



# *Easter*

## *A Splendour of our Own*



**Lent Cycle A**

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# Easter

## A Splendour of our Own

### Lent Cycle A

#### *How to use this Lenten programme*

##### *For personal reflection*

Begin with a slow meditative reading of the Gospel.

Pay attention to the insights, images that arise in you.

Use your journal to write anything you wish to remember.

Use the **Word Broken and Shared** section to help you expand your understanding of the Gospel.

In the **Food for the Journey** section make your own choice of something to take with you for the coming week.

Before beginning each subsequent week take time to evaluate the journey thus far.

##### *For a group study*

You will need someone to read the Gospel aloud.

The pattern is the same as above except that, after each section, the reader/leader will invite you to share with the other group members.

It is important to participate in the sharing as this is a way to gift others and to be gifted by them.

Share the action you hope to take if appropriate.

Conclude with the prayer provided or another of the group's choosing.

# *Overview of Six Meetings*

Matthew's Gospel was first directed to his community of Jewish Christians. In his concluding words he urges the community to move beyond the known into fresh fields. His Passion narrative is couched in the language of a journey, one we must all take if we are truly disciples.



*The testing of God-Son*

*A glimpse of the Shining*

*A thirsty woman refreshed*

*A blind man enlightened*

*A brother given a new lease of life*

*A God-Son*

*becomes first fruits of new life*

## Week One

### The testing of God-Son

#### *A struggle with darkness - Matthew 4: 1-11*

*Pre-reading: Joel 2: 12-18; Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2*

#### **Key words**

Desert- place of wandering; of purification; of evil and danger; of special closeness to God; the Messiah will come from the desert.

Holy city - place of worship; place of justice and faithfulness; focus of spiritual yearning.

Mountain- meeting place of heaven and earth; place of God's revelation.

Three - completeness; time to expect the action of God.

Forty - a long time; the time of the flood; period of wandering.

Temptation - testing; ordeal; struggle.

#### *The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared*

There is no doubt that the disciples were aware that Jesus had experienced serious temptation and that this temptation was related to his mission. The Gospel writers shaped their understanding of this temptation according to the pastoral needs of their own communities.

Matthew composes the story using the debating style of the scribes, where both parties use Scripture as proof texts.

There is a three-fold testing, each with its own locale. Each stage evokes a sacred story from the Jewish Scriptures. Matthew believes that the sacred literature of Israel is part of the Christian heritage.

The story begins with the Spirit leading Jesus into the desert.

## **Act One - In the Desert**

*The temptation - turn stones into bread.*

Will Jesus use his ministry for his own advantage?

Jesus responds: Not on bread alone does one live, but on the bread of the Word of God. - *Deuteronomy 8:3*

*Pause and read the ancient story. Deuteronomy 8:2-5*

There is a hunger in our lives which will be satisfied only by seeking to discover what God asks of us.

## **Act Two - On the Temple parapet**

*The temptation - throw yourself down*

Will Jesus force God to give him a sign of his protection?

Jesus responds: You shall not test God. - *Deuteronomy 6:16*

*Pause and read Psalm 91*

God's name is not a magic charm, nor is one's presence in a holy place proof of true holiness.

## **Act Three - On a very High Mountain.**

*The temptation - choose wealth and celebrity status, you'll reach more people.*

Will Jesus seek a messiahship based on political power?

Jesus responds: God only is worthy of worship. - *Deuteronomy 6:13*

*Pause and read Psalm 2 and Deuteronomy 34.*

The true Son of God seeks the way of Obedience (listening) and Justice (right action). The Messiah of God is the suffering servant.

Conclusion Angels come and provide table service.

Jesus has come through his trial successfully so he can now enjoy a meal.

