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Illuminating Christ

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ILLUMINATING CHRIST

 THE SAINT JOHN'S BIBLE

SEEING THE WORD

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BY JESSIE BAZAN

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Join *Seeing the Word* as we take a prayerful look into the life of Jesus Christ through the lens of *The Saint John's Bible*. As the first handwritten and illuminated Bible in more than 500 years, *The Saint John's Bible* was commissioned by the monks of Saint John's Abbey with the hope that its beautiful illuminations and calligraphy would ignite the spiritual imaginations of readers. One might be captivated by the shimmering gold while another can't stop looking at the honeycomb texture smattered about. Its evocative artwork, brilliant colors and beautiful calligraphy have made *The Saint John's Bible* one of the best evangelization and catechesis tools of its time.

This bible is a conversation-starter. We hope *Illuminating Christ* helps to further the conversation. Each section features prayers and reflections centered on Christ's life within the different liturgical seasons. Readers will also be walked through the *visio divina* prayer practice step-by-step and offered space to journal. What do you see in the illumination? How is Christ speaking to you?

The possibilities are endless.



Seeing the Word combines Scripture passages and sacred artwork from *The Saint John's Bible* with the powerful prayer process of *visio divina*.

Participants are guided through a powerful prayer experience rooted in Scripture and supported with sacred art.

Participants LISTEN and MEDITATE on Scripture, SEE with eyes of faith as they gaze on illuminations, PRAY to God, CONTEMPLATE the Spirit's movements, and reflect how they might further BECOME CHRIST-LIKE: the 6 steps of *visio divina*.

What do you see in the illuminations?

Colors

Layers

Comfort spots

Borders

Let the story come to you!

Shapes

Chaos spots

Movement of the strokes

Preparing for Christ: Advent

O come, o come Emmanuel! The Christian community approaches the season of Advent with eager hearts as we await the birth of our savior. Christ the Beloved Son has dwelt with God the Father since the beginning. His coming was foretold by prophets like Isaiah. The Prince of Peace, the King of Kings will be born to us! He will suffer greatly, giving of himself as a servant for humankind. This child will change the world. The Church recognizes that we're going to need some time to prepare for this radical coming — both the birth of Christ and his second coming, the coming of the kingdom.

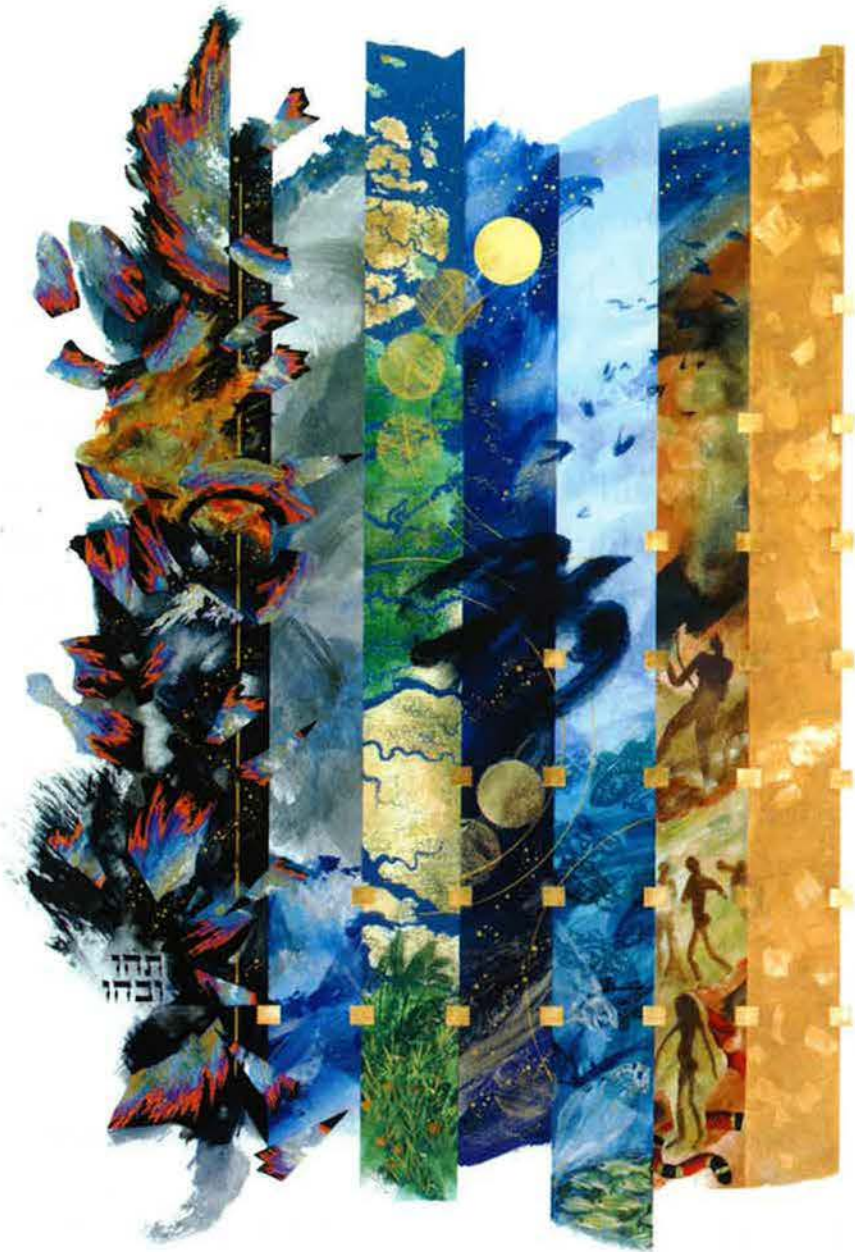
The kingdom where wolves and lambs, leopards and kids live in harmony.

