

PLEASE READ THIS
TO UNDERSTAND THE ARRANGEMENT

In the Lectionary three courses of Readings are combined as follows:

1. **Readings for Sundays and major Festivals, for use either in Morning or Evening Worship or in the Lord's Supper.** These are printed in **bold type** in two columns, those for Morning or Evening Worship on the left, and those for the Lord's Supper on the right. These Readings have been selected in order to present the main gospel themes in the course of each year: it is hoped that they will be useful to pastors in their systematic biblical preaching. References are also printed in *The Book of Worship* (pages 157-260), and the full texts for the Lord's Supper are printed in *Readings for Sunday Worship* (Year A, B and C) and *Readings for Festivals etc.*, published by the ISPCK (For Morning or Evening Worship, the Readings have in some cases been extended to include more of the context.)

2. **Extra Readings for Morning and Evening Worship on Sundays and Major Festivals,** in case they are needed for additional Services or for private devotion. These are printed in the Appendix, pages 46-54.

3. **Readings for Morning and Evening Worship on remaining weekdays throughout the year.** These cover the whole of the New Testament each year and as much as possible of the Old Testament in two years.

Note: In this Lectionary **Morning and Evening Worship** is indicated as **MW, EW, or M/EW** and **The Lord's Supper** as **L.S.** in bold type.

PLAN OF GOD

January 1st, Friday Naming of Jesus: The Renewal of the Covenant
Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah (Bp., Ev.) 1945

Theme: The Name of Jesus

M/EW	Psalm 20	L.S.	OT	Joel 2.28-32	2.28-32
	OT			Joel 2.28-32	Psalm 20.1-5, 7-8
	NT			Romans 10.5-13	Epistle. Romans 10.9-13
	and/or			Luke 2.15-21	Gosp. Luke 2.15-21

And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.... (Joel 2: 28a)

The biblical faith is about the relationship between God and us. 'Covenant' describes the nature of that relationship. In contrast to a 'contractual' relationship, covenantal relationship is eternal, which explains why God's mercies never end. Even when we prove unfaithful, God remains committed to His covenantal relationship with us. The intervention of renewal that God initiated through His Son is the proof of that unwavering commitment.

Joel identifies the Holy Spirit as not another means of renewal. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. The outcome of the anointing by the Spirit is that "your sons and daughters shall prophesy" (v 28). Truth is the essence of prophecy. To be renewed in our covenantal relationship with God is to be renewed in our commitment to truth. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6). Truth of this order challenges all man-made discriminations. The Spirit will be poured out not only on God's 'menservants' but also on 'maidservants' (v 29). There is no gender discrimination in the plan of God.

Also, the renewal of this covenantal relationship will result in wondrous manifestations (vs. 30, 31), all of which attest the salvation assured to those who call on the name of the Lord (v 32). The Psalmist also witnesses to the help that is available in the God of Jacob (Ps. 20:1, 2). God will grant the hearts desire of His anointed; but the heart's desire of the anointed are quite different from the heart's desire of the worldly! The former rejoice in the salvation that the Lord offers (v. 5).

Prayer: God, give us the Spirit to understand and accept the strength of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DIVISION AND DISUNITY

January 2nd, Saturday

Daniel Wilson (Bp.) 1858

MW Ps. 5(om.v.9-10),6 Ezekiel 37.21-end Mark 6.1-6a
EW Ps. 7,8 Jer.30.18-22 Luke 11.27-32

My dwelling-place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Ezekiel 37: 27)

Throughout the Bible, the principle of sin, or the satanic principle, is portrayed as one of division and disunity. There can be no unity or oneness as long as this principle drives or dominates us. Even wisdom and mighty deeds of compassion, as the reading from St. Mark indicates, cause offence (or become means of division) in this state. In contrast, God is seen endeavouring, through the ages, to gather together the scattered and the fragmented. God is the principle of 'wholeness' of which healing is a symbol.

God, through Ezekiel, announces a vision of oneness. If we would turn to Him, we will become one nation. Unity is one of the three cornerstones of the Church of North India. Our unity can only result from our belonging together in God. We can have only 'one King' (vs 22): the Lord Jesus Christ. This blessed state is marked by: (a) sanctity or purity (vs. 23). Idolatry, depravity (or doing detestable things, vs 23), and sinning in domestic life mark the un-sanctified life. By returning to God, we come home to our true identity, marked by three features: (a) there will be political harmony, as symbolized David, the anointed king, ruling over them and (b) dwelling in the land that God meant for us. This land is not a geographic unit but the Kingdom of God. (c) They will live in peace (v 26). The Bible insists that peace can only be a by-product of a covenantal relationship with God (Jn. 14: 27).

Prayer: God, our heavenly father, may we dwell in unity through your love. Amen.

BEING CHILDREN OF GOD

January 3rd, Sunday

2 Sunday after Christmas

Theme: We are shares in the Sonship of Christ.

M/EW Psalm 87 L.S. OT Jeremiah 31.1,7-9
OT Jeremiah 31.1-9 Psalm 103.8-14
NT Romans 8.11-17 Epistle. Romans 8.11-17
and/or John 1.9-18 Gosp. John 1.9-18

Notice of the Epiphany of our Lord on 6 January and Baptism of Jesus on 10 January

Yet to all who received Him, to those who believe in His name, He gave the right to become Children of God. (John 1: 12)

St. John assures us that through Jesus we are given the privilege to become the children of God (Jn.1: 12). God sent His Son to this world as the ransom for the sins of the world. Sin is the principle of lostness, or alienation. In our state of lost-ness we no longer recognize God as our "Father in Heaven". The "Father in Heaven, unlike fathers on earth, belongs to humankind as a whole, but not in an arbitrary or automatic fashion. He will be the God of all the families of 'Israel' (Jer. 31: 1-3). Israel, since Jesus, is not an ethnic category but a faith entity. Those who belong to God, anywhere in the world, through faith in His Son are the new Israel.

Jeremiah goes on to describe, through a poetic image, the felicity of being the children of God (vs. 4, 5). The new Israel will be like an adorned virgin. There are four associations with this image. (a) Worth: The adorned virgin is cherished, not despised. (b) Security. It is only in a state of security that people are sure of being able to enjoy the fruits of their labour. (c) Joy. The lives of those who share the Sonship of Christ become a joyous celebration (v. 4-7)! Joy is the hallmark of a godly life. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22, 23). (d) Unity. The ungodly are scattered. But God gathers together His elect and gives them a distinctive identity (v. 8, 9).

Prayer: God, help us to understand the greatness of being the children of the living God. Give us the Spirit to be like you. Amen.