## ***Food for the Journey***

*Imagine that you were to face a similar testing. What would the temptations or charges be?*

*What should I or my group, or our parish examine?*

*What responses will I/we make?*

*The first reading tells us that discerning right action is not easy but God understands our weakness. Paul reminds us that people tended to give in to temptation and place themselves and their own interests from the beginning. Laws came to be to moderate behaviour. As we know this doesn't always work. A mature person is one who acts according to his/her conscience.*

*God of the Wilderness  
you were with Jesus in his struggle  
to seek the right path.*

*Be with us as we face the seductions  
that our world offers as the path to happiness.*

*Teach us through your Word  
and the example of others to grow through challenge  
and live life to the full.*

*Amen*



## Week Two

### A glimpse of the Shining

#### *Hope for the Journey. A call to live in the light. Matthew 17:1-9*

*Pre –reading Genesis 12:1-4; Psalm 33; 2 Timothy 1:8-10*

#### **Key words**

Mountain -see week One

Three -see week One

Moses –Saviour, first and pre-eminent leader of Israel, lawgiver

Elijah –prophet and messenger of God, champion of justice (1 Kings 18:16-46)

Booths, tents – echo of the harvest festival when the people lived in tents to commemorate their delivery from slavery. A joyous heavenly time.

Tent shrine –the portable sanctuary of the Ark of the Covenant

Cloud – the presence of God

Light –presence of the Divine, also Wisdom

#### *The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared*

Some writers have thought that this was an account of a resurrection appearance of Jesus put back into the ministry of Jesus, many others believe it to be a vision or mystical experience.

Jesus leads three disciples to a high mountain. They experience something which they describe as a blinding light which seems to transform Jesus. Two figures, Moses and Elijah, mountain men are talking to Jesus. *Exodus 34: 29-32*

Peter, caught up in the ecstasy of the moment, wants to grasp the moment and hold on to it. But that is not to be. God speaks. *Read Matthew 3:13-7*

The disciples, now afraid, fall to the ground. In scripture stories we read many examples of people being afraid in the presence of mystery. Read Moses' story *Exodus 3:1-15*; or Mary's story *Luke 1:26-38*. In each story there is reassurance. So, too, the disciples are reassured. Jesus touches them offers his words of comfort, "Do not be afraid".

This is a good example of how a Gospel brings with it a cloud of other stories. Often we have moments of such great happiness when we taste the Divine and we say "It is good for us to be here!"

### ***Food for the Journey***

*Share some of your "mountain" stories. These are often fragments. What part do these moments play in our lives?*

*Look back on your journey and recall a moment when you felt filled with joy. Reflection on these experiences remind us that there is always light somewhere to encourage us.*

*God of our Hearts and Hearths  
There are times when I feel  
the chill of loneliness and pain;  
Lift me again to the high places of your Love  
When I'll feel again your energy*

*Amen*

## Week Three

### A Thirsty Woman Refreshed

#### *Of wai-ora, springs and fountains. John 4:5-42*

*Pre-reading: Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95; John 4: 5-42*

#### **Key words**

Samaria – a district in the central hill country of Palestine

Shechem – Jacob bought land there after his reunion with Esau -  
Genesis 33:18-20

Jacob – father of the twelve tribes; also called Israel (he who wrestles  
with God) Genesis 32:28

Gerizem – sacred mountain of the Samaritans

Eternal Life - a life in God, lived to the full

#### *The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared*

This wonderful story is a dramatic account of the meeting of Jesus and a foreign woman, a Samaritan. There has been a long history of antagonism between Jews and Samaritans. One bone of contention was the Samaritans' refusal to regard Jerusalem as the place of worship.

While both men and women were despised by the Jews, the Samaritan women were considered ritually impure, hence the woman's response to Jesus, "How can you ask me, a Samaritan and a woman....?"

The first movement of the drama focuses on "living water". There follows a subtle word-play, comparing still waters with flowing water, wells and fountains.

Jesus claims to be a fountain, the outflow of a gift from God, that will transform all who receive it.

What is this gift? Something that opens the door to eternal life. Jesus speaks from the images of his tradition.

On that day, living waters will flow from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea, half to the western sea and it shall be so in summer and in winter.

*Zechariah 14:8*

Two evils have my people done: they have forsaken me, the source of living waters. They have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water. *Jeremiah 2:13.*

With joy you will draw water from the fountain of salvation. *Isaiah 12:3*

Another understanding is that the living water is the Spirit of God. John combines both images – water and Spirit in the Nicodemus story. *John 3:1-21.*

A further link between spirit and water is found in *Ezekiel 36:25-26*. I will sprinkle clean water on you...I will put my spirit within you.

