

Day 5 SUNDAY

The story that must be told.

Matthew 2:13-15

Focus verse:

Matthew 2:13

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

Reflection

Prayer

*I*f Matthew's Gospel were published as breaking news, King Herod would dominate the front page. A ruthless ruler, willing to do anything to preserve power, keeps his people in line through fear and violence. The world tends to tell the story of whoever holds the headlines.

But Matthew tells a different story, one that runs quietly beneath the noise. When Joseph dreams of danger and flees with Mary and the infant Jesus into Egypt, Matthew connects this escape to Hosea's prophecy: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1). In the Hebrew Scriptures, those words recalled the Exodus — God delivering Israel from bondage. Now, Matthew sees that same divine pattern unfolding again. The God who once brought Israel out of Egypt is at work in Jesus, shaping human history toward redemption.

It's a reminder that history is not only the story of kings and empires, but of God's persistent grace. Even in the shadow of tyrants, God is writing a quieter, deeper narrative, one that bends toward deliverance and hope.

Our news cycles are still filled with Herods — leaders who cling to power, stories driven by fear and outrage. Lent invites us to tune our hearts to a different frequency, to listen for God's ongoing work of liberation. If people are to have hope in a world full of Herods, this is the story that must be told.

Where do you see God's quieter story unfolding beneath today's headlines? How might your faith help you bear witness to that story of redemption?

Redeeming God, when the world's stories leave us anxious and afraid, remind us that you are still at work writing grace into human history. Help us trust your larger narrative of hope, and give us courage to tell it. Amen.



Day 6 **MONDAY**

Jesus steps into our muddy waters.

Matthew 3:13-17

Focus verses:

Matthew 3:13-15

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

Reflection

Prayer

Jesus comes to the Jordan River to be baptized, and John can't imagine how this visit makes sense — why the sinless one is submitting to a baptism of repentance. But Jesus insists: "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." That word "righteousness" can sound lofty, moralistic, even stiff. But another way to understand it is "right relationship": to live rightly with God and with one another. Jesus' baptism isn't about washing away sin; it's about immersion in humanity. He steps fully into the human experience, into our muddy waters, so he can show us the way back into right relationship with God and with each other.

I once baptized a seven-year-old girl who couldn't sit still. During worship she squirmed, darted down the aisle, rolled under the pews and giggled loudly while her parents tried (and failed) to contain her. But when the time finally came, and her father lifted her to the font, something shifted. As the water touched her head, she grew still. When I baptized her "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," she nodded solemnly each time my wet hand brushed her hair — as if she knew, intuitively, that this was her moment. She knew that she was seen, loved and right in God's eyes.

Lent invites us to return to that kind of knowing — to trust that through Jesus we are already claimed, already loved, already made right.

Where in your life do you feel out of right relationship — with God, with others or with yourself? What might it mean for you to let Jesus step into those muddy waters with you?

Loving God, thank you for sending Jesus to enter fully into our human story. Immerse us again in your grace. Restore our relationships — with you, with others and within ourselves — until all is made right in your love. Amen.

Day 7 **TUESDAY**

Jesus stands with us in the wilderness.

Matthew 4:1-11

Focus verses:

Matthew 4:1-2

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished.

Reflection

*A*fter Jesus' baptism, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Hungry, weary and alone, Jesus faces three tests set by the devil: to turn stones into bread, to throw himself from the Temple to prove God's care and to bow to evil in order to receive worldly power.

These temptations are not new. They echo Israel's own wilderness journey in the book of Exodus. God's people were tempted to give in to hunger (Exodus 16), to test God's faithfulness (Exodus 17) and to worship false gods (Exodus 32). Those who first read or heard Matthew's Gospel would have known those stories well. In the account of Jesus' testing, they would spot the familiar pattern — and they would note the good news that this time, the story goes differently.

The wilderness exposes what we trust most. Do we trust God to provide when we hunger? Do we trust God's faithfulness without demanding proof? Do we trust God's sovereignty rather than bowing to the idols of power, success or control? These are not ancient questions only — they're ours too. Every day we meet them in small and large ways, in our personal lives and public life.

But Jesus stands with us in the wilderness. The story of his temptations warns us of the dangers of misplaced trust and also encourages us. Temptation is not the end of the story. Jesus shows us that faithfulness is possible. His footsteps mark a path through the dry and desolate places, leading us to discipleship and meaningful ministry.

Where and when do you feel most tempted to take control rather than trust God? How might Jesus' example in the wilderness give you strength to choose faithfulness today?

