

LECTIONARY SUPRANARRATIVE YEAR A: THE YEAR OF MATTHEW (2023)

Advent-Christmas

Advent begins the liturgical year, but the Lectionary supranarrative doesn't start at the beginning of Matthew. Instead, the First Sunday of Advent has Jesus near the end (chapter 24), describing Christ's manifestation in glory at the end of time. The Christmas season ends with Christ's manifestation at the Jordan as the one who "fulfills all righteousness" on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, a perfect transition into Year A Ordinary Time, where Matthew's Jesus is the preacher of higher righteousness, beyond the letter of the law to its spirit.



Matthew's infancy narrative is typical of his Jewish Jesus: Like Joseph in the Hebrew Scriptures, the mystery is revealed to Mary's husband in dreams (4th Sunday of Advent); Like Moses, the infant Jesus is concealed from the evil plot of a ruler (Holy Family). The Gentiles need the Jewish revelation if they are to find the object of their revelation (Epiphany)

Sunday/ Feast	Date	Gospel	Theme
1 Advent	11/27	Mt 24:37-44	Stay Awake! Christ's manifestation in glory at the end of time.
2 Advent	12/4	Mt 3:1-12	John the Baptist: Prepare the way, call to repentance.
3 Advent	12/11	Mt 11:2-11	Jesus' revelation to John the Baptist: "Go and tell John what you see..."
4 Advent	12/18	Mt 1: 18-24	Annunciation to Joseph in a dream: "She will bear a son...name him Jesus."
Christmas	12/25	Vigil: Mt 1:1-25	Genealogy of Jesus: Salvation history has come to a climax in the Incarnation.
Holy Family	12/30	Mt 2:13-15	Like Moses, the infant Jesus concealed from the massacre of innocents.
Mary, MOG	1/1	Lk 2:16-21	Shepherds tell Mary & Joseph the angels' announcement.
Epiphany	1/8	Mt 2:1-12	Manifestation to the Gentiles, foreshadowing the Passion
Baptism of the Lord	1/9	Mt 3:13-17	Christ's manifestation at the Jordan as the one who "fulfills all righteousness."

Winter Ordinary Time

There are five general blocks of material in the Ordinary Time supranarrative, centered on the five great sermons, and presented in an alternating pattern of narrative and teaching. In order to cover the gospel in 34 weeks, the Lectionary has edited Matthew to highlight his particular theological concerns: it portrays Jesus as the new Moses by focusing on words (his teaching and especially parables) rather than deeds (miracle stories). This new Moses offers a new Torah, reflecting Matthew's theme of Church, the events that the Lectionary *does* include center on the disciples and their relationship with Jesus.

Sunday/ Feast	Date	Gospel	Theme
Transitional Sunday: Who is Jesus? (continues theme of Baptism of the Lord)			
Ordinary 2	1/15	Jn 1:29-34	Witness of John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God."
1. Christ's Teaching on Life in the Kingdom of God			
<i>Narrative:</i>			
Ordinary 3	1/22	Mt 4:12-23	Preaching in Galilee, Call of the first disciples
<i>First Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount</i>			
Ordinary 4	1/29	Mt 5:1-12a	Introduction, Beatitudes
Ordinary 5	2/5	Mt 5:13-16	Parables of Salt & Light
Ordinary 6	2/12	Mt 5:17-37	<i>Words of Jesus on the Law: On murder, on adultery, on divorce, on swearing,</i>
Ordinary 7	2/19	Mt 5:38-48	<i>Words of Jesus on the Law: On retaliation; Love your enemies</i>
Ordinary 8	*	Mt 6:24-34	Serving Two Masters; On anxiety
Ordinary 9	*	Mt 7:21-27	Warnings Against Self-deception; Hearers & Doers of the Word

* An unfortunate aspect of placing such a pivotal block of Matthew's teaching in Winter Ordinary Time is that the beginning of Lent almost always breaks into the proclamation of the Sermon on the Mount, this year right after the 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Because each liturgical year must end on the 34th Sunday, or the Feast of Christ the King, we "lose" a few weeks of Ordinary time in this break. This year, the 8th, 9th and 10th Sundays are lost. Catechist and preachers should note this, and perhaps compensate for this by drawing from these teachings in some other way.