The second movement of the story concerns the nature of true worship. Jesus asks the woman to call her husband. We have another play on words. In the Canaanite language the word for husband was Baal which is also the word for Lord and owner. Jesus implies that the woman has had many lords and that her present lord is not legitimate.

It may also refer to the seven gods of ancient Samaria.

The woman's answer shows that she sees the religious reference as she claims to be heir to those who regard Mt Gerazim as the legitimate place of worship.

Jesus replies by pointing to the future when temporal institutions will take second place, rather the way to the Father will be through the Son-who-reveals God's truth to all.

The final movement has two parts. The disciples return and are shocked to discover that Jesus has been talking to a woman. As the woman began

by misunderstanding Jesus' reference to water so they misunderstand His reference to food. Using the harvest imagery, Jesus claims that his mission is his Food or sustenance. In Matthew's Gospel we will only see the real fruits when all is completed at the end of time. In other words when we grasp the whole picture. You see the fruits of the yeast in the dough when the bread is baked.

John goes on to show us that fruits are starting to appear. The Samaritan woman becomes the first proclaimer of the gospel. John is saying that the Good News will be found in unexpected places.

### ***Food for the Journey***

*We are approaching the half-way point of Lent.*

*What do you find life-giving in your Christian journey? Are there stagnant waters that need stirring?*

*We are invited to delight in the water of Life. Is our faith a source of new energy and joy?*

*What is your Food? Where are your energies directed?*

*God of the Living  
Through the waters of Baptism  
we passed from death to life.  
Be with us as we embrace our mission  
of bringing hope to our world  
through the good news of Jesus Christ.*

*Amen*

## Week Four

### A blind man enlightened

#### *A light for the Journey: John 9:1-41*

*Pre-reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41*

#### **Key words**

Rabbi – a respectful address to a teacher

Pool of Siloam - an ancient city reservoir connected by tunnel to the spring of Gihon, the principal water supply for the city. There is a play on words between verses four and seven.

Pharisees - a class of religious correct Jews who, because of their devotion to the exact following of the Torah (The Law of Moses) and Jewish customs are challenged by some of Jesus' words and actions.

Synagogue - the assembling for prayers, Scripture reading and teaching and the building designated for this use.

#### *The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared*

A man who sits in darkness is called to physical and spiritual sight and a group of religiously "sighted" people are confronted with their blindness. This complex and entertaining story shows a master storyteller at work. Jesus and his disciples come upon a blind man sitting at the wayside. The disciples, noting the man's condition raise the question of the relationship between sin and sickness. This question keeps raising its head every time something bad happens even today. Even though the Book of Job had taken this theme and argued against any cause/effect relationship, it still persisted even among the educated. It was a popular notion that misfortune of any one was a result of sin, either the individual's sin or the parent's sin. In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus seems to make a connection between sin and sickness. We are more aware today of how our spirit can affect our bodily well-being. If we feel stressed, anxious or guilty of something it seems to reflect in our whole demeanour.

Jesus focuses on the whole person, he believes that healing is part of wholeness and holiness. Read Luke 4:18. To be a light of the world means to dispel darkness. Jesus then performs a most unusual action. He makes a little mud pack and smears it on the man's eyes. He then sends the man to the Pool of Siloam, source of life giving water, to wash. *Read 2 Kings 5:10-13. Naaman's story.*

Jesus' action causes a series of ripples from the denial of the miracle. It's not the same man, to an attack on the miracle worker. The parents are brought in to testify but they neatly side step the issue.

Why should a simple act of healing cause so much trouble?

Because it raised awkward questions about the identity of Jesus especially his relationship to God. The Pharisees were faced with something that had all the marks of prophetic action. To acknowledge this would be to acknowledge Jesus as servant of God.

As the story progresses, the formerly silent man becomes an eloquent witness to the presence of the saving power of God.

There are elements of comedy as the action cuts from one scene to another with the Pharisees appearing like bloodhounds determined to track down and trap the blind man.

