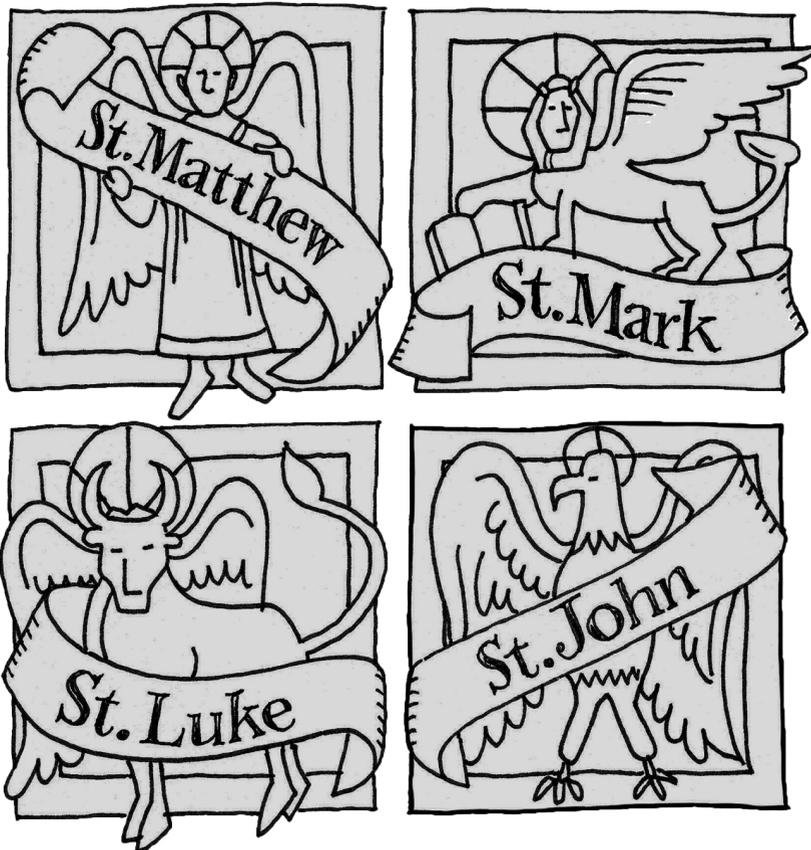


YEAR C

Drawn *to the Gospels*

An Illustrated Lectionary



JAY SIDEBOTHAM

 CHURCH
PUBLISHING
INCORPORATED



*This book is dedicated to Frances,
who after many years of marriage remains kind enough
to chuckle at my cartoons.*



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INTRODUCTION

How Would You Tell the Story of Jesus?

What part of the story would you emphasize? What do you think is most important for people to know about Jesus? Evidently, telling the story of Jesus is something we're all supposed to do. In the service of Holy Baptism, the following question is asked of the whole congregation:

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

It is a promise that we will share the Good News of Jesus as we know it, a promise that we will tell the story. There are lots of ways to do that. This book is just one of them, as it moves us through the church year, beginning with the First Sunday in Advent. For each Sunday, we include a cartoon to illustrate something about the portion of the gospel to be read in church, a few comments about the reading, and some questions to think about.

It's exciting that there's more than one way to tell this story. We give thanks in particular for the four gospels in the New Testament, and the varied ways that they share the story of Jesus.

What About the Cover of This Book?

For a long time, the Church has recognized the distinctive voices of the gospels and represented them with ancient symbols: Matthew is represented as a human being; Mark as a lion; Luke as an ox; and John as an eagle. Each character is depicted with wings, indicating the presence and participation of God in the writing of the gospels. The symbols, depicted on the cover, have biblical roots. We read about four such figures in the Book of Ezekiel (chapter 1) and also in the Revelation to John (4:6–9ff).

As you might imagine, commentators over the centuries have offered various interpretations of what these symbols mean, some more far

fetched than others. For example, the symbol of Matthew—a winged man, or perhaps an angel—represents the humanity of Jesus, noting the way that the gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus. The symbol of Mark—a lion—suggests a figure of courage and monarchy, as Jesus announces the nearness of the Realm of God. The symbol of Luke—an ox—reflects a figure of sacrifice, service, and strength. The symbol of John—an eagle—may represent the soaring, poetic language of the gospel, or the persistent and paradoxical theme in John's gospel that Jesus comes from above and returns to his heavenly realm when he is “lifted up,” lifted up on the cross, lifted up to heaven.

At various times in the history of the Church, efforts have been made to harmonize, and even homogenize the gospels. The *Diatessaron*, a document created by an ascetic named Tatian in the second century, is one of the earliest examples of this kind of attempt. The Church over the centuries decided to let four distinct voices stand, even if and when they disagree (and they sometimes do).

The Church has also decided that it is important for us to hear each of these voices. So we worship on Sunday guided by a three-year lectionary (the Revised Common Lectionary), a schedule of readings used by many denominations. On any given Sunday, you could drop in on a church down the street or on the other side of the globe and hear the same readings that are being read at your home church.

