

ADVENT WEEKDAY READING GUIDE

DECEMBER

PROLOGUE: JESUS ARRIVAL IS ANNOUNCED

1 Jesus submits to baptism and testing. (1:1-13)

SCENE ONE: JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY IN GALILEE

2 After Jesus' initial preaching, he calls his disciples. (1:14-20)
3 His healings lead to growing fame. (1:21-45) (2:1-3:6)
4 Controversies with religious leaders lead to growing opposition.

SCENE TWO: JESUS REACTS TO REJECTION BY HIS PEOPLE

5 Growing opposition leads to rejection by his family. (3:7-35)
6 His parables beside the sea lead to divisions. (4:1-34)
8 More healings lead to rejection by his home town. (4:35-6:6)

SCENE THREE: JESUS TRAVELS OUTSIDE OF GALILEE

9 Jesus sends out twelve disciples and feeds thousands; John is beheaded. (6:7-52)
10 He heals people and argues about food traditions. (6:53-7:23)
11 Again he heals and feeds thousands, but his disciples do not understand. (7:24-8:26)

SCENE FOUR: JESUS JOURNEYS TOWARD JERUSALEM

12 Jesus predicts his death and resurrection and is transformed. (8:27-9:29)
13 A second prediction leads to ethical teachings. (9:30-10:31)
15 A third prediction leads to more misunderstanding. (10:32-10:52)

SCENE FIVE: JESUS TEACHES AND ARGUES IN THE TEMPLE

16 Jesus enters Jerusalem and challenges the rulers. (11:1-12:12)
17 Controversies in the temple stymie the leaders. (12:13-13:2)
18 Final instructions prepare the disciples for his absence. (13:3-37)

SCENE SIX: JESUS IS ARRESTED, TRIED, AND EXECUTED

19 The disciples flee the night Jesus is arrested. (14:1-52)
20 Next morning he is tried by priests and the governor. (14:53-15:20)
22 That afternoon he dies, abandoned by all. (15:21-41)

EPILOGUE: JESUS' RESURRECTION IS ANNOUNCED

23 Women react to his burial and empty tomb. (15:42-16:8)

Mark's abrupt ending, without any appearances by Jesus after his resurrection, invites readers to continue the story in their own lives. A longer ending (16:9-20) was appended to this gospel by later copyists.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Advent 2008

Dear Friends,

We in the ELCA have begun an exciting new venture in reading the Scriptures together. The *Book of Faith* initiative is our chance us to reclaim our heritage by studying the Bible more intentionally.

The vision statement for this effort states the goal clearly:

*That the whole church become more fluent
in the first language of faith,
the language of Scripture,
in order that we might live into our calling
as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered,
and sent by the Word.*

So now I want to invite all the members of our synod to become part of the process. On Sunday, November 30, we begin a new liturgical year centered on the Gospel of Mark. Will you join me in reading it in its entirety during Advent?

This reading guide will direct us on our journey as we read a chapter or so each weekday from now until Christmas. We can even share our insights *via* our synod's website at www.mpls-synod.org! Let us see how our faith will grow as we explore God's Word.

Rev. Craig Johnson, Bishop
Minneapolis Area Synod, ELCA



book of faith

Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.

A GUIDE FOR READING THE GOSPEL OF MARK DURING ADVENT 2008

MARK AS A WORK OF LITERATURE

Mark's gospel is an engaging story. When we read it, we feel ourselves caught up in the action. It begins abruptly, when Jesus appears as a young man, and it closes just as abruptly when a few women flee dumbfounded from his empty tomb.

Every story is made up of characters, plot, and setting. Jesus and his disciples are the leading characters, as are their opponents, primarily the religious and civil leaders, both Jewish and Roman.

Jesus, the enigmatic "Son of Man," is both a teacher and a healer. His one-line aphorisms and his riddle-like parables challenge our preconceptions and invite us to sample life in God's realm in surprisingly new ways. His exorcisms and healings display God's compassion for people who are vulnerable and hurting.

We most easily imagine ourselves in the role of the disciples. Sometimes they are faithful followers; other times they fail to understand Jesus' expectations. They seem to get worse as the story progresses from rural Galilee to urban Jerusalem. They reject Jesus' agenda even as he travels toward his destination with death.

As we read Mark's tragic tale, we may ask whether we are living as faith-filled disciples. Have we heard Jesus' gracious call? Are we content with our own humanity, and our own mortality? Do we share the blessings of God with the marginal people in our society?

MARK AS A PRODUCT OF HISTORY

Although this gospel is an anonymous document, tradition suggests it was written by John Mark, a companion of Peter and Paul. It was likely written around 70 CE when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem. Perhaps it originated at Rome, during the persecutions of Emperor Nero, or in southern Syria or Galilee, the locale of Jesus most successful ministry.

We can clarify our understanding by asking how this story, and Jesus' teachings in particular, would have been understood by Mark's earliest audience in the 70s. Would his announcement of the arrival of God's reign been heard as a challenge to Roman imperial claims? In what ways would a fledgling Christian community have been strengthened, or challenged, by *this* particular telling of Jesus' story?

We can also explore the historical aspects of Jesus' ministry in its Palestinian setting around 30 CE. Did his compatriots see him as a rabbi? Or a prophet? Or an exorcist? Or a revolutionary? How would his ministry have impacted the marginal peasant population of rural Galilee? In what ways would he have been a threat to the urban establishment in Jerusalem? Why was he executed as a subversive?

MARK AS A RESOURCE FOR THEOLOGY

Key Lutheran insights can help us appreciate the theological impact of this gospel. One is the distinction between **Law and Gospel**. Insofar as Mark serves to critique our innate tendency to be self-serving and arrogant men and women, it functions as Law. To the degree that it offers us the hope of restoration beyond failure and life beyond death, it functions as Gospel. As we read each passage, we need to ask whether it condemns or affirms us, and whether it helps us formulate doctrinal or ethical norms.

A second insight is our focus on the **theology of the cross**. "A theology of glory," says Luther, "calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." (LW 31:40) In Mark the prospect of death colors the narrative almost from the beginning. Is this a realistic assessment of our human condition? How does Jesus' execution by crucifixion become good news for us?

A third insight is our confessional insistence on **justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith**. Although based on Paul's writings, this summary resonates well with strong themes in Mark. Jesus' healings in particular show God's graciousness, and he repeatedly commends the trusting faith of those whom he aids. In what sense is it true that Christ is the one who puts things right for us?

MARK AS AN EXERCISE IN DEVOTION

When we read Mark in the context of our prayer life, we want to pay special attention to how it inspires and nurtures and challenges us. The spiritual blessings from doing this will comfort and strengthen us on our journey through this life toward eternity.

Among the many devotional practices in popular use today, we could all benefit by trying the T.R.I.P. method inspired by the Moravians and promoted by Mount Carmel Ministries. As we contemplate a passage, we ask: What in this text calls forth our **thanksgiving**? What drives us to **regret** anything we have done amiss? For whom do we need to make **intercession**? And are we invited to undertake a **plan of action** to live out our faith more intentionally?