse, they start with the final consummation of all things at the end of history and move through events in Jesus’ public ministry to stories of the months before Jesus’ birth.

² Advent short preface, *Common Worship*.

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The liturgy is above history and sees all history in the light of the mystery of Christ as it exists in the heart of the Father, from Christ's eternal pre-existence to his final advent as Judge of the Universe. The mystery of Jesus' birth can only properly be understood in the light of all this. Apart from Origen's homilies on Luke, the commentaries on the Gospels in *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* are taken from Latin writers as Advent is a Western Christian season. Among them Bernard and Gueric represent the distinguished medieval Cistercian monastic tradition of Advent sermons.

The sequence of Advent Gospels in our contemporary lectionaries is a development of the traditional Roman series of Advent Gospels, which was in part preserved in the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) of the Church of England. The first Sunday (BCP Advent 2) had Luke 21.25–33 on the signs of the end times but without the call to watch and pray (21.34–36) found in the Gospel for Advent 1C in the modern lectionaries; the second Sunday (BCP Advent 3) had Matthew 11.2–10 on Jesus and John, as on Advent 3A; the third Sunday (BCP Advent 4) had John 1.19–28 on Jesus and John, now used on Advent 3B; the fourth Sunday had Luke 3.1–6 on the start of John's ministry, now used on Advent 2C. The focus on the Virgin Mary on the fourth Sunday is taken from the ancient Gospels for Wednesday (Luke 1.26–38, now used on Advent 4B) and Friday (Luke 1.39–47, now used on Advent 4C) in Ember Week in Advent (the Ember Saturday Gospel is Luke 3.1–6). Embertide is four series of Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, corresponding to the four seasons. The name derives from the Anglo-Saxon word *ymbren* (a circuit or revolution) with reference to their place in the annual cycle of the year, or perhaps from their Latin title, *ieiunia quatuor temporum* (fast of the four times/seasons). They are periods of prayer and fasting and for centuries they have been the time for ordinations. The series of Gospels on the Sundays of Advent thus preserves all the riches of the traditional Catholic and Anglican liturgy.

As the season of Advent progresses the liturgy shifts its focus from the final coming of Christ to his first coming at Bethlehem and there is a distinct change on 17 December when the Great 'O' antiphons begin to be sung at Evensong, starting with *O Sapientia* (O Wisdom – the calendar of the BCP has this antiphon on 16 December, which was its date in the pre-Reformation English calendar of Salisbury). The usual modern liturgical colour of the season is purple but medieval colour sequences also indicate blue, red and black, and blue is used today in some churches. On the third Sunday of Advent, called Gaudete Sunday from the first word of the traditional entrance chant, *Gaudete in Domino semper* (rejoice in the Lord always ..., Philippians 4.4–6), rose-pink vestments are sometimes used, following the Roman Missal of 1570.

First Sunday of Advent Year A: Matthew 24.37-44

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW
BY ST PASCHASIVS RADBERTUS

Watch, for you do not know the day nor the hour. Like many other Scriptural texts, this admonition is addressed to all of us, though it is formulated in such a way that it would seem to concern only Christ's immediate audience. We can all apply it to ourselves because the Last Day and the end of the world will come for each of us on the day we depart this present life. This means we must make sure we die in the state in which we wish to appear on the Day of Judgement. Bearing this in mind each of us should guard against being led astray and failing to keep watch, otherwise the day of the Lord's return may take us unawares. If the last day of our life finds us unprepared, then we shall be unprepared on that day also.

I do not for a moment believe the apostles expected the Lord to return in judgement during their own lifetime. All the same there can be no doubt that they took every care not to be drawn from the right path. They kept watch, observing the universal precepts their master had given to his disciples so as to be ready when he came again.

Consequently we must always be on the lookout for Christ's twofold coming, the one when we shall have to give an account of everything we have done, and the other when he comes day after day to stir our consciences. He comes to us now in order that his future coming may find us prepared. If my conscience is burdened with sin what good will it do me to know when the Day of Judgement will be? Unless the Lord comes to my soul beforehand and makes his home with me, unless Christ lives in me and speaks his word in my heart, it is useless for me to know if and when his coming will take place. Only if Christ is already living in me and I in him will it go well with me when he comes in judgement. If I have already died to the world and am able to say, *The world is crucified to me, and I to the world*, then, in a sense, his final coming is already present to me.