The kingdom where people are judged by their motivations and their character.

The kingdom where peace and justice reign supreme.

Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:4



Let us pray ...

Creator God,

You formed the heavens and the earth,
the sea and the sky, the birds and the beasts.
You called forth light from the darkness and from
humble clay, you breathed life into humankind.

All that is beautiful comes from you.

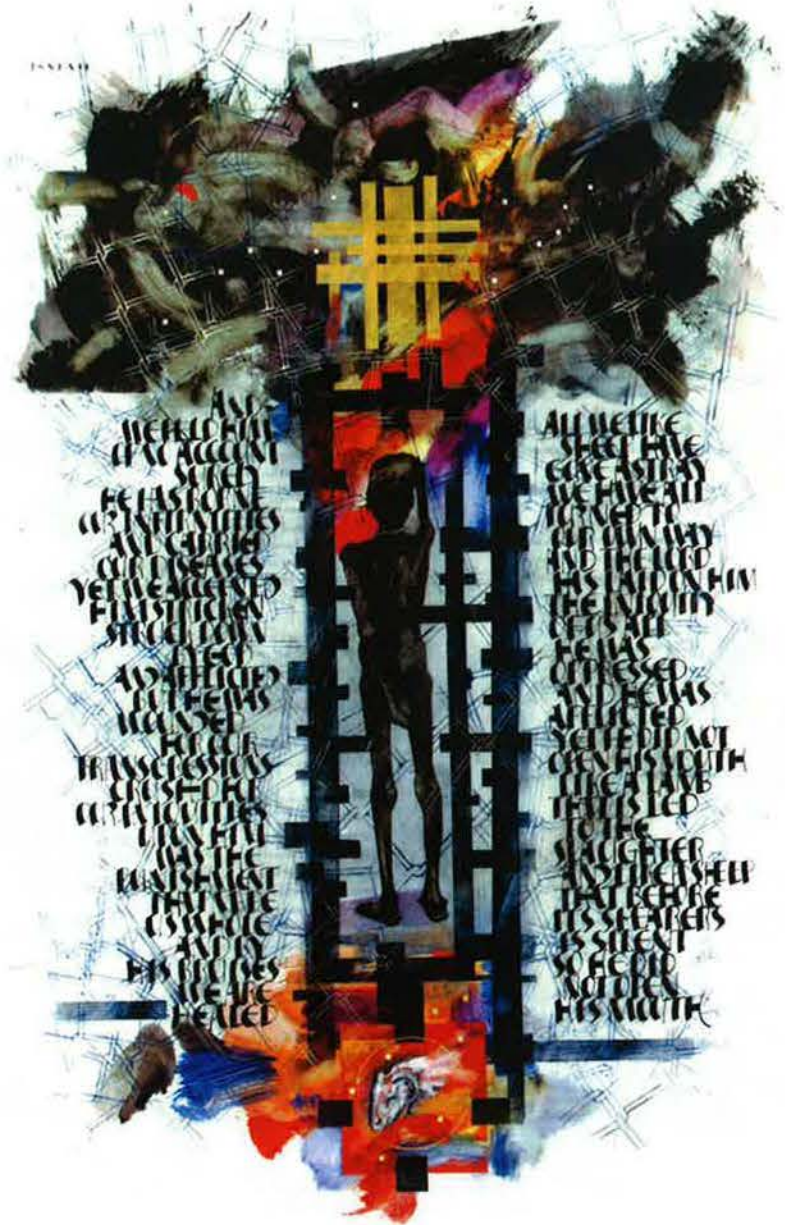
By the grace of your creative love,
bless the time we share together today,
that through our conversations, listening and
prayers, we may grow ever more aware of the ways
your beauty shapes our world.

We offer this prayer in your holy name,
Amen.

*Where do you experience God's beauty
in nature?*

Suffering Servant

Isaiah 52-53



Reflection

Kings are supposed to look the part, right? Bedazzled in jewels, clothed with the finest garments, a king carries the air of royalty. He eats what he wants. He acts how he wants. Kings aren't known to lack much of anything.

The prophet Isaiah prepares us for a radically different king. This king is "despised" and "rejected" by his own people. His body "wounded" and "crushed" because of the evil his people had done and the good they had failed to do. In fact, this king is not even granted the title "king." He is called the suffering servant. Caged in a chain-linked fence, the suffering servant appears to be starving. His limbs are thin as twigs.

Could this suffering servant *really* be the one to save the world? By the incredible love of God, the answer is yes.