FUNCTION OF A PROPHET

January 4th, Monday

MW Ps. 11(om.v.6),12 Deut.18.15-end 2 Cor.8.1-9
EW Ps. 13,15 Prov.8.1&22-31 Heb.1.5-end

**I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers;
(Deut. 18:18a)**

Biblical spirituality has a powerful prophetic aspect. Jesus was the Prophet par excellence (Jn. 4: 19). The function of a Prophet is to speak the mind of God, which the people need to hear. A true prophet, as against a false prophet, speaks the words that God puts into his mouth (Deut. 18: 18). For that very reason ungodly people cannot endure listening to the Prophet. Those who have a holy fear of God, on the other hand, are ready to listen (v 16). The fear of the Lord is, hence, the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10). Those who fear the Lord heed His prophets. They readily listen to Jesus, the Son of God (Lk. 9: 35).

If the true Prophet comes, false prophets cannot be far behind! Many will presume to speak in God's name (v. 20). They speak their own words as though they are God's words. God warns us that this is a serious matter. Such persons shall die (v. 20). It is a serious thing to take the name of God in vain. We are not to fear or listen to these false prophets. It is not impossible to distinguish mercenary prophets from true prophets, though this could take time.

From the epistle reading we learn that giving is an aspect of listening to God. The most fundamental form of giving is 'giving ear to' or listening. The giving that arises out of listening to God alone is true charity. Whatever be the substance of our charity, it is to God that we give.

Prayer: God, give us the Spirit to recognize true prophets and follow them. Amen.

THE LIGHT WITHIN

January 5th, Tuesday

Epiphany Eve

MW Ps. 19 Numbers 24.15-17 2 Cor.4.1-6
EW Ps. 87 Isaiah 49.5-13 Romans 15.7-13

..... the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly. (Num 24: 15b)

The Bible is often seen as a portrait of Jesus, the Son of God, to which the Old Testament constitutes the background. There are very many moments of prevision in which the coming of the Messiah, or the Christ, is intuited. The passage from Numbers is one such. Here the Balaam, the son of Beor, almost foresees him as the Star that would come out of Jacob (v 17). Yet, he cannot see him 'now'.

The difficulty in seeing the Son of God is not one of time. It is rather one of the state in which people are. This is true, as a rule. The problem is not that we do not have time. We do not have time, if at all, only because we are the problem. That is what Paul says to the Corinthians. Spiritual things remain hidden from us because we do not renounce 'renounce the hidden things of shame' (II Cor. 4: 2) and we are crafty. If those who are worldly find the Gospel of salvation veiled, or incomprehensible, it is not because it is complex but because they are corrupt. The light of within, the light of truth, is the light in which the Gospel of salvation is to be read and understood.

Paul invites us to confront the essence of spiritual blindness. We cannot see spiritually not because we do not have eyes, but because the 'god of this age' has blinded our eyes (v 4). Jesus, the light of the world (Jn. 9:5) can open our eyes (Lk.4:18).

Prayer: God of the light, open our hearts to experience your light in our lives. Amen.

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

January 6th, Wednesday

Theme: The coming of the wisemen from the east is a sign that Christ is for the whole human race.

M/EW	Psalm 47	L.S.	OT	Isaiah	60.1-5 or
	OT	Isaiah	60.1-5 or		45.22-25
				Psalm	72.1-2,8,11-13
	NT	Ephe.	3.1-12	Epistle.	Eph. 3.1-12 or 3.1-6
	and/or	Matthew	2.1-12	Gosp.	Matthew 2.1-12

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you, and His glory appears over you. (Isaiah 60: 2)

The coming of the Son of God demands a response from us. We have to rise and shine. We need to shine because darkness covers the face of the earth (Is. 60: 2). Even greater darkness reigns over the people. But this all-encompassing darkness only increases the relevance of the children of God, who are to be light to the world (Mt. 5 14).

The light given to us, through the Eternal Light, is not for private ownership. It is not a privileged possession but a sacred trust. That Light is meant also for the Gentiles or, in the words of Jesus, the strangers. The willingness to reach this light to the people of the world is the secret of our relevance and worth. If we remain faithful to the God-given vocation, we shall become radiant (v 5) and, as a result, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to us. This does not mean that we shall come to own their material wealth. The Gentiles, as the wealth of God, will come to us insofar as we remain faithful to the light that has arisen upon us. The work and witness of Mother Teresa, in our generation, illustrates this truth.

The Psalmist also testifies to the universal scope of the Light that Jesus is. God's work or purpose cannot be limited to any territory or race. The Creator God is concerned about the whole world (Jn. 3:16). The angels announced the significance of his birth as 'tiding of great joy for all mankind'.

Prayer: God, we thank you for giving us the eternal light in our lives. Make us to shine the way you want. Amen.

SECRET OF FREEDOM

January 7th, Thursday

MW	Ps. 19	Hosea 1.1-2.1	Gal.1.1-12
EW	Ps. 20,21(om.v.8-12)	Hosea 2.2-13	Gal.1.11-end

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart..... (Psalm 19: 8a)

Creation as a whole is a witness to the glory of God! Creation exists for witness. This witness is universal, beyond all man-made barriers (Ps. 19: 3). The Psalmist exalts the law and the statutes of the Lord and commends to us the fear of God as immensely preferable or valuable (v 10). But the value a person attaches to these depends largely on whether or not he dwells in light or not. Light illumines the worth of spiritual assets; whereas darkness hides their value. That is why the Psalmist prays fervently to be protected from 'presumptuous sins' or sins of presumption. He knows that it is in the nature of sin to exercise 'dominion over' individuals. Sin is a state of slavery; whereas God is the secret of freedom. Slavery as well as freedom stem from within. God sees our inner life and it is the truth of our inner life that He requires of us (Ps. 51: 6-10).

In sharp contrast to the 'natural' witness of the rest of Creation to the glory of God, we have human opposition to witnessing God! (Gal.1: 7). This is the supreme irony. Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. So we would assume that witnessing God is natural to us. Far from it! In the human domain there are two problems: (a) resistance to the Gospel and (b) vulnerability to false or heretical Gospel. Those who resist the true Gospel succumb to the gospels of false prophets.

Prayer: God, gives us the Spirit not to succumb to the gospels of false prophets. Amen.

GOD'S JUDGEMENT

January 8th, Friday

MW	Ps. 22	Hosea 2.14-3 end	Gal.2.1-10
EW	Ps. 23,24	Hosea 4	Gal.2.11-end

.....**God does not judge by external appearance....** (Gal. 2: 6b)

Today we focus on the reading from Galatians, in which Paul addresses one of the universal problems in popular religiosity about which we still lack clarity. God intends religion to be a call to freedom. God is the fountain spring of freedom. Human liberation is the essence of Jesus' ministry (Lk. 4:18). Freedom is, essentially, an inner state. This is what the Holy Spirit signifies. If we are led by the Spirit we shall be free from the tyranny of stereotypes. But, over time, religion gets organized in terms of traditions and customs that prevent us from seeking and doing the work of God.