Consider also our Lord's warning: *Many will come in my name.* It is only the Anti-Christ and his members who, albeit falsely, claim the name of Christ, though they lack his works and his true doctrine and wisdom. You will never find the Lord in Scripture actually declaring, 'I am the Christ.' His teaching and miracles revealed it clearly enough, for the Father was at work in him. Louder than a thousand acclamations his teaching and mighty works proclaimed: 'I am the Christ.' And so whether or not you find him describing himself in so many words, the works of the

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Father and his own message of love declared what he was, whereas the false Christs who possessed neither godly deeds nor holy doctrine loudly claimed to be what they were not.

St Paschasius Radbertus, *On Matthew*, 2.24: PL 120, 799–800

First Sunday of Advent Year B: Mark 13.33–37

[24–37]

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY GODFREY OF ADMONT

Take heed, watch, and pray, the Scripture says. By these words our Lord and Saviour admonished not only his disciples whom he was addressing in the flesh; by these same words he also made clear to us what we must do, and how we should keep watch. The three parts of this saying plainly show how all destined to be saved, who forget what lies behind them and desire to press on toward what lies ahead, can attain the summit of perfection which is their goal.

Those then who, moved to compunction by divine grace, have decided to renounce the world and its desires, must have their eyes open and take heed, according to the warning of the word of God at the beginning of the gospel reading. In other words, they must begin by distinguishing between what should be done and what should be avoided.

However, people intending to change their way of life will not reach perfection simply by knowing what is right. After learning how to live a good life they must also strive to be watchful by performing good works. Hence, after warning his disciples to take heed, the Lord fittingly adds, *Watch and pray*. The command to watch means that we must strive to put our understanding of what is right into practice. We must turn our backs on the lazy, indolent way of life into which we had fallen, and eagerly watch for anything that we can do.

But to those who thus keep watch by the zealous performance of good deeds, the Lord shows a yet higher way. He immediately adds the admonition: *and pray*. All the elect are commanded to pray, which means that their desires are to be for things eternal; their only motive in performing a good deed should be their hope of a reward in heaven. It would seem to be perseverance in this kind of prayer that the apostle Paul enjoins on his disciples when he tells them to *pray without ceasing*. We pray without ceasing if for performing a good deed we have not the slightest desire to

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receive the glory of earthly praise, but think longingly only of what is eternal.

Take heed, watch, and pray, our text says; meaning, *take heed* by understanding what is right; *watch* by doing what is good; and *pray* by desiring what is eternal. And the following words show clearly why they must be so very heedful, watchful, and prayerful. *You do not know*, the text says, *when the time will be*. So since we are ignorant of the time of this great visitation, we must be always watching and praying; that is to say, for the grace of so great a visitation we must prepare the innermost recesses of our hearts by vigilant effort.

Godfrey of Admont, *Festal Homilies*, 23; PL 174, 724–6

*First Sunday of Advent Year C: Luke 21.25–28,
34–36 [25–36]*

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST BERNARD

It is surely right that you should celebrate our Lord's coming with all your hearts, and that the greatness of the consolation which his Advent brings us should fill you with joy. Indeed one can only be amazed at the depth of his self-abasement, and stirred up to new fervour by the immensity of his love. But you must not think of his first coming only, when he came to seek and save what was lost; remember that he will come again and take us to himself. It is my desire that you should be constantly meditating upon this twofold advent, continually turning over in your minds of all that he has done for us in the first, and all that he promises to do in the second.

It is time for judgement to begin at the house of God. But what will be the fate of those who do not obey the Gospel? What judgement will be reserved for those who will not submit to the judgement taking place now? In this present judgement the ruler of this world is being cast out, and those who seek to evade it must expect – indeed they must greatly fear – the judge who will cast them out along with him. However, if we are fully judged now, we may safely *await the Saviour who is to come, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies into the likeness of his glorious body*. Then the just will shine forth so that both learned and simple may see it; they will *shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father*.