*Who in this world is suffering?
Have I thought to see Christ in them?*

Messianic Prediction

Isaiah 9:2-7; 11:1-16



Visio: Listening

Listen with the ear of your heart for a word or phrase that stirs you.

Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will **give you a sign**. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him **Immanuel**. ...

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**. His authority shall grow continually and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The **zeal of the Lord** of hosts will do this.

Journal ...

Birth of Christ:

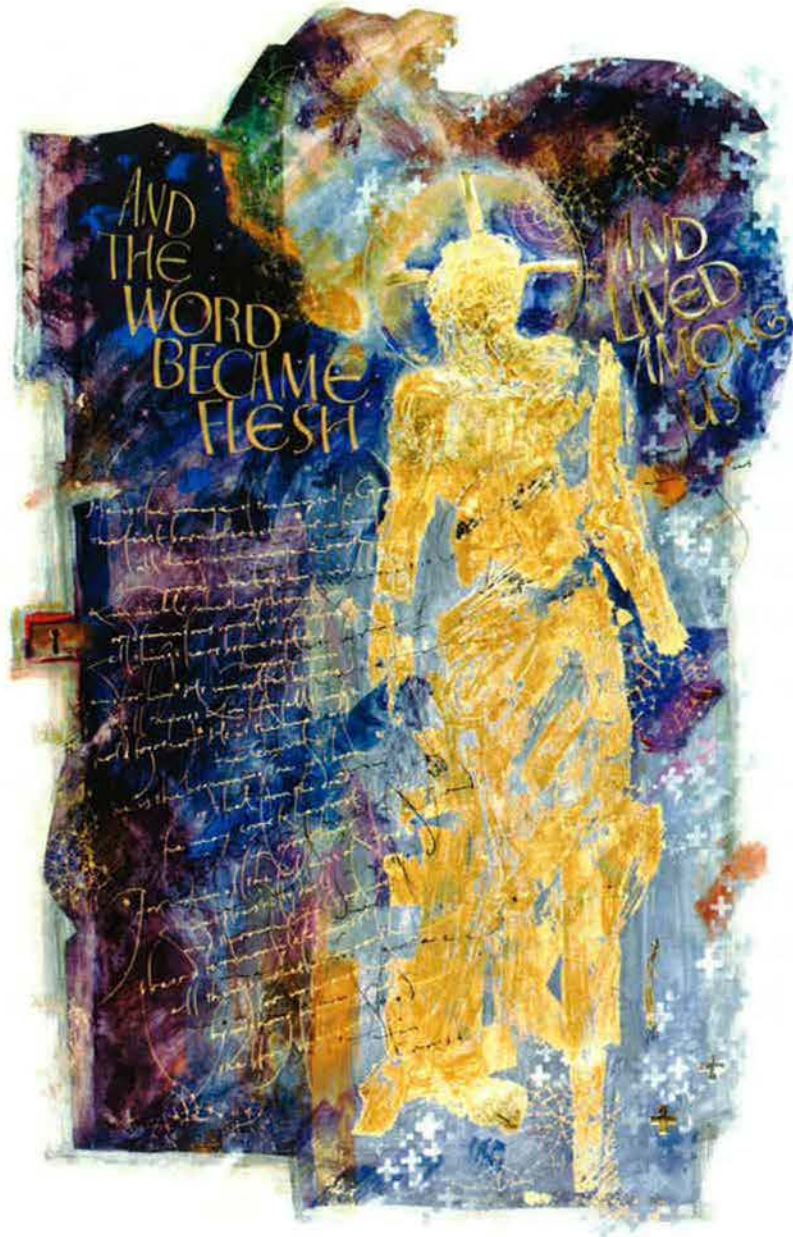
Christmas

John's famed Gospel starts off, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Christ the Word, the fully divine Word, was with God from the very beginning, creating and loving and giving life to all things. The story continues. Sin happened. Humanity fell. We needed help. We needed a savior ... and the Word could not stay away. "He was in the world," John writes. Christ the Word, the light, does not let the darkness overcome. He does not let the chaos break us down.

Jesus Christ the Word was born and baptized into *this* world. Our world. Our broken, needy world. Christmas is a season to celebrate the Incarnation, God's choice to become flesh and live among us. God's choice to dwell in the chaos. God's choice to love this broken world more than we can ever imagine.

The Word Made Flesh

John 1:1-14



Let us pray ...

God of Light,

You have been with us from the beginning.

You are here with us now and we pray in confidence that you will dwell with us forever.