A case in point is that of circumcision (Gal. 2: 3). Paul feels relieved and reassured that Titus, his co-worker in the mission of Christ, was not forcibly circumscribed. The old wine, as Jesus warns us, should not survive into the new wineskin, unlike the case of those who continued, under the hang-over of Judaism, to insist on circumcision. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus had rendered circumcision and similar other practices superfluous. Obsolete religious practices can add, or subtract, nothing from the finished work of Christ.

As in the case of religious rituals, so also in the case of our idea of mission. There is always a temptation to insist that what one does is the norm and to denounce the rest as deviations. The truth is that God calls people to different missions and purposes. Peter was meant to be the apostle to the Jews; whereas Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. God is not bound by superficial differences (v 6).

Prayer: Holy Spirit, lead us through the paths of righteousness. Amen.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

January 9th, Saturday

MW	Ps 25	Hos. 5. 1-14	Gal. 3.1-14
EW	Ps 26-27	Hos5.6.11a	Gal. 3. 15-22

.... **So that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Gal. 3.14b)**

Spiritual life involves a radical shift in foundation. In Galatians 3: 1-14, Paul identifies this as the shift from law (human effort) to the Holy Spirit (v 3). This shift results from hearing the Gospel of Jesus. If such a change does not take place in our lives, it is as good as our not having heard the Word.

The shining examples of faith, from Abraham downwards, did not become what they were by adhering to law. The initiative in spiritual life rests at all times with God. It pleased God to call Abraham out to be blessing on all nations (v 8). Abraham was not only an individual but also an exemplar: the model of what everyone can become by faith.

Those who live by the law are under a curse. The logic of this truth must be noted. To live by the law is to fall chronically short of it. Law cannot empower us to observe it flawlessly. So, we come under the punishment prescribed for breaking the law. Thus it is that living by law brings us under a curse. Law is inadequate as a life principle. Faith is different from the law in the sense that it is not marked by the cause-effect inflexibility. When we live by faith we are under God, not under law or causality. But living by faith involves us in responsibilities that go far beyond our narrow, individual interests. Faith in Jesus makes us inheritors of the tradition of assuming responsibility for those who are outside of this faith, as in the case of Abraham (v 14).

Prayer: God, through your spirit build our belief and spiritual life. Amen.

CHRISTIAN PARENTHOOD

January 10th, Sunday 3 Sunday after Christmas : Baptism of Jesus

Theme: At his baptism Jesus is revealed as the Son of God.

M/EW	Psalm	2	L.S.	OT	Isaiah 42.1-7
	OT	Isaiah 42.1-7		Psalm	2.1-8
	NT	Acts 8.26-40		2nd R.	Acts 8.26-40
	and/or	Matthew 3.15-17		Gosp.	Matt. 3.15-17

Notice of the Week of Prayer for Christian unity begins from 17 January

....My Chosen one in whom I delight: I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. (Isaiah 42: 16)

In the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, baptism is presented as the inauguration of a life of mission. It is much more than a ritual of initiation to Church membership. It is important to regain this lost spiritual kernel of baptism. Even a casual examination of the baptism of Jesus makes this amply obvious.

Isaiah's words in chapter 42 are an apt introduction to the baptism of Jesus. The Spirit of God is poured out on the 'servant' of God. In the Bible, son-ship is equated with servant-hood! Jesus was at once the Son and Servant of God. This, incidentally, is a tremendous insight into Christian parenthood. Because parents no longer understand this principle, they end up losing their authority over their children. Children must be brought up in a spirit of service (Mk. 10: 45). Children are partners with their parents, as Jesus was with his Father in Heaven.

The Son-Servant has a mission. Otherwise, the son will be a parasite. The significant aspects of this mission are: (a) Commitment to justice (v 1). The proof that we are committed to justice is insistence on justice for 'strangers' and Gentiles. (b) Compassion to the weak and the vulnerable, symbolized by the 'broken reed' and 'smouldering wick'. (c) Endurance or the refusal to be discouraged. They will, as Jesus said, endure to the end (Mtt. 10: 22) and will not be like the seed that fell on shallow ground (Mtt. 13: 5). He will make a difference (cf. open the eyes of the blind and set the captives free).

Prayer: God, may the mission of our life be like your Son and always do your will. Amen.

CONCERNS OF GOD

January 11th, Monday

MW	Ps. 30,32	Hosea 6.11b-7end	Gal.3.23-4.11
EW	Ps. 33	Hosea 8	Gal.4.12-20

but they do not realise that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before me. (Hosea 7:2)

Let us heed the godly concerns of Hosea. They are godly concerns, because Hosea is experiencing and expressing the concerns of God. This is a hallmark of a child or servant of God. In contrast, we are insensitive and deaf to the cry of God concerning the depraved life that people lead. To meditate on the Word of God is to participate in the sorrows of God which, in a strange way, becomes the 'peace that passes all understanding'.

God's concern has always a double reference. First, Israel must be restored (Hos. 7: 1). Second, the world must be redeemed from the sins and deceit that thrive in it. The two are inter-dependent. The restoration of Israel also involves the redemption of the world. It is this 'double reference' that is lacking from the Christian response to God and the world today. This is the main reason why we remain marginalized.

Hosea gives us a graphic account of human degradation. People of Ephraim and Samaria have a consuming passion for evil-doing and are passionately engrossed in it day and night! Notably, this is complemented by Israel's arrogance (v. 10). Spiritual degradation breeds daily suffering (v 13, 14). Even extreme suffering, however, does not make the people turn to God. This means that suffering will have only a destructive impact on them. In the biblical vision of things suffering results from sin. As long as sin remains, suffering will remain. The sinful and the righteous suffer. But, while the sinful are consumed by suffering, the righteous are purified and strengthened by it.

Prayer: God, may your Spirit lead us in our suffering, so we know that you are with us and do your will. Amen.

SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE

January 12th, Tuesday

MW Ps. 34 Hosea 9 Gal.4.21-5.6
EW Ps. 35(om.v.4-8,26) Hosea 10 Gal.5.7-25

The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. (Hosea 9: 7a)

Hosea now puts the spotlight on the infidelity of Israel. Repentance, like charity, must begin at home! This too is a spiritual challenge that the Christen world needs to heed. According to the prophet, the people of Israel need to wake up to their spiritual degradation (v 7); for the days of punishment are at hand. A tell-tale sign of their degradation is their hostility to prophets, which reveals their alienation from God. The more they are sunk in corruption (v 9) the more hostile they become. Corruption and violence are country cousins. To corrupt is to be, necessarily, violent.