When our Saviour comes *he will change our lowly bodies into the likeness of his glorious body*, provided that our hearts have been changed and

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made humble as his was. This is why he said: *Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.* We may note from this text that humility is twofold: that is intellectual humility and a humility of one's whole disposition and attitude, here called the heart. By the first we recognize that we are nothing; we can learn this much of ourselves from our own weakness. The second enables us to trample the glory of the world under our feet, and this we learn from him who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. When the people desired to make him a king, he fled from them; but when they wanted to make him undergo the shame and ignominy of the cross, he gave himself up to them of his own free will.

St Bernard, *Advent Sermons*, 4.1, 3-4: *Opera omnia*,
Ed. Cist., iv (1966), 182-5

Second Sunday of Advent Year A: Matthew 3.1-12

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

The gospel tells us that some people were rebuked by the Lord because, clever as they were at reading the face of the sky, they could not recognize the time for faith when the kingdom of heaven was at hand. It was the Jews who received this reprimand, but it has also come down to us. The Lord Jesus began his preaching of the gospel with the admonition: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* His forerunner, John the Baptist, began his in the same way. *Repent*, he said, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Today, for those who will not repent at the approach of the kingdom of heaven, the reproof of the Lord Jesus is the same. As he points out himself, *You cannot expect to see the kingdom of heaven coming. The kingdom of heaven*, he says elsewhere, *is within you.*

Each of us would be wise therefore to take to heart the advice of his teacher, and not waste this present time. If it is now that our Saviour offers us his mercy; now, while he still spares the human race. Understand that it is in hope of our conversion that he spares us, for he desires no one's damnation. As for when the end of the world will be, that is God's concern. Now it is the time for faith. Whether any of us here present will see the end of the world I know not; very likely none of us will. Even so, the time is very near for each of us, for we are mortal. There are hazards all around us. We should be in less danger from them were we made of glass. What more fragile than a vessel of glass? And yet it can be kept safe and last indefinitely. Of course it is exposed to accidents, but it is not

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liable to old age and the suffering it brings. We therefore are the more frail and infirm. In our weakness we are haunted by fears of all the calamities that regularly befall the human race, and if no such calamity overtakes us, still, time marches on. We may evade the blows of fortune, but shall we evade death? We made escape perils from without, but shall we escape what comes from within us? Now, suddenly, we may be attacked by any malady. And if we are spared? Even so, old age comes at last, and nothing will delay it.

St Augustine, *Sermon* 109.1: PL 38, 636

Second Sunday of Advent Year B: Mark 1.1–8

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON LUKE BY ORIGEN

Let us examine the scriptural texts foretelling the coming of Christ. One such prophecy begins with a reference to John the Baptist. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.* What follows, however, applies directly to our Lord and Saviour, since it is by Jesus rather than by John that *every valley has been filled in.*

You have only to recall the kind of people you were before you put your faith in the Lord to see yourselves as deep valleys, as pits plunging precipitously into the lowest depths. But now that the Lord Jesus has come and has sent the Holy Spirit in his name, all your valleys have been filled in with good works and the Holy Spirit's fruits. Love no longer tolerates the presence of valleys in your lives; if peace, patience, and goodness find a home in you, not only will each of you cease to be a valley but you will actually begin to be a mountain of God.

Among the pagans we daily see this prophetic filling of every valley realized, just as among the people of Israel, now deprived of their former privileged status, we see the overthrowing of every mountain and hill. But *because of their offence, salvation has come to the pagans, to stir Israel to emulation.*

If you prefer you can visualize these fallen mountains and hills as the hostile powers that formerly raised themselves up in opposition to the human race. Such an interpretation is legitimate because, in order to fill in the kind of valleys we have been speaking of, the enemy powers – the mountains and hills – must be laid low.