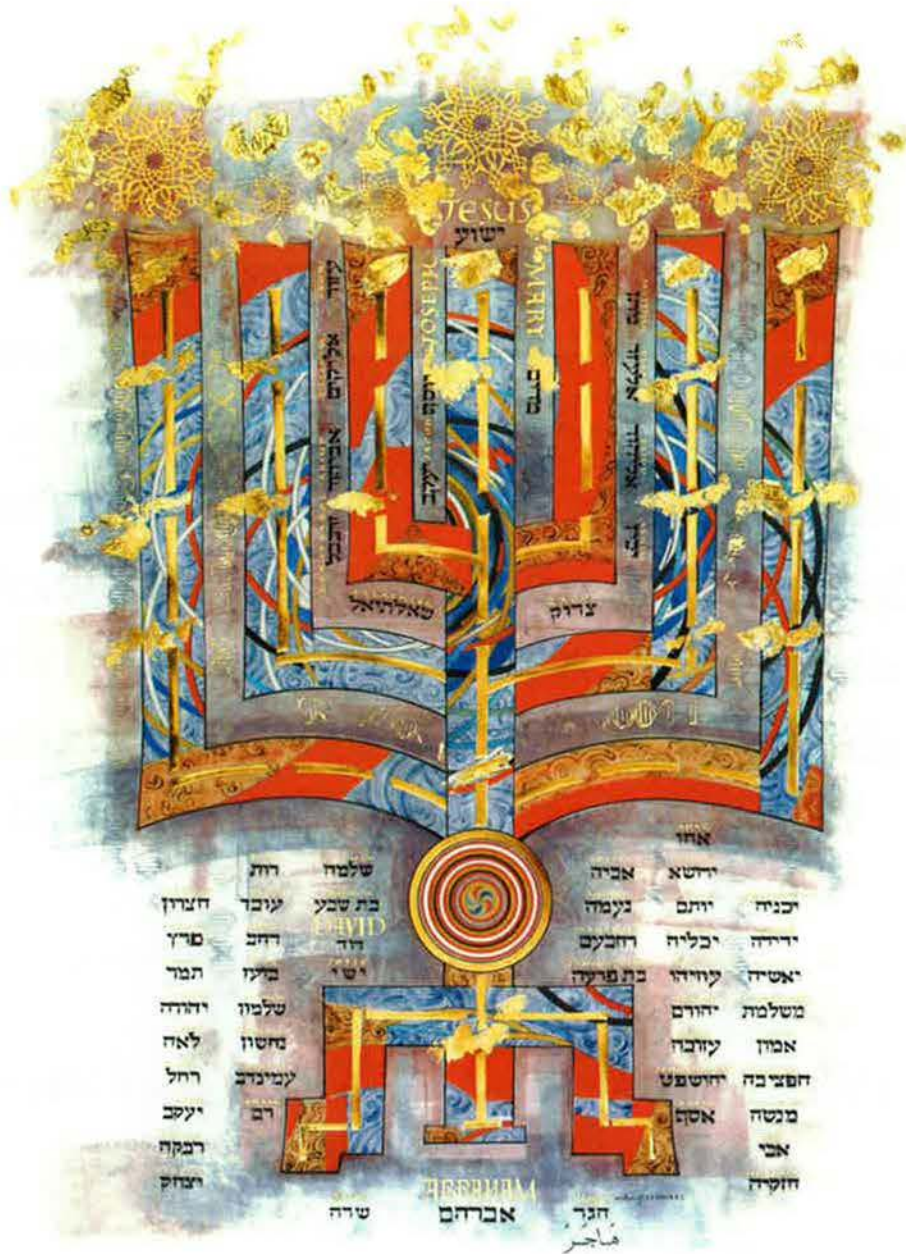
Ignite our minds and enliven our hearts, that we may have the courage and strength to illuminate your Word in our communities.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

What makes your heart feel most ignited and enlivened?

Genealogy of Jesus

Matthew 1



Reflection

This clan must have had some epic family reunions.

Picture Jesus's family strewn together in one backyard. Boaz and Bathsheba tossing the frisbee. Abraham manning the grill. Jesse and David fighting over the last piece of cake.

Jesus has a real human history. His genealogy gives us 42 generations worth. Recognized here are names of overachievers and jokesters, heroes and disappointments. Jesus understands family life — all the joys and challenges it brings.

Christ also has a real human future. The divine familial gold looks to be catapulting off the page, ready to illuminate its next name. Could that name be yours? Jesus lives in the words and actions of Christians everywhere. In baptism, our names get chiseled into Christ's family tree — brothers and sisters for good.

In what ways does your family influence your faith life?

Baptism of Jesus

Mark 1:9-11



Visio: Meditating

Allow this word or phrase to dwell in your heart and mind. Let it move you into dialogue with God.

I'm visualizing the heavens being "torn open" — what an amazing image!

Why was Jesus baptized if he was already free of sin?

I've never pictured the Holy Spirit as a dove before.

What does your voice sound like, God?

Journal ...

Ministry of Christ:

Ordinary Time

A few weeks of Ordinary Time await the Church between Christmas and Lent. Stockings are stowed away and trees hauled to the curb. The season of Christmas is over, but the Church is not quite ready to enter into Lent. (Heading straight from the Incarnation to the Passion of Christ would be pretty intense!)

What can we take away from winter Ordinary Time? This season offers a great chance to focus on the life and ministry of the Jesus of history. Our God was alive on this very earth, walking and talking, preaching and teaching. Jesus embraced sinners with mercy. He cured the sick and fed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread. From birth to death, Jesus spent his short years on earth ministering to others in both miraculous and ordinary ways. His witness serves as an example for us all.

Two Cures

Mark 5:25-43



Let us pray ...

Compassionate Healer,

You remedied disease by the gentle
touch of your hands.
Revive those areas of our lives that
need healing,
so that we might have the strength to
live our faith to the fullest.
We pray in your holy name,
Amen

What areas in your life need healing?