Prayer

Faithful God, when we wander in the wilderness, hungry and uncertain, meet us there. Strengthen us to resist what lures us away from you, and guide our steps in the way of righteousness. Through Christ, who walks beside us. Amen.



Day 8 WEDNESDAY

Jesus calls us to let go, follow and trust.

Matthew 4:18-22

Focus verse:

Matthew 4:22

This is the only passage in Matthew's Gospel where we hear how Jesus called his disciples. In the rest of the story, they simply appear — already following, already learning (see Matthew 10:1-4). But here on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, we watch it happen.

Reflection

Prayer

Matthew emphasizes two things about these first followers: their family ties and their work. Simon Peter and Andrew are brothers, as are James and John. Matthew even names Zebedee, their father, who remains in the boat as his sons walk away with Jesus. And all of them are fishermen, whose lives are defined by hard labor, familiar routines and deep family bonds.

When Jesus shows up, everything shifts. His invitation – “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people” – isn't about improving their craft or enhancing their family business. His is a call to transformation. The kingdom of God reorients every relationship and disrupts the patterns we once thought were permanent. The goal of God's kingdom is not to make us more successful at what we already do, but rather to draw us into God's work of redeeming the world.

As a parent, I think of that moment in Baptism when we acknowledge that our children ultimately belong not to us but to God. They are children of God's covenant, marked as Christ's own forever. Their lives are held and shaped by the one who calls them. My role is to love them fiercely, raise them well and then let them go — trusting that God will use their gifts for good.

Jesus' call is always a call to let go – of nets, of expectations, even of our own plans – and to trust that what God is building is greater than what we leave behind.

What nets – habits, roles or relationships – might Jesus be inviting you to loosen your grip on? How might following him transform not just your life but the world around you?

God who calls us, you interrupt our routines with your holy invitation. Give us courage to drop what holds us back and to follow where you lead. Transform our hearts, our homes and our work until all life serves your kingdom. Amen.

Day 9 THURSDAY

Imagine a society that follows the Beatitudes.

Matthew 5:1-12

Focus verse:

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

In his volume *Matthew* in the Westminster Bible Companion series, Thomas G. Long describes the Sermon on the Mount as the “constitution” of the church – and calls the Beatitudes its “preamble.” In a nation’s constitution, the preamble captures the vision of who the people aspire to be. It identifies what is most essential about the nation’s identity and its hopes for its citizens.

The Beatitudes do the same for the kingdom of God. They describe what life looks like when God reigns: what kind of people belong to this kingdom and what kind of society they create together. Yet Jesus’ description is shocking. The kingdom of heaven belongs not to the strong, the wealthy or the powerful, but rather to the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. In a world that celebrates domination, power and individualism, Jesus envisions a kingdom that blesses humility, compassion and peace.

These blessings aren’t sentimental — they’re revolutionary. The Beatitudes turn the world’s values upside down. They call us to imagine our world turned right-side-up again through God.

Close your eyes and imagine a society that truly lives by these Beatitudes: a community where the poor are prioritized, mercy is the norm, peace is the policy, and righteousness (right relationship) is the national ambition.

- What would our laws look like?
- Who would be our leaders?
- What would we value and reward?
- What might you need to release or reclaim to live as a citizen of that kingdom?

Reflection

Which Beatitude feels most hopeful to you today — and which feels most challenging? Why?

Prayer

God of blessing, your kingdom confounds our expectations and reshapes our desires. Help us hunger and thirst for your righteousness. Form us into people of mercy, humility and peace, that our lives might reflect your reign on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.



Day 10 **FRIDAY**

A little salt goes a long way.

Matthew 5:13-16

Focus verse:

Matthew 5:13

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

Reflection

Prayer

Jesus tells his followers, “You are the salt of the earth.” It’s a simple phrase but a profound metaphor. Salt adds flavor. It preserves what might otherwise spoil. It keeps things fresh. And we don’t need much — a small pinch can change everything.

Matthew’s church needed that reminder. They were a small, struggling congregation trying – with mixed results – to live an alternative way of life amid a teeming, fast-changing world that neither appreciated nor understood them. Jesus’ words offered both encouragement and commission: You may feel small, but you matter. A little salt goes a long way.

The same is true for the church today. We can look around at a culture in constant motion and feel like what we do hardly makes a difference. But the Gospel insists otherwise. Every casserole delivered to a grieving family, every food pantry stocked and shared without shame, every building that opens its doors to AA meetings, affordable childcare, elder care or a yoga class for the community – all these are small acts of salt and light. They add the flavors of love, compassion and kindness to a bland world. They preserve hope. They reveal the steady work of God’s kingdom.