Now let us turn to that part of the prophecy which also concerns the coming of Christ and see whether this too has been fulfilled. The text

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continues: *Every crooked way shall be straightened.* Each one of us was once crooked; if we are no longer so, it is entirely due to the grace of Christ. Through his coming to our souls all our crooked ways have been straightened out. If Christ did not come to your soul, of what use would his historical coming in the flesh be to you? Let us pray that each day we may experience his coming and be able to testify: *It is not I who now live, but Christ who lives in me.*

So then, by his coming Jesus my Lord has smoothed out your rough places and changed your disorderly ways into level paths, so that an even, unimpeded road may be constructed within you, clear enough for God the Father to walk along, and Christ the Lord may himself set up his dwelling in your hearts and say: *My Father and I will come to them and make our home in them.*

Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, 22.1-4: SC 67, 300-2

Second Sunday of Advent Year C: Luke 3.1-6

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON LUKE BY ORIGEN

The word of God was addressed to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert, and he went through all the Jordan valley. Where else could he go but through the Jordan valley, where there would be water at hand to baptize those wishing to amend their lives?

Now the word Jordan means descent or coming down. Coming down and rushing in full flood is the river of God, the Lord our Saviour, in whom we were baptized. This is the real, life-giving water, and the sins of those baptized in it are forgiven.

So come, catechumens, and amend your lives so that you may have your sins forgiven in baptism. In baptism the sins of those who cease to sin that are forgiven, but if anyone comes to be baptized while continuing to sin, that person's sins are not forgiven. This is why I urge you not to present yourselves for baptism without thinking very carefully, but to give some evidence that you really mean to change your way of living. Spend some time living a good life. Cleanse yourselves from all impurity and avoid every sin. Then, when you yourselves have begun to despise your sins, they will be forgiven you. You will be forgiven your sins if you renounce them.

The teaching of the Old Testament is the same. We read in the prophet Isaiah, *A voice cries out in the desert. Prepare the way for the Lord. Build*

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him a straight highway. What way shall we prepare for the Lord? A way by land? Could the Word of God travel such a road? Is it not rather a way within ourselves that we have to prepare for the Lord? Is it not a straight and level highway in our hearts that we are to make ready? Surely this is the way by which the Word of God enters, a way that exists in the spaciousness of the human body. The human heart is vast, broad, and capacious, if only it is pure. Would you like to know its length and breadth? See then what a vast amount of divine knowledge it can contain.

Solomon says: *He gave me knowledge of all that exists; he taught me about the structure of the universe and the properties of the elements, the beginning and the end of epochs and the periods between, the variations in the seasons and the succession of the months, the revolution of the year and the position of the stars, the natures of living things and the instincts of wild animals, the force of the winds and the thoughts of human beings, the various kinds of plants and the medicinal properties of roots.*

You must realize that the human heart is not small when it can contain all this. You ought to judge it not by its physical size but by its power to embrace such a vast amount of knowledge of the truth.

But so that I may convince you that the human heart is large by a simple example from daily life, let us consider this. Whatever city we may have passed through, we have in our minds. We remember its streets, walls, and buildings, what they were like and where they were situated. We have a mental picture of the roads we have travelled. In moments of quiet reflection our minds embrace the sea that we have crossed. So, as I said, the heart that can contain all this is not small!

Therefore, if what contains so much is not small, let a way be prepared in it for the Lord, a straight highway along which the Word and Wisdom of God may advance. Prepare a way for the Lord by living a good life and guard that way by good works. Let the Word of God move in you unhindered and give you a knowledge of his coming and of his mysteries. To him be glory and power for ever and ever, amen.

Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, 21: PG 13, 1855–6

Third Sunday of Advent Year A: Matthew 11.2–11

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON LUKE BY
ST AMBROSE

Calling two of his disciples, John sent them to Jesus saying: 'Are you the one who is to come, or must we look for another?'

It is no easy matter to understand these simple words. If we take them at their face value they conflict with what was said earlier. We find John declaring his ignorance of the one whom he had previously recognized on the Father's testimony. How is this possible? How could John recognize a man hitherto unknown to him, and later deny any acquaintance with him? Here is what he says: *I did not know him, but the one who commissioned me to baptize told me he would be the man upon whom I should see the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven.* John believed these words, and recognized the man thus revealed to him. Not only did he baptize him, he paid homage to him and proclaimed him as the one who was to come, announcing: *I have seen and have borne witness that this is God's chosen servant.* What are we to think then? Is it conceivable that a prophet of John's stature could be so far from the truth that after identifying Jesus as the one who takes away the sins of the world he still could not believe Jesus to be the Son of God?