Loaves and Fishes

Mark 6:33-44; 8:1-10



things. "When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late. Send them away so that they may go into the surrounding villages and buy food for themselves.' But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to these people?' And he said to them, 'How many loaves have you?' They said to him, 'Five, and two fish.' Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down on groups on the grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed them and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled. And he took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. These when the boys numbered five thousand men. Jesus then he made the disciples get into the boat to go on ahead to the other side of Tyberias, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray. When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. When he saw that they were remaining on the sea, he came toward them early in the morning walking on the sea. He was rebuked to pass this on by. 'But why are they now here without us? They saw this, thought it was a ghost and fled out.' For they all saw him and were terrified, but someone said to him, 'He is here!' 'But he said, 'Do not be afraid.' Then he got into the boat with them in the wind ceased, and they were utterly astounded. For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. When they had sailed over the sea, they came to land at a town called Bethsaida. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that which he was doing to bring the sick to him, so wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, cities or villages or farms, they laid the sick on the mats and on the ground, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they were of that sort of his disciples were coming with defiled hands that is without washing them. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders, and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it, and they do all or many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups and vessels and benches. The Pharisees and the scribes asked him, Why do your disciples not fast according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands? He said to them, Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written:

The people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; so vainly do they worship me, teaching human precepts and traditions. You abandon the commandment of God to hold to human traditions. Then he said to them, You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your traditions! For a time said I found some fathers as some mothers, and the one speaks evil of father or mother, which the other says is a thing of command to the father or mother. Whichever of these might have had power over you from that is an offering to God. The one who keeps precept during one thing for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition, that you have hardened me. And you do many things like this. Then he called the crowd again and said to them, Listen to me, all of you, and understand. There is nothing outside a person

Reflection

Think about the last time you were really hungry. How long had it been since your last meal? Three hours? Seven hours? The crowd described in Mark's Gospel hadn't eaten in three days. Imagine — hear their grumblings. Feel their distress.

Jesus did.

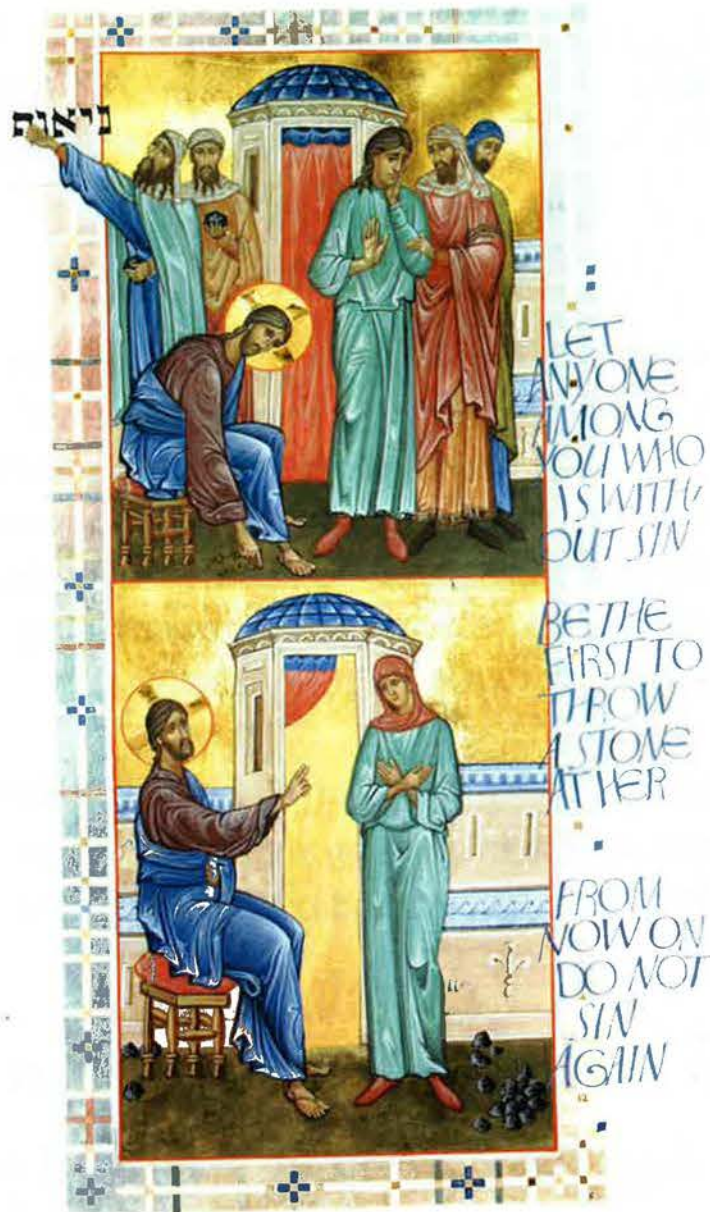
Christ was in tune with the needs of the famished crowd, so in tune that his heart was moved. *His heart was moved*. The surge of compassion Jesus felt for his people didn't stay inside. The movement in his heart led Christ to act — and the result was spectacular. With five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus fed all 5,000 hungry people. These Scripture pages are filled with bread and fish. They just keep multiplying!