The agony of God about the corruption of His people results from the intensity of His love for them (v 10). Finding and choosing Israel was, for God, a matter of immense joy. But they, in contrast, turned away from God. Hosea then portrays the various consequences of this rebelliousness. (a) They have come under the principle of death (v 14). (b) They have earned 'homelessness' for themselves. Because we are 'created in the image and likeness of God' God alone can be our 'refuge' or our spiritual home. That is why Jesus invites us to 'abide in me and I in you' (Jn. 15:4). (c) They have become 'fruitless' (v. 16). Their labours are blighted with barrenness. (d) God withholds His love from them, which explains their fruitlessness. Love is the secret of fruitfulness. God is love. Those who abide in Him will bear fruit and without Him we cannot bear any fruit. (Jn. 15: 5).

Prayer: God, may we always be prepared spiritually to abide with you. Amen.

GOD'S MERCIES

January 13th, Wednesday

Nilakantha Devasahayam Pillai
(Mar.), 1752

MW Ps. 36,37.1-11 Hos. 11.1-12.1 Gal.5.25-6.10
EW Ps. 37.12-end Hos.12.2-end Gal.6.11-end

My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. (Hosea 11:8b)

Hosea 11 is an emphatic statement on God's love for us; for we are, through Christ Jesus, the 'new' Israel. But we are also a bit like the 'old'. The more love looks for us, the more we retreat from him (v 2). That has its consequences! From the domain of a healing, caring, providing and restoring God, they come under the yoke of slavery and violence. Even then, God finds it hard to give up on us (v 8) because God is love (1 Jn. 4: 8). The perils of our situation quicken God's compassion! That is the nature of love. It is moved not by what one receives but by what the other needs. The more we move away from God, therefore, the more God comes after us (Lk. 19: 10).

In this respect God is so different from us (v 9). While we give in to anger, God gives out mercy and forgiveness. God continues to intervene, not in anger but in saving mercy. This is because God's purpose is not retribution but restoration (v 11). Throughout this passage we are challenged by the contrast between our attitude to God and God's response to us.

But God's mercies are not to be taken for granted! Grace abounds where sin dwells. Therefore, are we to sin? Not at all! God's mercies are not indiscriminate or purposeless. Mercy is the costly investment that God makes into our restoration. The fact that we have a patient and persevering God should not make us harden our hearts or hypocritical.

Prayer: God, may we never take your mercies for granted and always commit ourselves unto thy mercies. Amen.

WRATH OF GOD

January 14th, Thursday

MW	Ps. 38	Hosea 131	Timothy1.1-17
EW	Ps. 39	Hosea 141	Tim.1.18-2 end

Now they sin more and more; (Hosea 13: 2a)

In the 13th chapter, Hosea portrays the ‘wrath’ of God. We find it difficult to associate wrath with the God of love. That is because we mistake love for something else. Holy anger is innate in love. Where love is absent, anger degenerates into destructive malice. What provokes God’s wrath is human sin (v1-2). That is because sin is the death principle.

Idolatry, in its many forms, is the foremost expression of sin. Idolatry is the death principle. The logic of this must be reckoned. We become like what we worship. Idols have no life. They have eyes that see not and ears that hear not. To worship idols is, hence, to shift from the way of life to the way of death. Hence it is that idol-worshippers become like the morning dew or the chaff that have only a fleeting existence (v 3).

Unlike idols, God cares (v 4, 5). Human liberation is a function of the caring nature of God. That being the case, liberation is not merely the removal of the yoke of slavery. It is also the building of a people on godliness. But it is not enough God cares enough to liberate us. We must be willing to abide in him. Israel, in contrast, rejected God in favour of an earthly king (v 9 - 11). The king is a secular idol. It does not take long for this to become an arrangement of oppression and death. Jesus the King gives his life for our sake; earthly kings demand our life for their sake.

Prayer: God, may we be the liberators for removal of the yoke of slavery. Amen.

HUMAN REPENTANCE

January 15th, Friday

MW	Ps. 40	Zephaniah 1.1-13	1 Timothy 3
EW	Ps. 41	Zephaniah.1.14-2.4	1 Timothy 4

He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devils trap. (1 Timothy 3:7)

The portrayal of God’s wrath and its serious consequences lead to a call for repentance. Redemption, not revenge, is the purpose of God’s holy wrath. God withdraws the fire of his anger in the wake of human repentance. Repentance involves renunciation of sin on our part and the forgiveness of our sins on God’s part.

To human repentance God responds with total restoration (v 4-7). This means: (a) healing. It is not only from our illnesses that we need to be healed. We need to be healed even more from our waywardness, which is a sign of our sinfulness. Sin and steadfastness (or being founded on the rock) do not do together. It is because of this that the worldly –or the servants of Mammon- are tortured by anxiety about tomorrow (Mtt. 6: 25). It makes eminent sense to be anxious. While the exhortation “do not be anxious” is the slogan of the Kingdom of God, “be anxious” is the only sensible advice in the kingdom of man.

When God restores His people they blossom! They take root and stand firm. They exemplify life in all its abundance (v 5, 6). This fullness of life, and not some pietistic posturing, is the proof that we have repented. Hosea compares this state to that of the ‘corn’ and the ‘wine’, both of which enrich the life of others. The proof of our spiritual fruitfulness is that we become a blessing in the life of others. Religiosity driven by selfish passions amounts to little more than ‘taking the name of God in vain’.

Prayer: God, heal us from our waywardness. Amen.

SANCTITY OF LIFE

January 16th, Saturday

Robert de Nobili (Ev.), 1656

MW	Ps. 42,43	Zeph.2.5-end	1 Tim.5.1-16
EW	Ps. 44	Zeph.3.1-10	1 Tim.5.17-6.2

....these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents for this is pleasing to God. (1 Tim. 5:46)

We turn to the reading from 1 Timothy for our spiritual sustenance today. It emphasizes the duty to respect the sanctity of life. The spiritual insight is that all of life is one, as the life of every person has its origin in God. Because of this, the accidents of life –old age, social status, etc. - do not affect the worth that the life of a person has. Neither old age nor being young diminishes anyone's worth.

The same insight also brings us under the duty to care for those who need help and support. Widows, unsupported by their family members, are to be taken care of. Our religiosity is nothing if it does not make us caring persons (v. 4). This is the point that Jesus makes through the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 25- 37). Those who do not care for his own family are worse than unbelievers.