Lent-Triduum-Easter-Pentecost (The Paschal Cycle)

The only time we hear from Matthew on the Sundays of Lent are on the first 2 Sundays. These Gospels are characteristic of this evangelist's approach to Jesus as the "new Moses." He quotes Deuteronomy to the devil as he resists temptation to which Israel fell prey in the desert (1st Sunday): Jesus will not demand bread from God, or test God ("Is God in our midst or not?"), nor will he make alliance with the kingdoms of the world.

We return to Matthew on Palm Sunday with his Passion account. Here, he highlights the themes we have come to expect from him: There are parallels and contrasts with his infancy stories: As Herod Conspired with the Gentile Magi, so the religious leaders conspire with Pilate; As the Magi are warned in a dream, so Herod's wife is warned. As Jesus birth is accompanied by signs of nature, so is his death and resurrection. The community of disciples (representing the Church) is portrayed in all its good will and in its weakness.

Matthew's account of the Ascension is essentially a summary of Christ's paschal victory: he has "full authori-

ty,” and promises that “I am with you always.” In true Matthean form, a mission is entrusted to the Church to “Go, make disciples.”

Sunday/ Feast	Date	Gospel	Theme
1 Lent	2/26	MT 4:1-11	Jesus is tempted in the desert (contrast Israel in the desert).
2 Lent	3/5	Mt 17:1-9	Transfiguration of Jesus (recalling Moses’ theophany on Sinai).
3 Lent	3/12	Jn 4:5-32	Jesus and the Woman of Samaria
4 Lent	3/19	Jn 9:1-41	Jesus and the Man Born Blind
5 Lent	3/26	Jn 11:1-45	Jesus Raises Lazarus
Palm Sunday	4/2	Mt 21:1-11; Mt 26:14-27:66	Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem; Jesus is Crucified, Dies, and is buried
Holy Thurs.	4/6	Jn 13:1-15	Jesus washes his disciples’ feet
Good Friday	4/7	Jn 18:1-19:42	The Passion according to John
Easter	4/8-9	Mt 28:1-10	The women encounter the Risen Lord
Easter 2	4/16	Jn 20:19-31	The Risen Lord greets the disciples, Thomas
Easter 3	4/23	Lk 24:13-35	The Risen Lord appears to 2 Disciples on the Road to Emmaus
Easter 4	4/30	Jn 10:1-10	“I am the gate for the Sheep”
Easter 5	5/7	Jn 14:1-12	“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.”
Easter 6	5/14	Jn 14:15-21	“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always.”
Ascension	5/21	Mt 28:16-20	Jesus commissions the disciples to “Go, make disciples.”
Pentecost	5/28	Jn 20:19-23	“Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Summer/Fall Ordinary Time

As we mentioned above, we “lose” the 8th, 9th and 10th Sundays of Ordinary Time this year, to adjust for the liturgical year, as well as for the Feasts of the Most Holy Trinity and The Body and Blood of the Lord. This is one of the least disruptive interruptions to the cycle, as we lose only the tail end of the Sermon on the Mount, and the call of Levi narrative before the second discourse.

Note that the reading of this second discourse is not exactly sequential. After the 11th Sunday’s selection, the Lectionary’s editing omits Jesus’ advice on simplicity and how to respond to acceptance and rejection. After the 12th Sunday’s call to fearless confession, the Lectionary omits Jesus’ prediction of division within families on his account.

Sunday/ Feast	Date	Gospel	Theme
Trinity	6/4	Jn 3:16-18	"God so loved the world..."
Body & Blood	6/11	Jn 6:51-58	"Whoever eats this bread will live forever..."
2. The Spread of God's Kingdom			
<i>Narrative:</i>			
Ordinary 10	*	Mt 9:9-13	The Call of Matthew the Tax Collector
<i>Second Discourse: The Mission Discourse</i>			
Ordinary 11	6/18	Mt 9:36-10:8	Sending of the Twelve
Ordinary 12	6/25	Mt 10:26-33	Fearless Confession
Ordinary 13	7/2	Mt 10:37-42	Conditions of Discipleship

The material containing the 3rd Great Sermon spans 2 full chapters, 80 verses in all. The Lectionary, however, selects only 6 verses to represent the entire block. Upon examination, however, this makes sense. The story about John the Baptist at the beginning of Chapter 11 was already heard on the 3rd Sunday of Advent. Most of Chapter 12 also appears in Mark's gospel, and so is heard in Year B. The few verses we hear this year are the ones unique to Matthew, containing some of the most beautiful words attributed to Jesus: "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden..." The "Sermon in Parables" is contained in 52 of the 58 verses of Matthew 13. The long versions of the gospels on Sundays 15-17 covers this sermon in full, thus meeting the Lectionary's objective of presenting the unique teaching and perspective of this year's evangelist.