When Jesus calls us the salt of the earth and the light of the world, he’s not demanding grand gestures or headline-making miracles. He’s reminding us that holiness often looks ordinary: faithful people who show up day after day, doing small things with great love.

Where have you seen the quiet work of the church – or your own small actions – make a difference in someone’s life? How might you add a little more salt or light this week?

God of the small and steady, thank you for calling us to flavor the world with your love. When we feel insignificant, remind us that even a little faithfulness can shine bright. Keep us salty, radiant and ready to serve. Amen.

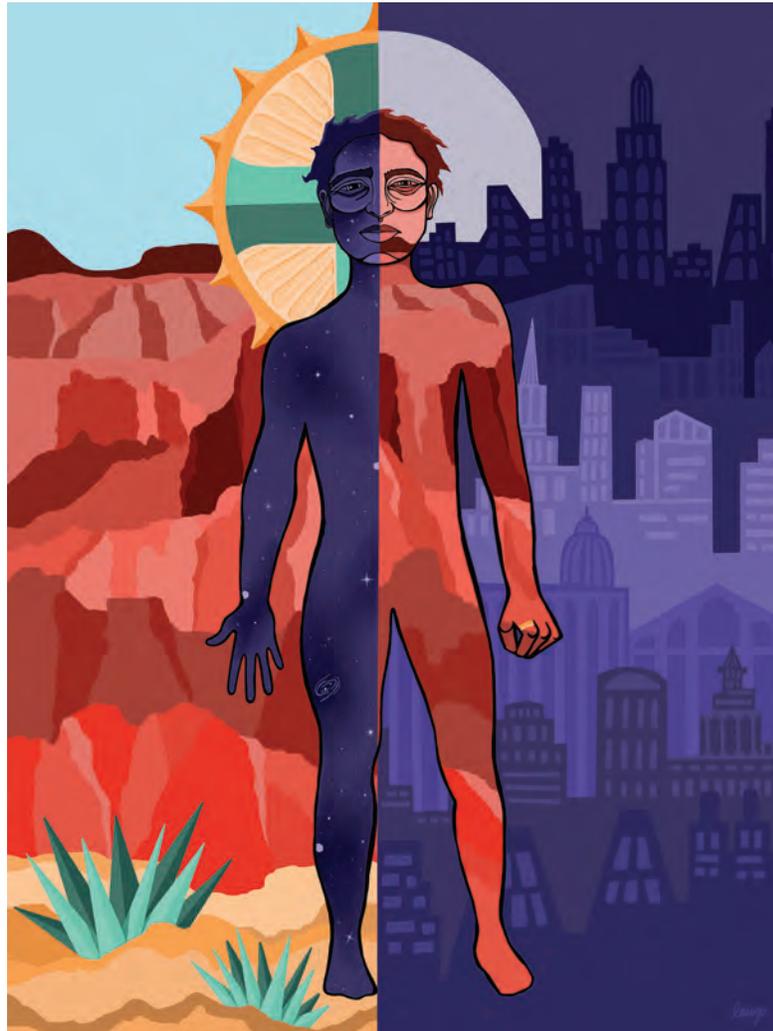
About visio divina

Visio divina, or “divine seeing,” is a prayer practice that invites us to encounter God through art. Just as *lectio divina* guides us to listen deeply to Scripture, *visio divina* encourages us to slow down and see with the eyes of faith. Rather than analyzing the artwork, we allow it to speak to us through color, light, texture and emotion. As you gaze upon the image, notice what draws your attention, what stirs your heart, and how the Spirit might be inviting you to see God’s story in a new way.

Spirit Led

Inspired by Matthew 4:1-11

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Reflection

- Take time to sit with the image before you.
- What do you notice first? What colors, shapes or movements stand out?
- As you linger, what emotions begin to surface — wonder, longing, conviction, peace?
- Do you see echoes of this week’s journey — Jesus stepping into the waters of baptism, walking through wilderness temptations, calling disciples to follow, proclaiming a kingdom that blesses the humble and sending us out as salt and light?
- What might this image reveal about your own calling, or about the quiet ways in which God’s Spirit transforms ordinary life into holy ground?

Prayer

Transforming God, open our eyes to the movement of your Spirit. When the path feels uncertain or the wilderness long, remind us that you walk beside us. When you call, give us courage to follow. When you bless the meek and the merciful, teach us to live those blessings aloud. As we journey through this second week of Lent, may our hearts be kindled with your light and our lives be seasoned with your grace — signs of your kingdom breaking in, even now. Amen.