Since the literal sense of this passage appears to be contradictory, let us look for its spiritual meaning. I have already told you that John represents the law which foreshadowed Christ. And so how fitting it was that the law should have been kept imprisoned materially in faithless hearts, deprived of the light of eternity! There it was to remain as if confined within a womb where, despite persistent birth-pangs, incomprehension barred its exit: it could not bear full witness to the Lord's saving plan without the confirmation of the Gospel. Because Christ is the fulfilment of the law, John sent his disciples to him to obtain further information. Knowing that it was impossible for anyone to possess the fullness of faith without hearing the Good News (for the faith that has its origin in the Old Testament is brought to completion in the New), our Lord answered the disciples' question not by giving them a verbal assurance of his identity, but by pointing to his actions. *Go, he said, and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, the dead rise again, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.*

Nevertheless these things are only minor proofs of the Lord's presence. The fullness of faith consists of recognizing the Lord when he is crucified, dead, and buried. This was why Jesus concluded by saying: *Blessed are*

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those who are not scandalized by me. It is indeed possible for the cross to prove a stumbling block even for the elect. But we have no greater testimony to Christ's divinity, nothing which more clearly shows him to be more than human, than his offering himself as the unique sacrifice for the whole world; this alone fully reveals him as the Lord. Moreover it was in this light that John pointed him out: *Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.*

However, Christ's answer was addressed not to John's disciples but to all of us, in order that when we found his claim supported by facts we might come to believe in him.

St Ambrose, *Commentary on Luke*, 5.93-5, 99-102, 109: CCSL 14, 165-6, 167-8, 171-2

Third Sunday of Advent Year B: John 1.6-8, 19-28

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON JOHN BY JOHN
SCOTUS ERIUGENA

Into the theological plan of his gospel John the Evangelist draws John the Baptist; deep calls to deep at the utterance of divine mysteries. We hear the Evangelist relating the story of the forerunner, the man whose gift it was to know the Word as he was in the beginning, speaking to us of the one who was commissioned to go ahead of the Word made flesh. *There was*, says the Evangelist, *not simply a messenger of God, but a man.* This he said in order to distinguish the man who shared only the humanity of the one he heralded from the Man who came after him, the Man who united godhead and manhood in his own Person. The Evangelist's intention was to differentiate between the fleeting voice and the eternally unchanging Word. The one, he would suggest, was the morning star appearing at the dawning of the kingdom of heaven, while the other was the Sun of Justice coming in its wake. He distinguished the witness from the one to whom he testified, the messenger from him who sent him, the lamp burning in the night from the brilliant lights that filled the whole world, the light that dispelled the darkness of death and sin from the entire human race.

So then, the Lord's forerunner was a man, not a god; whereas the Lord whom he preceded was both man and God. The forerunner was a man destined to be divinized by God's grace, whereas the one he preceded was God by nature, who, through his desire to save and redeem us, lowered himself in order to assume our human nature.

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A man was sent. By whom? By the divine Word, whose forerunner he was. To go before the Lord was his mission. Lifting up his voice, this man called out: *The voice of one crying in the wilderness!* It was the herald preparing the way for the Lord's coming. John was his name; John to whom was given the grace to go ahead of the King of kings, to point out to the world the Word made flesh, to baptize him with that baptism in which the Spirit would manifest his divine Sonship, to give witness through his teaching and martyrdom to the eternal light.

John Scotus Eriugena, *Homilies on the Prologue of John*, 13: SC 151,

275-7

Third Sunday of Advent Year C: Luke 3.10-18 [7-18]

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON LUKE BY ORIGEN

The baptism that Jesus gives us is a baptism in the Holy Spirit and in fire. Baptism is one and the same no matter who receives it, but its effect depends on the recipient's disposition. He who is portrayed as baptizing in the Holy Spirit and in fire *holds a winnowing fan in his hand, which he will use to clear his threshing floor. The wheat he will gather into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with fire that can never be quenched.*

I should like to discover our Lord's reason for holding a winnowing fan and to inquire into the nature of the wind that scatters the light chaff here and there, leaving the heavier grain lying in a heap – for you must have a wind if you want to separate wheat and chaff.