But Christian charity must exist within a comprehensive framework of spiritual discipline. A woman who has been unfaithful to her husband does not merit being treated as a widow, simply because her husband is no more (v 9). That is because, infidelity is a principle death. Murdered by her, their relationship died before the husband could! Also, to merit the benefit of a caring culture one has to be a caring person. That is because life is a matter of reciprocity. As we sow, so we shall reap. Paul maintains that a life of sensual indulgence kills the caring culture. Spiritual discipline is basic, it is important to note, to becoming a caring person.

Prayer: Lord, make us caring persons, not for our family alone but for the community at large. Amen.

GOD'S GRACIOUS PURPOSE

January 17th, Sunday

4th Sunday after Christmas
Antony of Egypt (Hermit), 356

Theme: Jesus brings joy through the fulfilment of God's gracious purpose.

M/EW	Psalms 145	L.S.	OT	Isaiah 25.6-9
	OT	Isaiah 25.6-9		Psalms 145.10-16
	NT	Galatians 3.23-29		Epistle. Galatians 3.23-29
	and/or	John 2.1-11		Gosp. John 2.1-11

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples..... (Isaiah 25: 6a)

Life in Christ is not a bleak and cheerless affair! Quite contrary to what Jesus has taught us and revealed through his life, but we have turned the biblical faith into a prohibitively joyless state. Jesus' life was a celebration. The one thing he associated with the Kingdom of God was great and infectious joy! It is like a royal banquet, he said. Joy results whenever God and individuals are reconciled. Alienation, on the contrary, is the 'outer darkness' marked by weeping and gnashing of teeth.

God offers the very best (v 6): the banquet of aged wines and the best of meats. Not only that. He will also destroy the 'shroud' or the aura of death around all peoples. God being the source and fullness of life, His lordship over our life transforms mere existence into a celebration of life. He will annul the domination of death over the way of life we otherwise lead.

The world we live in is marked by a vast sorrows and torrential tears. Mere human efforts or good intentions are insufficient to wipe these sorrows away. The suffering of the world results from its alienation from God and the resultant subjection of life to the way of death, rather than of life (Mtt. 7: 13, 14). This is not what God meant for us! The state of the world is a mockery of God's creation that, at each stage, He watched and found good. This truth will dawn on us when we turn to God and we too shall say, "Surely, this is our God..." (v 9).

Prayer: God, make us to realize the truth of life, your purpose in our life, so that your will is done. Amen.

NEW WAY OF LIFE

January 18th, Monday

MW	Ps. 45	Zeph.3.11-end	1 Tim.6.3-end
EW	Ps. 46,47	Joel 1	2 Tim.1.1-14

But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the lord. (Zeph. 3: 12)

Through Zephaniah, God projects a vision of the redeemed and restored life of the people. We shall note its main features. (a) The people will be freed from their embarrassing memories. They won't live in fear of being put to shame (v 11). They will be washed clean in the living waters of God's forgiveness. An important aspect of God's mercy is this cleansing of memories. If we are not washed in this holy river, we live in a private hell of corrosive memories. In Jesus we become a 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5: 17). The past no longer haunts us.

(b) This new way of life will be marked by meekness (v 12). Those who attain worldly and material progress become arrogant and oppressive. But the more we develop spiritually, the more humble we become. Meekness was the sign of Jesus' spiritual perfection and the secret of his authority. It is this authority, not worldly power, that we need. In a way of life based on power, there is no cleansing or new beginning.

(c) There will be no place for fear or falsehood (v 13). Where there is falsehood fear reigns. In contrast, truth sets us free. Truth is the seed of peace. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is also the truth (Jn. 14: 6). On the other hand, Satan is the Thief, the father of lies (Jn. 10: 10). The reason for the absence of fear and falsehood is: 'The Lord your God is with you' (v 17). Where God is present, truth will prevail and people will be joyful, not fearful.

Prayer: God, develop within us a Spirit of spirituality so that we become humble in thy sight. Amen.

STRENGTH IN CHRIST

January 19th, Tuesday

MW	Ps. 50	Joel 2.1-17	2 Tim.1.15-2.13
EW	Ps. 51	Joel 2.18-end	2 Tim.2.14-end

You then, my Son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 2.1)

Paul urges Timothy, his spiritual son in Christ, to be strong in the faith (2: 1). 'Strength' is universally coveted. But the spiritual understanding of strength varies from a worldly understanding of it. To the world, strength is a state of domination. Spiritually, strength is the ability to be reliable. Faithfulness is the secret of strength. Faithfulness enables us to endure hardship (v 3) for the sake of Christ. Often those who are strong in a worldly sense prove weak –very weak- spiritually. When life puts them to the test, they crumble and collapse. We need to be strong in faith and spiritual discipline, as athletes and farmers are. They are clear about their purposes and they endure whatever it takes to attain them.

Our endurance is not mere doggedness. It arises out of being founded on the risen Christ (v 8). We are dead with him (v 11). In this state, we become free from the double-mindedness of the world. This means that the options available to the world are not permissible for us. So endure. We will not shift our foundation, because we died with him. Paul points us Jesus as the example of this faithfulness. Even when we prove faithless, he will remain faithful because 'he cannot disown himself' (v 13). This should make us think hard on the illusory options rooted in our 'freedom of choice'. The temptation of Eve in Eden is a clear warning in this regard. The limit of our freedom should be that we do not choose what is incompatible with our identity as the children of God (Jn. 1: 12).

Prayer: God, may we always be faithful fo you for your love to us sinners. Amen.

SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEPRAVITY

January 20th, Wednesday

MW	Ps. 52	Joel 3.1-8	2 Timothy 3
EW	Ps. 53,54(om.v15,23)	Joel 3.9-end	2 Timothy 4

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy. (2 Tim. 3:2)

Paul forewarns us of the spiritual and moral depravity that humankind is heading towards. We seem to have almost arrived there! So his words are of special interest to us. The essence of this degradation is 'self-love,' cripples us in respect of loving others (v 2). Paul then lists the ingredients of this fallenness. People become lovers of money. We cannot love money and love human beings. They are proud, boastful and abusive, which denotes a vulgarisation of taste and deadening of sensitivity. Having no respect for the sanctities of life, they disobey their parents, are unforgiving and slanderous towards others. They lack self-control which, incidentally, is not a matter acquired moral brakes. It arises out of accountability to God. Driven by unholy desires, they crave sensual pleasures. And, most importantly, they are depraved in their minds (v 8). As a result, they reject faith. It should make us deeply concerned that all of these sound very familiar to us today!

Given the depravity of this sinful world, the godly must expect and endure unmerited hostility (v 12). In the midst of it all, we must live a life that is guided by the Spirit-inspired Word of God. The Scripture is, in the words of the Psalmist, the lantern to our feet and the light to our path (Ps. 119: 105). Equipped as we are with this invaluable resource, we have a duty to teach, admonish, correct and train each other in righteousness, so that as the Church we are equipped to do God's work (v 16, 17).