Feelings of empathy, shock and even anger can be the driving sparks that ignite action. Like Jesus, we too can do an amazing amount of good in our ministry today. But our hearts need to be moved first.

When is the last time your heart was moved by the suffering around you?

Woman Taken in Adultery

John 7:53-8:11



Visio: Seeing

Gaze upon the illumination with the eyes of your heart to see what God wants you to see. Be open to the thoughts, feelings or impressions that the art evokes. Where do you meet God in this illumination?

The man right behind Jesus seems to be staring me down. It's making me feel uncomfortable.

Is he accusing me of casting a stone?

I can't stop looking at the pile of stones in the bottom corner.

The woman is wearing red shoes. Jesus has a trace of red around his halo.

Might there be a connection?

Journal ...

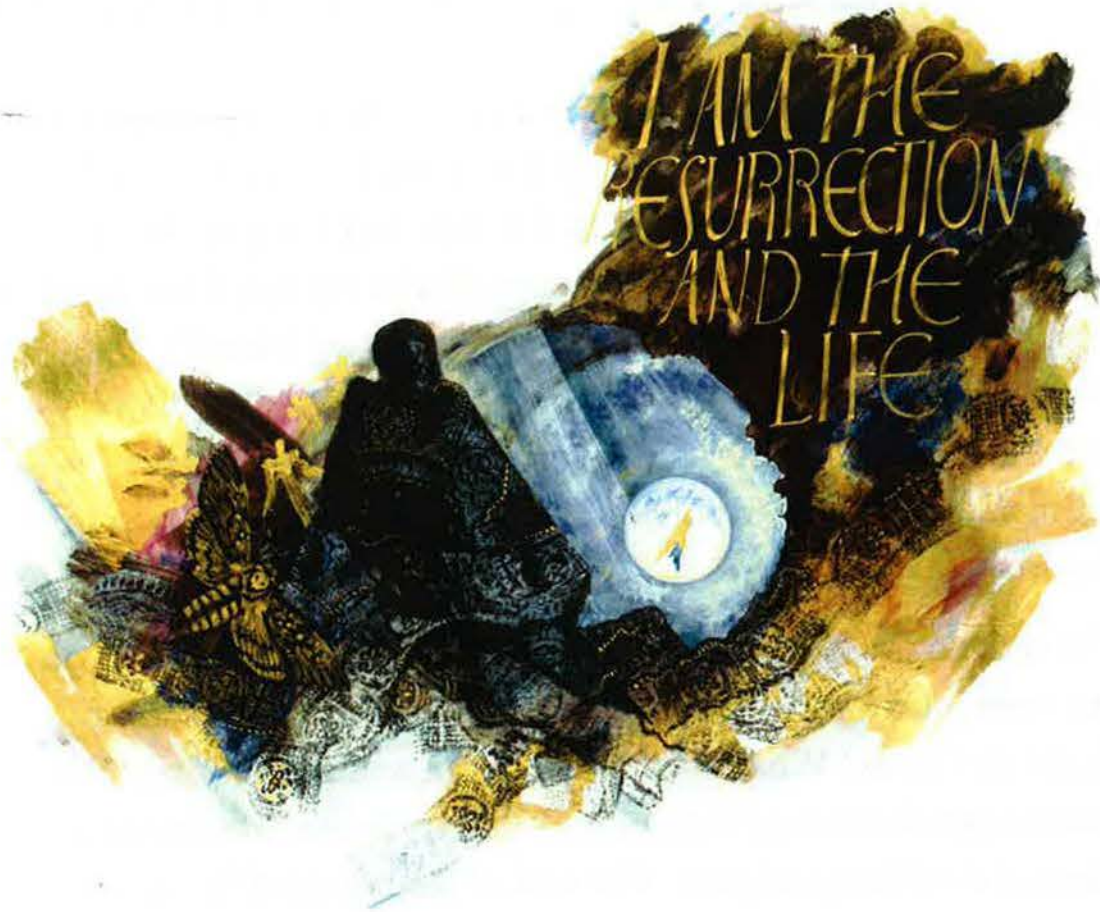
Journeying with Christ: Lent & Triduum

The seasons of Lent and the Triduum invite us to journey with Christ as he prepares to take up the cross. In the time leading up to his death, Jesus tended to the sick and hungry. He forgave — and dared others to do the same. Christ revealed his divinity on a mountaintop and his humanity at a dead friend's tomb. During his final meal, Jesus offered the world his very body and blood. These earthly ministries led Jesus to his ultimate ministry — dying on the cross to bring salvation to the world.

The movements of Lent invite us to slow down and reflect on our own journeys with God. How is prayer helping me grow closer to Christ? What about my fasting and almsgiving? We move with these meditations into the Triduum, the most sacred days of the liturgical year. The end of Jesus's earthly journey marks the beginning of a new journey into eternal life.

Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1-57



Let us pray ...

Son of Humankind,

Your friend Lazarus died, and you wept.
The raw ache of grief tugged at your heart.

You know what it feels like to mourn.
You also know what it's like to rise again.