The blind man moves from a condition of helplessness to that of an eloquent debater of the Law. Why do you want me to tell my story again? Do you want to become his disciples. This jibe is the last straw.

The Pharisees are defeated and as so often happens, resort to violence.

Three times in the story the blind man says that he doesn't know Jesus. When Jesus goes looking for him he asks for faith. *Read Mark 9:22-24.*

Three times the Pharisees claim to know Jesus yet they are unwilling to accept the truth. They claim sight so their blindness is all the more destructive.

## *Food for the Journey*

*Jesus met many people who suffered from blindness or deafness or who seemed to drift through life barely conscious of those about them. He contrasted these physical states with spiritual deafness, blindness or indifference. What opportunities for healing, helping, freeing should you be aware of in your communities? When did you last volunteer for something?*

*Discipleship is about being alert, responding with empathy to those around us.*

*Listening God*

*Help us to hear the cry of the poor.*

*As Paul tells us, "Now is the hour to rise from sleep!"*

*God's work calls us to live life to the full  
and our lives are linked  
to all peoples, everywhere.*

*Amen*

## Week Five

### A brother given a new lease of life

#### *New energy for the journey John 11:1-40*

*Pre-reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:8-11*

#### **Key words**

Bethany a village a short distance from Jerusalem.

Glory the Hebrew is kabod, a word for presence, nearness, radiance, reflection.

#### *The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared*

Last week we read of a blind man brought from darkness to light. In this story a man is brought from the darkness of death to the light of renewed life.

The purpose of the Gospels is to help us become disciples. We are not followers enjoying the company of someone famous but learners. We are called to be other christs in our communities. So what are we to learn from this story which seems to be far beyond our capabilities.

In the last story Jesus uses blindness to stand as a symbol for spiritual sightlessness. In this story John is telling us that our discipleship is participation in a new type of life that we call resurrection. As this concept is very difficult to grasp we have to use pictures to help us. A renewed life will show forth the glory of God. This gift will come to us through the suffering and death of Jesus it is God who raises Jesus and through the action of the Spirit we are called to share.

Two weeks ago we listened in on Jesus and the Samaritan woman discussing new life through the image of water; Jesus now speaks with another woman discussing new life that is a gift of the Spirit.

Martha: Lazarus wouldn't have died if you'd been here. It's not too late God will do anything for you.

Jesus: Your brother will rise again.

Martha: I know about the last day.

Jesus: I am the last day. I am the gift of Resurrection and Life. Do you believe this?

Martha: Yes, I have come to believe.

Martha like the Samaritan woman, like the apostles at the transfiguration, is struggling with trying to find new ways to understand the action of God. We all have to learn "to read between the lines" especially with regard to the Scriptures. The stories are not literal accounts, like the reporting of an accident. The stories are layered. We are called to wrestle with them. No one image, story, or description does justice to describe the action of God.

The writers of scripture knew this and so they looked around for pictures, a burning bush, a mighty wind, a gentle breeze, dead bodies in the desert that join bone by bone, a cloud, and so on.

Jesus meets with Mary, the sister of Martha and they walk to the grave.

Jesus shudders and cries. The crowd around the grave. They say, "If he loved him that much why didn't he prevent his death."

We all expect that God will save us from accidents, sickness and death. That's the cry of a child who doesn't yet take responsibility for their own actions or understand how our bodies are fragile.

Jesus now comes closer to the burial cave which is sealed with a boulder.

Jesus prays aloud, he calls for the grave to be unsealed.

Lazarus come out!

We cannot imagine the awe and fear of that moment. As the figure

emerges Jesus says. "Untie him and set him free."