I suggest that the faithful are like a heap of unsifted grain, and that the wind represents the temptations which assail them and show up the wheat and the chaff among them. When your soul is overcome by some temptation, it is not the temptation that turns you into chaff. No, you were chaff already, that is to say fickle and faithless; the temptation simply discloses the stuff you are made of. On the other hand, when you endure temptations bravely it is not the temptation that makes you faithful and patient; temptation merely brings to light the hidden virtues of patience and fortitude that have been present in you all along. *Do you think I had any other purpose in speaking to you, said the Lord to Job, than to reveal your virtue?* In another text he declares: *I humbled you and made you feel the pangs of hunger in order to find out what was in your heart.*

In the same way, a storm will not allow a house to stand firm if it is built upon sand. If you wish to build a house, you must build it upon rock.

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Then any storms that arrive will not demolish your handiwork, whereas the house built upon sand will totter, proving thereby that it is not well founded.

So while all is yet quiet, before the storm gathers, before the squalls begin to bluster or the waves to swell, let us concentrate all our efforts on the foundations of our building and construct our house with the many strong, interlocking bricks of God's commandments. Then when cruel persecution is unleashed like some fearful tornado against Christians, we shall be able to show that our house is built upon Christ Jesus our rock.

Far be it from us to deny Christ when that time comes. But if anyone should do so, let that person realize that it was not at the moment of his public denial that his apostasy took place. The seeds and roots had been hidden within him for a long time; persecution only brought into the open and made public what was already there. Let us pray to the Lord then that we may be firm and solid buildings that no storm can overthrow, founded on the rock of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, 26.3-5: SC 87, 340-2

Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A: Matthew 1.18-24

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY THE VENERABLE BEDE

Matthew the evangelist gives us an account of the way in which the eternal Son of God, begotten before the world began, appeared in time as the Son of Man. His description is brief but absolutely true. By tracing the ancestry of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ through the male line he brings it down from Abraham to Joseph, the husband of Mary. It is indeed fitting in every respect that when God decided to become incarnate for the sake of the whole human race none but a virgin should be his mother, and that, since a virgin was privileged to bring him into the world, she should bear no other son but God.

Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he will be called Emmanuel, a name which means God-with-us. The name God-with-us, given to our Saviour by the prophet, signifies that two natures are united in his one person. Before time began he was God, born of the Father, but in the fullness of time he became Emmanuel, God-with-us, in the womb of his mother, because when the Word was made flesh and lived among

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us he deigned to unite our frail human nature to his own person. Without ceasing to be what he had always been, he began in a wonderful fashion to be what we are, assuming our nature in such a way that he did not lose his own.

And so Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, the child of her own flesh and blood. She brought forth the God who had been born of God before creation began, and who, in his created humanity, rightfully surpassed the whole of creation. And Scripture says *she named him Jesus*.

Jesus, then, is the name of the Virgin's son. According to the angel's explanation, it means one who is to save his people from their sins. In doing so he will also deliver them from any defilement of mind and body they have incurred on account of their sins.

But the title 'Christ' implies a priestly or royal dignity. In the Old Testament it was given to both priests and kings on account of the anointing with chrism or holy oil which they received. They prefigured the true king and high priest who, on coming into this world, was anointed with the oil of gladness above all his peers. From this anointing or chrismation he received the name of Christ, and those who share in the anointing which he himself bestows, that is the grace of the Spirit, are called Christians.

May Jesus Christ fulfil his saving task by saving us from our sins; may he discharge his priestly office by reconciling us to God the Father; and may he exercise his royal power by admitting us to his Father's kingdom, for he is our Lord and God who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Ven. Bede, *Homily 5 on the Vigil of the Nativity*: CCSL 122, 32–6

Fourth Sunday of Advent Year B: Luke 1.26–38

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY THE VENERABLE
BEDE

Today's reading of the gospel calls to mind the beginning of our redemption, for the passage tells us how God sent an angel from heaven to a virgin. He was to proclaim the new birth, the incarnation of God's Son, who would take away our age-old guilt; through him it would be possible to be made new and numbered among the children of God. And so, if we are to deserve the gifts of the promised salvation, we must listen attentively to the account of its beginning.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house

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of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. What is said of the house of David applies not only to Joseph but also to Mary. It was a precept of the law that each man should marry a wife from his own tribe and kindred. St Paul also bears testimony to this when he writes to Timothy: *Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my Gospel.* Our Lord is truly descended from David, since his spotless mother took her ancestry from David's line.