Console us in our times of despair.
In our darkest days, help us to always live
and believe in you,
so that we may enjoy everlasting life with
you in heaven.

We pray in your holy name,
Amen.

*Consider Jesus getting emotional.
What feelings does that evoke in you?*

Eucharist

Luke 22:14-20



Reflection

A key concept in this passage from Luke and in the Eucharistic celebration itself is sacrifice. We see this beautiful gift of sacrifice illuminated here in three ways.

The first panel shows the gifts consecrated during Mass, the sacrificial offering of bread and wine. Blood pours out of the sacrificial lamb in the center panel. The image of Christ as the sacrificial lamb serves as a reminder of the new covenant Christ promised to his people. During the Eucharistic prayer, the words of Christ ring out: "This cup is poured out *for you*." What an intimate sacrifice. The third panel depicts the ciborium, the vessel in which the Eucharist is reserved.

Together, these Eucharistic illuminations help us see that Christ's sacrifice, his love for us, is ongoing. Christians have reaped the benefits of the love of Christ from the night of the Last Supper to today. And by the grace of God, this love will continue forever and ever. Amen.

When was a time you sacrificed something for someone you love? What did that feel like?

The Crucifixion

Luke 23:26-49



Visio: Praying

Pray to God, allowing for the transformation of your being and feelings. Give to God what you have found in your heart.

Remember me, Jesus. Remember me when you come into your kingdom. Even in death, you radiate light brighter than this world has ever seen. You shined *in death*, Jesus. Were you scared? Were you relieved? Were you ready to go?

Thank you for your sacrifice, for the love you embodied on that cross. May it remain a source of inspiration and grace in my heart. Amen.

Journal ...

Rejoicing in Christ:

Easter

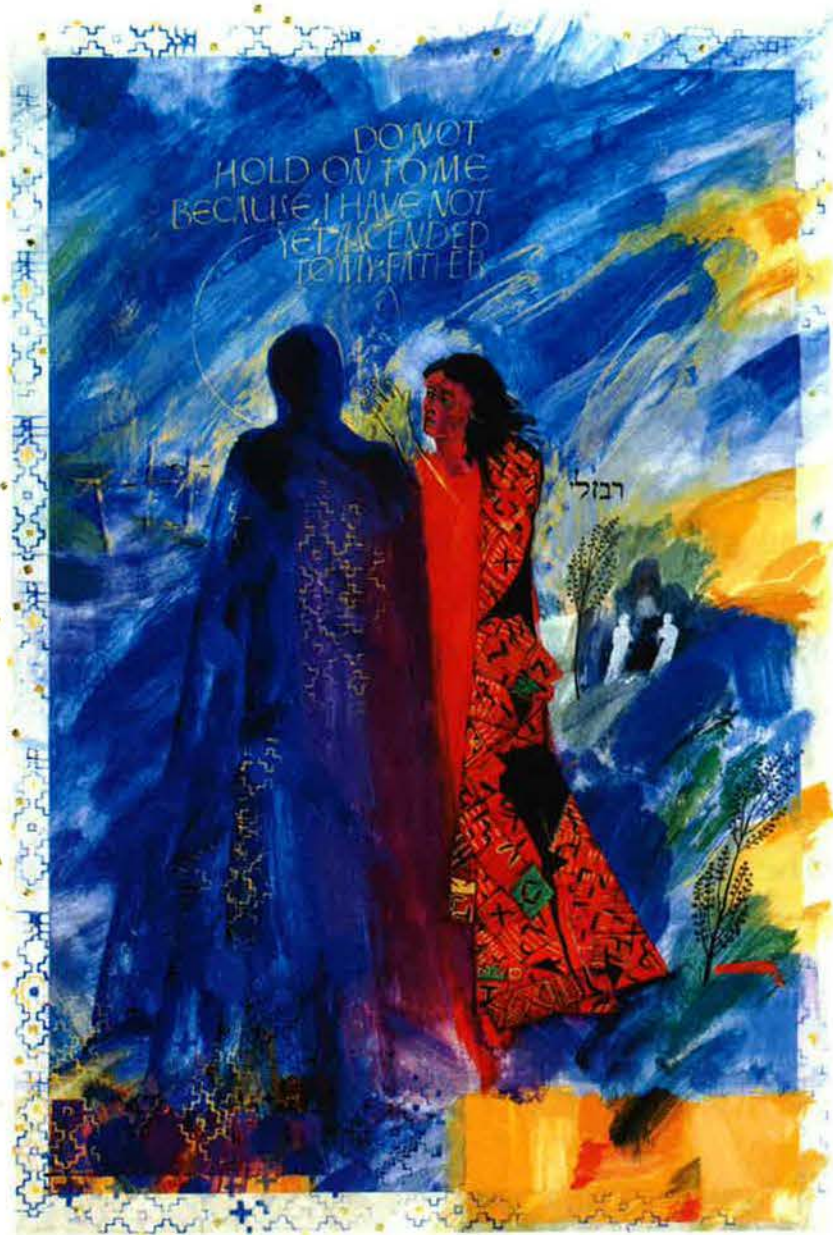
The Entrance Antiphon for Easter Sunday Mass reads,
"I have risen, and I am with you still, alleluia.
You have laid your hand upon me, alleluia.
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge, alleluia, alleluia."