Surprisingly for us there is no dwelling on the miracle because for John that is not the hub of the story. The real import is that in Jesus lies the promise of eternal life here and now, with a real future. "An hour is coming when all those in graves will hear his voice and come forth to the resurrection." *John 5:28.*

### *Food for the Journey*

*Have we ever felt buried? What can bury us? Is it work? Is it difficulties we've got ourselves into?*

*Have we experienced that someone we care for is tangled in deathly pursuits, alcohol, drugs, self-harming, other addictive practises?*

*Who can call us from our tombs? We can seek help - or even, first of all admit that we need help. How do we help others?*

*We can seek support from a counsellor or soul friend whom we trust.*

*God of the Depths*

*We cry knowing you hear our voice*

*Help us to discern what we need*

*and give us the wisdom to seek help.*

*Grant us the grace to respond wisely*

*to the pain of others*

*in the name of Jesus Saviour.*

*Amen*

## Week Six

### A God–Son becomes first fruits of eternal life

#### ***A splendour of our own Matthew 26, 27***

*Pre-reading: Isaiah 50: 4-7; Psalm 21; Phillippians 2: 6-11.*

*Catholics have an ancient prayer called the Stations of the Cross. They commemorate stopping places in the final Journey of Jesus.*

*I am presenting the Passion of Jesus according to Matthew, as Stations. The last seven episodes in Jesus' life.*

*Around these seven stories other stories are clustered.*

#### ***The First station***

Chapter 26, begins with Jesus' announcement of his imminent death. Matthew is at pains to show us that Jesus is in control of his destiny. There follows two very different responses.

Jesus is anointed by an anonymous woman, while in another place a meeting was convened by the religious elders to consider ways to capture Jesus and bring about his death.

#### ***The Second Station***

The story of the Eucharist is arranged between two stories of impending betrayal. Judas and Peter, both disciples who have held positions of leadership in the group, will show themselves to be weak reeds.

#### ***The Third Station***

The next major event is the First Trial. Jesus is brought before the priests and elders of his religious tradition. This challenge to his beliefs is framed by Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. In the garden Jesus

faces a personal crisis of faith from which he emerges, his confidence in God reaffirmed. He then must face the mockery of Judas' sign of peace and Peter's threefold denial in front of everyone. With an oath and finally with curses Peter leaves Jesus abandoned.

### ***The Fourth Station***

The drama now moves to a second trial. Pilate is astonished at Jesus' demeanour and senses that malice lies behind the charges. Having been rejected by the priests and elders, then his followers, Jesus is now rejected by the crowd.

Those who experienced his love and healing ministry now choose a political rebel as saviour.

As the story moves towards an inevitable end the only pity comes from Pilate's wife who makes the only plea on his behalf.

### ***The Fifth Station***

The sentence is passed. Jesus must die. Jesus now experiences abuse from the soldiers; first physical abuse and then he is the butt of sadistic humour. Finally he is led to Golgotha. A passerby is dragooned in helping as the mockery intensifies. There is no compassion even from those who will die with him.

When Jesus cries to God in his desolation, there is not one crumb of consolation –except for some shadowy figures on the periphery– women who had been part of his ministry offer the support of companionable silence.

### ***The Sixth Station***

The death of Jesus causes reverberations or aftershocks. Following the death cry, a series of events are:- The curtain of the sanctuary rips exposing the silent chamber known as the Holy of Holies. (See *Exodus 26: 31-35*) The letter to the Hebrews uses this as a symbol of our invitation to the heart of the sacred. (*Hebrews 10:15-25*) Graves open as the earth heaves and rocks in birth pangs signifying a new age is imminent. (See *Psalms 68; Hebrews 12:26; Matthew 28:1-10.*)

Graves give up their dead. All these pictures are used by Matthew to show that Jesus has conquered death. Death is now new Life.

The centurion and the others make a proclamation on behalf of the crowd who watch in terror.

### *The Seventh Station*

The Final movement of the Passion Narrative centres on the burial of Jesus. Matthew revisits the pattern of stories that we began with. The announcement of death was followed by conspiracy and an anointing. Now in the shadow of the cross Joseph, an elder, collects the remains of Jesus and with new linens attends to his burial. The enemies of Jesus now plot to see that nothing remains of the Jesus movement. To prevent interference with the grave they seal it and set a guard.

Through the final hour of Jesus' life the writer is showing us that "this day" belongs to God and not to the powers of darkness.

At the beginning of Lent we saw Jesus' triumph over darkness through his cooperation with the Spirit. Here at Calvary, at one with God action Jesus' action of fidelity enables the inauguration of the reign of God.