The angel came to her and said, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.' The angel refers to the kingdom of the Israelite nation as the throne of David because in his time, by the Lord's command and assistance, David governed it with a spirit of faithful service. The Lord God gave to our Redeemer the throne of his father David, when he decreed that he should take flesh from the lineage of David. As David had once ruled the people with temporal authority, so Christ would now lead them to the eternal kingdom by his spiritual grace. Of this kingdom the Apostle said: *He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.*

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. The house of Jacob here refers to the universal Church which, through its faith in and witness to Christ, shares the heritage of the patriarchs. This may apply either to those who are physical descendants of the patriarchal families, or to those who come from gentile nations and are reborn in Christ by the waters of baptism. In this house Christ shall reign forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. During this present life, Christ rules in the Church. By faith and love he dwells in the hearts of his elect, and guides them by his unceasing care toward their heavenly reward. In the life to come, when their period of exile on earth is ended, he will exercise his kingship by leading the faithful to their heavenly country. There, for ever inspired by the vision of his presence, their one delight will be to praise and glorify him.

Ven. Bede, *Homily 2 on Advent*: CCSL 122, 14-17

Fourth Sunday of Advent Year C: Luke 1.39–45
[39–55]

A READING FROM A SERMON BY BLESSED GUERRIC
OF IGNY

Our King and Saviour is coming; let us run to meet him! *Good news from a far country*, in the words of Solomon, *is like cold water to a thirsty soul*; and to announce the coming of our Saviour and the reconciliation of the world, together with the good things of the life to come, is to bring good news indeed. *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good tidings and publish peace!* Such messengers truly bear a refreshing draught to the soul that thirsts for God; with their news of the Saviour's coming, they joyfully draw and offer us water from the springs of salvation. In the words and spirit of Elizabeth, the soul responds to the message, whether it be of Isaiah four of his fellow-prophets: *Why is this granted to me, that my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, my spirit leapt for joy within me in eager longing to run ahead to meet my God and Saviour.*

Let us too arise with joy and run in spirit to meet our Saviour. Hailing him from afar, let us worship him, saying, Come, Lord, *save me and I shall be saved!* Come and *show us your face, and we shall all be saved.* *We have been waiting for you; be our help in time of trouble.* This was how the prophets and saints of old men went to meet the Messiah, filled with immense desire to see with their eyes, if possible, what they already saw in spirit.

We must look forwards to the day, so soon to come, on which we celebrate the anniversary of Christ's birth. Scripture itself insists on the joy which must fill us – a joy which will lift our spirit out of itself in longing for his coming, impatient of delay as it strains forward to see even now what the future holds in store.

I believe that the many texts of Scripture which urge us to go out to meet him speak of Christ's first coming as well as his second. Surely, however, we are to understand that as our bodies will rise up rejoicing at his second coming, so our hearts must run forwards in joy to greet his first.

Between these two comings of his, the Lord frequently visits us individually in accordance with our merits and desires, forming us to the likeness of his first coming in the flesh, and preparing us for his return at the end of time. He comes to us now, to make sure that we do not lose the fruits of his first coming nor incur his wrath at his second. His purpose now is to

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convert our pride into the humility which he showed when he first came, so that he may refashion our lowly bodies into the likeness of that glorious body which he will manifest when he comes again.

Grace accompanied his first coming; glory will surround his last. This intermediate coming is a combination of both, enabling us to experience in the consolations of his grace a sort of foretaste of his glory. Blessed are those whose burning love has gained for them such a privilege!

And so, my brothers, though we have not yet experienced this wonderful consolation, we are encouraged by firm faith and a pure conscience to wait patiently for the Lord to come. In joy and confidence let us say with St Paul: *I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am confident of his power to guard what has been put into my charge until the day when our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ comes in glory.* May he be praised for ever and ever. Amen.

Bd Gueric of Igny, *Advent Sermons*, 2.1-4: SC 166, 104-16