Prayer: God, may we never be proud, boastful and abusive. Give us the spirit to forgive. Amen.

MEANINGLESSNESS OF LIFE

January 21st, Thursday

MW	Ps. 57,61	Ecc1.1	Philippians 1.1-11
EW	Ps. 62	Ecc1.2.1-17	Matt 6.5-15

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher, “utterly meaningless! everything is meaningless.” (Eccl. 1:2)

The Teacher, son of David, bemoans the meaninglessness of life. Paradoxically, this very lament is affirmative. One cannot cry over the absurdity of life, unless life is meant by the Creator to be meaningful! Otherwise, this should not have mattered to us at all. Today we must cry over our incapacity to mourn the meaninglessness that we, and others, embrace in our God-less pursuits.

It is not the Teacher's thesis that we should despise labour or shirk our toils because the gains thereof are illusory. His message is best put in the words of the Psalmist. “Unless the Lord builds the house.....” (Ps. 127: 1, 2). Fruitfulness in life is not a matter only of hard work. Biblically, work is a medium for 'abiding in' God, which is the secret of fruitfulness (Jn. 15:4, 5). Being co-workers with God is the core aspect of worshipping God 'in spirit and in truth' (Jn. 4: 24). All our achievements prove either fruitless or fleeting (v 3-6) if they do not exist under the Lordship of Jesus. No matter how great our acquisitions and achievements, they only breed weariness in us unless our life is built on the solid rock of godliness (Mtt. 7: 24-28).

Even the pursuit of worldly wisdom is not worth the bother if it makes us unmindful of our relationship with God. The wiser we get, the more burdened and weary we become! When we are wise in a godly way, we are able to see worldly wisdom in perspective, and see through its 'madness and folly' (v 17).

Prayer: God, may we ever be grateful for all your blessings and enjoy the work entrusted to us. Amen.

MEANING-SEEKING CREATURES

January 22nd, Friday

MW	Ps. 57,61	Eccl.2.18-3.8	Phil.1.12-26
EW	Ps. 62	Eccl.3.9-end	Luke 11.5-13

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. (Eccl. 3:1)

The Teacher considers the motives that drive human pursuits. First, he considers the pursuit of pleasure (v 1). We are defined by what we seek. Either we seek God's justice and Kingdom (Mtt. 6: 33) or the fleeting goals that guide our short sojourn in this world. Pleasure is the broad way to futility and damnation.

Next he examines the prospect of engaging in significant efforts (v 4). They include enterprises that contribute to private and public wealth-generation. One of the by-products of these great efforts is fame. The other is a life of affluence and enjoyment: "I denied myself nothing" (v 10). Having seen and tasted it all, when he looked at the magnitude of his achievements, the Teacher is struck by the meaninglessness of such a life. The truth to which most people are blind is that God has created all human beings as 'meaning-seeking' creatures. Therefore, mere material acquisitions cannot satisfy it. There must be meaning and purpose to our life. God, and only God, can give us that. God-centered life is purpose-driven life. A life of worldly pursuits, though marked by impressive achievements, is doomed to meaninglessness and suffering. We are defeated by our successes and are crushed under the weight of our achievements.

What about human wisdom, then? Even though wisdom is better than folly (v 13), the same fate overtakes the wise and the foolish. In course of time, both die and are forgotten. No human effort or achievement has any worth unless centred on God.

Prayer: God, all our doings are worthless if it is not centered around you. Give us the wisdom to live and work for your glory. Amen.

BEING YOUNG

January 23rd, Saturday

MW	Ps. 63(om.v.21-23)	Ecclesiastes 4	Phil.1.27-2.13
EW	Ps. 64	Ecclesiastes 5	Luke 18.9-14

..... all labour and all achievements, spring from man's envy of his neighbour. (Eccl. 4: 4b)

Oppression stalks human existence in history. The realities of the world face us with a gloomy prospect: the dead are happier than the living! Also, a greater felicity is not to have been born at all! This should surprise us. At every step in creation, the Creator found every part of His creation 'good'. He found life in the form of the human person, 'very good' (Gen. 1: 31). Why is it no longer so?

We may achieve for two contrary reasons. In the first instance our efforts may be spurred by envy. We want to get ahead of our neighbours. The Teacher likens this attitude to life to 'chasing after the wind' (v 4). This robs life of its tranquillity, without which life becomes a burden and ceases to be a blessing. At the root of this, is the foolishness that makes us assume that the means of life are greater than life itself. The other alternative is to do all that we do for the 'glory of God' and for the good of our fellow human beings.

Unity and wisdom are to be desired above disunity and self-advancement. It is better to be a poor, wise youth than an old, foolish king. We can hear in the words of the Teacher, a call to the youth to wake up to the value of their present state. Being young is such an invaluable blessing! That also confronts us with a searching question: How are we using its resources and opportunities? Are we 'good and faithful' custodians of our youth?

Prayer: God we know, we realize; yet we fault and do what we are not suppose to. Help us to build the Spirit of love. Amen.

REBUILDING

January 24th, Sunday

5 Sunday after Christmas
Timothy: Companion of Paul

Theme: The true Temple of God is the Church, the Body of Christ.

M/EW	Psalm 122	L.S.	OT Haggai 2.1-9
	OT Haggai 2.1-9		Psalm 122.1-2,6-9
	NT 1 Cor. 3.10-17		Epistle. 1 Cor. 3.10-17
	and/or John 2.13-22		Gosp. John 2.13-22

Notice of festival of Conversion of Paul on 25 January and Republic Day on 26 January

Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord, and work. For I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty. (Haggai 2: 4b)

To commemorate the servants of God is to commit ourselves to becoming like them. We too have to be God's servants. The alternative is to be the servants of Mammon (Mtt.6: 24). The 'house of the Lord' has to be rebuilt at all times. Renewal is a continuing part of God's plan. As a rule, human beings are indifferent to this goal. It is only when God puts His concerns into the heart and mind of a human being that this mission to rebuild and to renew begins.

Rebuilding involves, first, remembering the 'former glory' of 'this house' (v 3). We are reminded of Nehemiah. It was because he was familiar with the former glory of the Jerusalem that the news of its dilapidation caused him unbearable anguish. Secondly, rebuilding involves great courage and determination (v 4). The servant of God can afford to have both because God is with him or her. Mere human strength or will power won't suffice. And it is basic to God's faithfulness that He provides the resources required for accomplishing His task.