Matthew ends his Gospel with a word to the disciples -

I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters...

By your gift I will sing praise...

All the ends of the earth shall hear and turn to the Lord...

May your hearts be filled with happiness.

*Words from Psalm 22*

## *Food for the Journey*

*Reflection on the Passion story calls us to silence. Many times you will have been struck with new insights; into the life death and resurrection of Jesus, and also with your own call to discipleship. To be a disciple is not the wearing of a label but a commitment to action, God action.*

*Spend some time in silent contemplation to discern where your talents may be used to enrich the lives of others and the health of the planet.*

*Gracious God  
You offer us, through Christ  
A splendour of our own.  
May we never lose sight of your goodness  
And go forward in our lives  
with joy and energy  
Knowing our happiness lies  
in our living as Christ Jesus did.*

*Amen*

## 1. Jesus Announces his Death

Conspiracy to kill  
Judas' betrayal foretold

A woman prepares Jesus by  
anointing

## 2. Eucharist

Peter's betrayal foretold

Judas mocks the sign of peace

## 3. First Trial

Peter betrays Jesus' friendship

## 4. Second Trial

Crowd betrays Jesus

Pilot's wife protests

The soldiers make a fool of  
Jesus

A foreigner is forced to help

## 5. Crucifixion

Jesus mocked by criminals

## 6. Aftershocks

Earthquake

Temple curtain torn

Tombs opened Proclamation

## 7. Burial

Fear of Conspiracy

A man Joseph prepares Jesus  
for burial

## *Alternative Psalms*

### **Psalm 51**

Have mercy, gentle God.  
Let the waters of your grace  
wash over me.

You see me for what I am,  
your justice reveals my inadequacies.

You call me to be centered in truth,  
For this I need to learn wisdom.

Let me rise from the waters, new born,  
my heart filled with gladness.

Re-shape my heart so that I, too,  
may teach others your way.

The gift I bring to you is a spirit  
once broken,  
now healed by your love.

### **Psalm 33**

Orchestra and choir show us how to praise God  
With each day we sing, a new song to God.  
The word of God is a holy deed.  
God, lover of truth and justice,  
fills the earth with love.

God speaks: we have a universe.  
God breathes: stars appear.  
Through the action of God all things  
come into being.

Blest are the people who acknowledge  
God as creator.  
God who made our hearts know our dreams,  
hopes and fears.  
Governments proclaim that peace will come through  
weapons of war;  
we know that such reliance on force is futile.

God cares for those who suffer.  
God calls on us to save.  
We attend to God's call as faithful servants.

## **Psalm 95**

Come! Let us sing of our joy.  
Acknowledge the presence of God with praise.  
God is great; the foundations of the earth attest it.  
God is great; the oceans proclaim it.  
All creation is God's handiwork.

There have been times when we have not listened  
to God.

In our desert times we grumble and turn away.  
Though we had evidence of God's goodness we  
wouldn't accept it.  
We had to learn that until we accepted  
God as our guide  
we would wander without direction.

## **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd.

When I need rest you give me the fragrant grass.  
By burbling streams my spirit revives.  
Along the steep tracks in the hills my feet are  
steady.  
Should I fall into a gully  
your crook will reach me.

The Lord is my host and comforter.

You call me to your table.  
You massage my aching head with healing oils.  
You feed me royally.

Shepherding goodness  
and comforting love,  
watch over me every day.  
My dwelling with God is my true home.

## Psalm 130

From the very depths of the pit I cry.  
Hear me! Hear me, Lord.

My distress is great.  
Let my pleading reach you.

We could not survive  
if you remembered  
our sins and shortcomings.

Your all-embracing forgiveness  
leaves me in awe.

I trust in God, ever faithful  
knowing, like those on night shift,  
that dawn will come.

Let us all be faithful watchers.  
God's mercy and pardon are ours.

These psalms can be used as alternatives and can be found in  
*Psalms - Songs from a pierced heart* by Patricia Stevenson rsj.

Available from - [sandy.leaitua@sosj.org.au](mailto:sandy.leaitua@sosj.org.au) in Australia  
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