3. The Mystery of God's Kingdom			
<i>Narrative:</i>			
Ordinary 14	7/9	Mt 11:25-30	Jesus' Thanksgiving to the Father; Comfort for the Heavy-Laden
<i>Third Discourse: The Sermon in Parables</i>			
Ordinary 15	7/16	Mt 13:1-23	Sower Parable; Reason for Parables; Blessedness of Disciples; Interpretation of Sower
Ordinary 16	7/23	Mt 13:24-43	Weeds/Wheat Parable, Mustard Seed, Leaven, Use of Parables, Interp. Weeds/Wheat
Ordinary 17	7/30	Mt 13:44-52	Hidden Treasure & Pearl, Parable of Net, Parable of Householder

Of the 18 episodes that precede the Sermon on the Church, 5 are chose for the Lectionary Supranarrative, Of the episodes not used, 3 appear in Year B, and the Transfiguration account appeared of the 2nd Sunday of Lent this year, and so normally is omitted here. This year, however, the Feast of the Transfiguration falls on a Sunday, and so replaces the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Most of the remaining material is picked up in the weekday Lectionary. All of the material used from the sermon is uniquely Matthean, and is pro-claimed on Sundays 23 and 24.

4. The Church: A Place Where God’s Kingdom Begins on Earth			
<i>Narrative:</i>			
Ordinary 18	*	Mt 14:13-21	Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand
Transfigura- tion	8/6	Mt 17:1-9	Transfiguration of the Lord
Ordinary 19	8/13	Mt 14:22-33	Jesus Walks on Water
Ordinary 20	8/20	Mt 15:21-28	Jesus and the Canaanite Woman
Ordinary 21	8/21	Mt 16:13-20	Peter’s Confession & Primacy
Ordinary 22	9/3	Mt 16:21-27	Passion Prediction 1, Discipleship
<i>Fourth Discourse: The Sermon on the Church/Community</i>			
Ordinary 23	9/10	Mt 18:15-20	On Reproving One’s Brother
Ordinary 24	9/17	Mt 20:1-16a	On Reconciliation; Parable of the Unmerciful Servant



The 5th and final block of Matthew is probably the best example of the Lectionary editor' crafting of the supranarrative in Year A. As in previous sections, they have the 3-year Lectionary cycle in mind : almost everything that has been edited of Year A appears somewhere else in Ordinary Time of Years B and C, and all the uniquely Matthean material is presented here. Especially important for Matthew's vision of Jesus' ministry becoming the Church's ministry are the parable of the laborers in the vineyard and the parable of the two sons (Sundays 25 & 26). Ordinary Time this year concludes with the uniquely Matthean story of the final judgment (the separation of the sheep and goats). When the righteous are rewarded for their care of "the least of mine," we might be reminded of the certainty of judgment promised on the 1st Sunday of Advent, and see now what the terms of that judgment will be. As we prepare for a new liturgical year, we are called to deepen the conversion presumed by our baptism, and to renew our commitment to "carry out everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

5. The Kingdom of God Will Come in God's Own Time			
<i>Narrative:</i>			
Ordinary 25	9/24	Mt 20:1-16a	Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard
Ordinary 26	10/1	Mt 21:28-32	Parable of the Two Sons
Ordinary 27	10/8	Mt 21:33-43	Parable of the Wicked Tenants
Ordinary 28	10/15	Mt 22:1-4	Parable of the Marriage Feast
Ordinary 29	10/22	Mt 22:15-21	Tribute to Caesar
Ordinary 30	10/29	Mt 22:34-40	The Great Commandment
Ordinary 31	11/5	Mt 23:1-12	Against Hypocrisy & Ambition
<i>Fifth Discourse: Eschatological Sermon</i>			
Ordinary 32	11/12	Mt 25:1-3	Parable of the Ten Virgins
Ordinary 33	11/19	Mt 25:14-30	Parable of Talents
Ordinary 34 Christ the King	11/26	Mt 25:31-46	Parable of the Last Judgment (Sheep & Goats)

This outline was based in part on Normand Bonneau, "the Synoptic Gospels in the Sunday Lectionary: Ordinary Time," in *Questions liturgiques* 75 (1994): 154-169.