Third, it involves believing in the ultimate authority of God. He has the power to shake 'the heavens and the earth' (v 6). The nations of the world shall be shaken out of their spiritual sleep. The best from among them will respond to the call of God. Material resources also shall not be wanting; for everything belongs to Him. (v 8). The 'house of God,' since the ministry of Jesus, is not a building but the people of God.

Prayer: God, may we always be ready to listen to your call. Amen.

CONVERSION OF PAUL

January 25th, Monday

Theme: Thanksgiving for Paul's wonderful conversion.

M/EW	Psalm 66	L.S.	OT Isaiah 6.1-8	6.1-8
	OT Isaiah 6.1-8		Psalm 67	
	NT Acts 22.3-21		2nd R. Acts 22.3-16	
	and/or Matt.19.27-30		Gosp. Matt.19.27-30	

About noon, as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. (Acts 22:6)

The conversion of Saul is a landmark in the history of our faith. In the transforming power of the resurrected Lord, Saul the fanatic is transformed into Paul the faithful. The expert in religious persecution becomes an emblem of suffering for Christ! The story of this amazing change challenges us with the duty to see people, not as they now seem, but as they can be if they encounter Christ.

First, Saul was the pride of the Jews. And he was proud of himself too! His religious zeal expressed itself in persecuting the followers of 'the Way'. Second, he was given the privilege to see something beyond religion. On the road to Damascus he saw 'a bright light from heaven' (v 6). The problem with the way religion is practised by most people is that it rarely provides the opportunity to see this 'bright light from heaven'. Third, Saul responded. Without this response, the vision from above will remain, at best, a mere spectacle, a pageant in the clouds, as it were. The birth of a new creation—who would be known as Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles- is marked by the question, "What shall I do, Lord?" (v 10). Fourth, he obeys God rather than religious authorities. Till then Saul was used to, mostly, either obeying them or, thereafter, others obeying him. Now he learns to obey the living God. He is instructed to go to Damascus without any indication of what exactly he is required to do there. Saul obeys! An apostle is, quite simply, one who obeys God unconditionally at all times. This obedience has the power to transform Saul into Paul.

Prayer: God, give us the Spirit to respond to the issues/situations around us positively. Amen.

REPUBLIC DAY

January 26th, Tuesday Polycarp of Smyrna (Bp., Mar.), c. 155

Theme: Prayer for our country.

M/EW	Psalm 85	L.S.	OT	Nehemiah 5.14-19
	OT	Nehemiah 5.14-19		or Jer. 22.13-16
		or Jeremiah 22.13-16		Psalm 85.1, 8-13
	NT	1 Peter 2.11-16		Epistle. 1 Peter 2.11-16
	and/or	Matt. 22.15-21		Gosp. Matt. 22.15-21

Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. (Psalm 85: 11)

Republic day marks a significant stage in the consolidation of our freedom and identity as a nation. The Psalmist in Psalm 85 portrays two contrasting states of existence. One is of alienation from God and its attendant slavery. The other is the redeemed way of life in which 'righteousness and peace kissing each other!' (v 11)

All through the Bible we see that alienation from God invites slavery. Freedom is God's gift to humankind and it is safe only under His Lordship. Human iniquity throws people outside the safe zone of divine authority and renders them vulnerable to oppression and exploitation over centuries. But the good news is that God is able and eager to forgive our iniquity and restore us (vs. 2 - 4).

We cannot claim the benefits of divine restoration and continue our iniquitous ways. To come under the Lordship of God is to live a way of life in which love and faithfulness embrace each other. It is marked by the complementarity of justice and peace, resulting from a harmony of heaven and earth. Even as justice looks down from above, faithfulness springs forth from the earth (v 11).

The Psalmist highlights the political dimension of faith. We must hold ourselves responsible for the political culture that prevails in our country. The fact that we are a minority does not allow us any luxury of excuse. If we are the salt of the earth, we can and must make a difference. Abraham was called to be a blessing on the land. We too must be.

Prayer: God, give us the Spirit and lead us to be blessings to our motherland. Amen.

WAY OF LIFE

January 27th, Wednesday

MW	Ps. 72	Ecclesiastes 6	Phil. 2.14-end
EW	Ps. 73	Ecclesiastes 7	Matt.21.12-22

All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied. (Eccl. 6:7)

The clue to the meaning of chapter 6 of Ecclesiastes is in verse 7. The evil that the Teacher attributes is not to life as such but to a way of life in which a man's efforts are only for his mouth. If mouth is all that matters to a person, then he is sure to be blind to the glory of his unique creation in the image and likeness of God.

We are made to look in the face the contradiction in our earthly existence. Material blessings come from God. If so, they should enhance and ennoble life. But that is not what happens! Having wealth does not co-exist with the capacity to enjoy it. The fruits of a man's labour fall into the laps of strangers. Prosperity of the most astronomical proportion amounts to nothing if the opportunity to enjoy it is denied. In such a situation, a still-born baby is better off than a rich man. At least it would not be caught in the toils of a meaningless life and the thorns and thistles that abound in it.

In the consumerist culture, the wise man and a fool are all the same. What we value, both at the individual and collective levels, reveals who we are. Our lifestyles matter. In a pleasure-seeking, indulgent way of life, we lose all spiritual sensitivity and the capacity to appreciate wisdom. Even the ability to know what is good for oneself is seldom developed (v. 12). This is not for want of knowledge. What is needed is the gift of discernment that the Holy Spirit gives.

Prayer: God, help and guide us, that we may never loose our spiritual sensitivity. Amen.

BEING OBEDIENT

January 28th, Thursday

MW	Ps. 74	Ecclesiastes 8	Phil.3.1-16
EW	Ps. 75	Ecclesiastes 9	Luke 22.39-46

Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. (Eccl. 8: 5)

Obedience is the key to life. Disobedience is anarchic. It cheapens life. In our public life we have to obey the legally constituted authority: the secular government. Disobedience, as the Bible warns us through the Adam and Eve event, is the death principle. It is sure to bring harm. It is so in respect of human beings. It is even more so in our relationship with God.

The Teacher then looks at some aspects of human limitation. No man can know the future. We cannot control the wind (Jn. 3:8). We cannot choose the day of our birth or death. Nor can we choose to be free from the consequences of our evil deeds (vs. 7, 8). The wicked may achieve popular acclaim. But it is futile and meaningless in the end.

Evil-doing must be seen for what it is. Tolerance of evil encourages evil-doers. Those who remain indifferent to such dangers or shut their eyes to them undermine the health of a society. Even if evil-doing is seen to offer some advantages for a considerable period of time, it is still to be avoided and despised. It is better to be a God-fearing person, even if this may not offer any material advantage. Evil-doing results from having no fear of God. Their perpetrators, hence, cannot last long. In this mixed-up world of ours, evil men get what the righteous deserve and vice versa! This should be no invitation to pursue evil. It is a pointer to the imperfection of this world. We must not entertain perfect expectations from an imperfect world.

