

Background to scripture readings in January 2016

Sunday January 3

Isaiah 60:1-6 The people of Israel return to Jerusalem. Isaiah tells them to arise for God is with them; they will reflect the presence and power of God.

Ephesians 3:1-12 Both Jews and Gentiles are called to share in Christ's saving activity. This is the "mystery of Christ". Paul's insistence on Gentiles being equal members of the church has led to his imprisonment.

Matthew 2:1-12 "Wise men" (in Latin: magi) were Persian astrologers and interpreters of dreams. Astrology was widely accepted then and a star was to be associated with each person .

Sunday January 10

Isaiah 43:1-7

Judah has complained that God has deserted them, his people, in the destruction of Jerusalem and in their exile.

Acts 8:14-17

Philip has proclaimed the good news in Samaria. Many have listened to what he has to say; some have been healed. Many have been baptized.

Luke 3:15-17,21-22

People flock to John the Baptist, responding to his urging to start new, ethical lives – as a way of preparing for Jesus. John has condemned those who seek his baptism with no intention of reforming their ways.

Sunday January 17

Isaiah 62:1-5 Persia has permitted the people of Israel to return to a small parcel of land near Jerusalem. After initial elation, the people begin to believe that God doesn't care for them. God breaks his silence.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 The Christians at Corinth have written to Paul about spiritual gifts. He continues to teach them about gifts provided through the Holy Spirit.

John 2:1-11 John tells in John 20:30-31 that he has written about some of the “signs” done by Jesus so that you (the reader) may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God...” In today's passage John writes about the first sign revealing who Jesus is.

Sunday January 24

Nehemiah 8:1-3,5-6,8-10 An edict from the Persian king permits Jewish exiles to return home. The people now gather to hear the prophet Ezra reading from Leviticus. He reads in Hebrew, and priestly assistants translate and interpret.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a Paul has told the Christians at Corinth that spiritual gifts come through the Holy Spirit and are given for the benefit of the whole community. Now he turns to the nature of the Church.

Luke 4:14-21 Jesus has been tempted by the devil in the wilderness. He returns to the synagogue in Nazareth and applies words from Isaiah to himself. He is, he tells them, the promised messiah

Sunday January 31

Jeremiah 1:4-10: With Jeremiah's help, King Josiah has guided the people back to faithfulness. God speaks to Samuel... since before he was born, God has known him and has dedicated him to his service. God will support him in his ministry, despite his youth and inexperience.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13: Paul has instructed the Christians at Corinth about the gifts of the Spirit and the nature of the church. Now he writes that the most important gift is love... the expression in the church of Christ's love for us.

Luke 4:21-30: Jesus has read verses from Isaiah in the synagogue and has told the worshippers that he fulfils those verses: He is the messiah who will rescue all those who are in need; God's promises made to Israel are fulfilled in Jesus in the new age.