The Christian church rejoices together during the season of Easter. In the spirit of Pentecost, people of all different backgrounds gather as one this season to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving. Christ has risen! Alleluia! The light of the world continues to shine now until the very end of time.

Christ will remain with us forever, wrapping us in love even when our hearts are troubled, when we're feeling afraid and can't see what's next. Our living God defeated death and now dwells within us, as steady as a gentle inhale and exhale. After a long Lenten journey, the church stands basking in the glow of the resurrected Christ, an Easter people born anew.

The Resurrection

John 20:1-23



Let us pray ...

Wonderful God,

Your beloved Son burst forth out of the tomb on that third day victorious.

Alleluia!

May we awe and hope in the glory of his resurrection, so that our hearts are moved to witness to all that the risen Christ did, does and will do for this world he so loves.

We pray through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

*Bask in the glory of the resurrection.
What do you want to say to Christ?*

Pentecost

Acts 1:6-11; 2:1-47



Reflection

Together, those gathered at Pentecost heard the slashing of the swirling wind. Together, they felt the fire of the Holy Spirit electrifying their tongues. The energy sounds like the energy of a crowd packed in at a football game. In fact, that's how artist Donald Jackson depicts Pentecost in this illumination. Those at the bottom of the page were inspired by the spirit Jackson witnessed at a Saint John's football game.

Pentecost was like the ultimate two minute drill.

Guts wrenched, hearts pounding with anticipation, the crowd knows something special is about to happen. You have people of different races and ethnicities, different classes and genders, all gathered *together* in a sea of spirit, cheering on one team with one goal.

That's the kind of energy ignited by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, a heart pounding euphoria for the new Church, a diverse Church, gathered in a sea of spirit, cheering on Team Christ ... *together*.

How can we enculturate the Gospel message?

Last Judgment

Matthew 24-25



Visio: Contemplating

Notice the transforming presence of God within you. Surrender all that is stirring, even if only briefly, and rest in God's embrace.

On the first day, you were here. On the last day, you will be here. Today, you are here. Through chaos and calm, through death and new life, you made your presence known.

What will the last judgment be like?

Who knows. But I am certain that you will be walking alongside me every step of the way ... and that is all the assurance I need.

Journal ...

Learning from Christ Ordinary Time

The Church labels this season "Ordinary Time," but no time we spend as Christians is really *ordinary*. The world constantly invites us to revel in new creation and new knowledge. There are new opportunities to love and serve all around. Christ encouraged his disciples to be life-long learners. After all, he is a life-long teacher. He calls his disciples to "follow me." To answer this call is to love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul. To be a disciple of Christ is to be merciful, to be pure in heart and to be a peacemaker.

It isn't always easy to do what we learn. Good people slip up and sin all the time. Coming out of the Easter season, we know that Christ redeemed us from all sin. His death and resurrection left us free to answer that call to "follow me." It left us free to never stop learning.

Beatitudes

Matthew 5:1-12



Let us pray ...

Beatitudes for Christ's Ministers

Blessed are the hospital chaplains,
for their presence comforts the sick.
Blessed are the teachers,
for their knowledge shapes the children of God.
Blessed are the youth ministers,
for their enthusiasm awakens young minds.
Blessed are the counselors,
for their sensitivity conveys mercy.
Blessed are the justice advocates,
for their conviction reveals the Gospel mission.
Blessed are the campus ministers,
for their creativity captivates young hearts.
Blessed are the parish volunteers,
for their commitment invites others to see God.
Blessed are all who minister in Christ's name,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Amen.

Who do you consider blessed?

What qualities do these people share?

You Shall Love the Lord

Matthew 22:37-40

YOU SHALL LOVE THE
LORD YOUR GOD
WITH ALL YOUR HEART,
AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL,
AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.
THIS IS THE GREATEST
AND FIRST COMMANDMENT,
AND A SECOND IS LIKE IT:
YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR
NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.
ON THESE TWO COMMAND-
MENTS HANG ALL THE LAW
AND THE PROPHETS.

Reflection

Think about what it feels like when you're reunited with your best friend. Your heart feels like it's about to burst. A goofy grin plasters itself on your face. You may even find your eyes welling with tears, overcome with joy, gratitude — and love.

That's the profound kind of love God calls us to — and then some. It's easy to love friends with great enthusiasm, but God asks even more. Love your neighbors — the supermarket clerk, the classmate, the fussy child in the back pew — with a love that makes your heart burst. Love God with a love that moves you to tears. This love isn't always easy. It can take work to love neighbors that bother us or are different from us. It can even take work to love God in times of loss or despair. But Jesus teaches us that love is always worth the work.

It's always worth it.

*What do you love most about
Christ the Lord?*

Call of the Disciples

John 1:35-51



Visio: Becoming Christ— Like

Return to God's word. Allow it to transform you.
Notice how your faith is being deepened and your
way of life motivated.

How can I be a disciple of Christ
in my community?

Who in this world is most in need of
my love and care?

What do I need to leave behind in order
to follow Jesus?

Why did Jesus call *me*?

Journal ...