Prayer: God, in your kindness and faithfulness may we always be obedient to your command. Amen.

TO BE PERFECT

January 29th, Friday

MW	Ps. 76	Eccl.10.1-11.6	Phil.3.17-4.7
EW	Ps. 77	Eccl. 11.7-12 end	Phil. 4.8-end

Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. (Eccl. 10: 8)

A little folly is enough to spoil the show! That is why Jesus urged us to be 'perfect' (Mtt. 5: 48). Nothing less than perfection, or a spiritually unalloyed state, will do. The opposite of this is being a double-minded person who, according to James, cannot receive any blessing from the Lord (James 1: 6, 7).

Fools advertise themselves! The pattern of the world is different from the spiritual pattern. The former is driven by self-advertisement. The more foolish a person, the greater is his penchant for self-exhibition! A spiritually sensitive person does not do anything 'to be seen by men' (Mtt. 6: 2, 5, 16). The fact that a person comes to occupy a high position does not prove his wisdom. In a wicked world a fool gets preferred over the wise, a corrupt over the honest. Those who have spiritual discernment are not taken in by it. They will not give honour to those who are wicked. (Ps. 15:4).

Even though the world we live in is morally flawed, the consequences of our evil-deeds will catch up with us. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it (v. 8). This is the greatness of life. Even though darkness appears to dominate most of the time, in the end light will prevail. Most of the time it may seem as though we are casting our bread upon the waters, as opposed to sowing the seeds in deep and fertile soil. But every godly deed of compassion will return blessed many-fold. But things work according to God's time-table, not ours. We must abide in patience.

Prayer: God, may we always aspire to be perfect in your sight. Amen.

LIBERATING TRUTH

January 30th, Saturday

MW	Ps. 78.1-16	Prov. 22.17-23.5	Eph 1.1-14
EW	Ps. 78.17-40	Prov.23.15-end	Eph.1.15-end

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (Eph. 1:4)

Our blessings come from God! This, in itself, is a liberating truth. Those who cultivate their fellow human beings for their benefits get degraded into beggars. Those who receive blessings from God are liberated. To be 'blessed' is to have one's hidden goodness brought into view. The beneficiaries of this blessing will not only be the person who is thus blessed but also many others. God blesses us that we may become blessings for others. That is when blessings become 'spiritual'. Nothing from which the neighbour is excluded is either spiritual or Christ-imparted.

The spiritual blessings that God offers through Jesus Christ include: (a) being predestined to be the children of God and hence being preserved holy and blameless in the sight of God (v 4). This is the seed of all our blessings. God does not distribute 'special favours'. He simply guarantees our birthright. The important thing, therefore, is not blessings. It is our status as children of God. Blessings follow naturally from this. (b) Redemption and forgiveness of sin (v 7). God loves us to the point of paying the most unimaginable price for this. (c) God's grace, wisdom and understanding. Grace is what is received unmerited: a free gift. The outcome of this gift is spiritual wisdom and understanding. Revelation is the source of this wisdom. The wisdom of the world militates against revelation whereas spiritual wisdom accepts the 'mystery' of revelation in faith (d) Unity, which is the proof that we are thus blessed. Under the Lordship of Jesus Christ we all become one.

Prayer: God, thank you for special favours to serve and love you. Amen.

LEPROSY SUNDAY

January 31st, Sunday

9 Sunday before Easter

Theme: God suffers in all those who suffer in this world.

M/EW	Psalm	123	L.S.	OT	2 Kings 5.1-14
	OT	2 Kings 5.1-14		Psalm	123
	NT	Acts 5.12-16		Epistle.	Acts 5.12-16
	and/or	Mark 1.40-end/Luke		Gosp.	Mark 1.40-end/ Luke
			or		
M/EW	Psalm	151.1-17	L.S.	OT	Isaiah 1.1-9
	OT	Isaiah 1.1-9		Psalm	151.1-17
	NT	Romans 1.18-25		Epistle.	Romans 1.18-25
	and/or	Matthew 13.10-17		Gosp.	Matthew 13.10-17

Note: This Sunday will be observed as leprosy Sunday, in which the prayer is made for the ministry among the leprosy patients.

Notice of festival of Presentation of Christ in the Temple on 2 February

But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he could surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my Leprosy. (2 Kings 5:11)

Leprosy is a powerful symbol of human alienation. The root of this alienation is the loss of sensitivity. Sin makes us thick-skinned and hard-hearted. Disobedience is the seed of sin. Disobedience to God makes us spiritual lepers. Naaman the leper is cleansed by washing himself in the waters of Jordan. We need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world to be healed of our spiritual leprosy (Jn.1: 29).

The hidden problem with Naaman was a sense of power that prevented him from obeying God. His power was derived from obeying the king. He knew exactly how everyone else, including the Prophet, was to behave. He had his set way of understanding how Elisha was to heal him (vs. 11). People like him will insist on being obeyed, but will not obey. It is virtually impossible to have fellowship with them, no matter how hard you try!

The treatment for spiritual leprosy is obedience! So, Naaman is given a lesson in obedience. He is asked to wash himself seven times in the Jordan. It makes no sense to him. But he has to obey nonetheless, which is true obedience to the authority of God. On this 'Leprosy Sunday' what we need

to do, first and foremost, is to realize the spiritual leprosy in which we languish. This is a far greater problem than the physical leprosy of some others; though we must do all we can to alleviate their suffering. But the latter is meaningless without the former.

Prayer: God, make us sensitive to the needs of others specially to the Leprosy effected. Amen.

HE IS OUR PEACE

February 1st, Monday

MW	Ps. 80	Prov.24.1-18	Eph.2.1-10
EW	Ps. 81	Prov.24.19-end	Eph.2.11-end

“ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility”. (Ephesians 2:14)

When we are not part of the body of Christ, we were-

1. Separate from Christ
2. Excluded from Citizenship of Israel.
3. Foreigners to the Covenant of Promise.
4. Without Hope.
5. Without God. (vs : 2)

However, we are now God's children and have been united to Him through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have peace because he himself is our Peace. (vs : 14)

Therefore, even though we were foreigners and aliens, we are now fellow citizens with God's people. We have this great privilege only because of our belief in the atoning sacrifice of Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is our common thread which joins the body of believers with one another.

The Challenge is to live it out through our own lives. The way we live and relate to the world around us reflects our relationship with Christ. Therefore let us reflect the inward peace that we have in building a peaceful society and community around us.

PRAYER: Make me a channel of your peace; where there is hatred, let me bring love, where there is injury, let me bring pardon and true faith. Amen.