The lectionary is designed for a year-long focus on each of three gospels, Matthew, Mark, or Luke. They have been called the *synoptic gospels*, which literally means that they can be seen together, or alongside each other in parallel tracks (*syn*, being a prefix meaning “with”; *optic*, having to do with being seen). These three gospels follow a similar outline and share a great deal of material, though each one contains some writings that are unique. In the course of the three lectionary years, we read a good chunk of the Gospel of John, which follows a different outline and represents a different style of writing with a distinctive theological perspective on the story of Jesus.

Which Brings Us to the Gospel of Luke . . .

This year in church (Year C), we will focus on the third gospel, attributed to Luke, a master storyteller who provides us with a number of insights into the life of Jesus that we might not otherwise have. Take a minute to look at the way that Luke begins his gospel. In the first sentences, he addresses the letter to someone named Theophilus, which means “God-lover.” Theophilus could be a real individual or a generic title for anyone interested in knowing more about God. In the opening verses, Luke suggests that he had had a chance to see various accounts of the story of Jesus. Having seen them, he feels called to write his own “orderly account.” It makes one wonder if he thought the other accounts were not sufficiently orderly. He brings his considerable gifts as a historian and storyteller to the task of explaining who Jesus is and what the Jesus movement is all about.

The tradition around Luke is rich. He is identified as a Gentile. He traveled around the Mediterranean with Paul, which must have had joys and challenges. His writing style suggests education. And he was prolific. He wrote not only this gospel but also the Acts of the Apostles, which means, in terms of word count, that he is responsible for about 25 percent of the New Testament. A doctor by profession, he emphasizes healing. We can tell by his writings that he cared deeply about the power of the Spirit and a life of prayer. A renaissance kind of

guy, he is known as the patron saint of artists. He has a heart for those who were outsiders in his culture: women, Samaritans, those who were poor. He believes that these folks were on the receiving end of God's grace, so that the gospel has universal scope. He believes that the least among us have something to teach us, lessons often conveyed in parables like the Good Samaritan, where the outsider becomes the hero. That story and the parable of the Prodigal Son appear only in Luke's gospel. We are indebted to Luke for these classic stories of grace, forgiveness, and healing. As you read his gospel throughout the year, we will do our best to note his unique contributions to the gospel, as we give thanks that he decided to offer his orderly account of the story of Jesus.

Which Brings Us to This Book . . .

It is clear that, in the Christian tradition, spiritually vital congregations and spiritually vital individuals engage with the Bible on some level. The Prayer Book recommends that we read, hear, learn, mark, and inwardly digest scripture. There are many ways to do that. This book and its companions for the other two years of the lectionary cycle offer one way to go deeper with the gospel reading you hear on Sunday.

For each Sunday in the year, we include a cartoon drawing—one person's perspective on the story. Some of the cartoons are silly. Some are slightly irreverent. They are offered to bring the gospel passage to life, and they are offered with

a light touch, in the spirit of G.K. Chesterton, who said that angels could fly because they take themselves lightly. Then we include a paragraph of commentary, followed by a few questions.

How to Use This Book

You might use it for your own personal devotion, as a way to get ready for Sunday or as a way to reflect on the gospel passage after you have been to church and heard a compelling, or maybe not so compelling, sermon. You might want to use the book in your home with your family. Perhaps after dinner, you might read the passage and answer a couple of the questions and then talk about the drawing, or even add to it.

You might want to copy the drawings and put them in the church bulletin, or have them on individual sheets or even posters, for children (of all ages) to color. You might use the book as a resource in Sunday school classes, Bible studies, or Confirmation classes. Some adults even seem to enjoy the drawings. Others may enjoy coloring them, since adult coloring books seem to be all the rage.

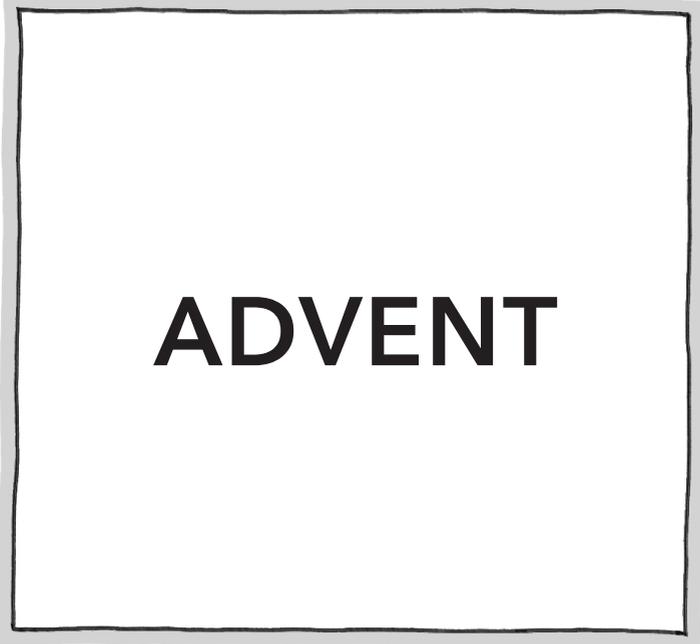
You may find the questions helpful, and you may need to translate them for use with different groups. If the questions provided are not working for you, here is another way to think about each gospel passage. Ask these two simple questions, which can be applied to almost any gospel passage:

1. Who is Jesus in this passage?
2. What does this passage tell us about what it means to be one of his followers?

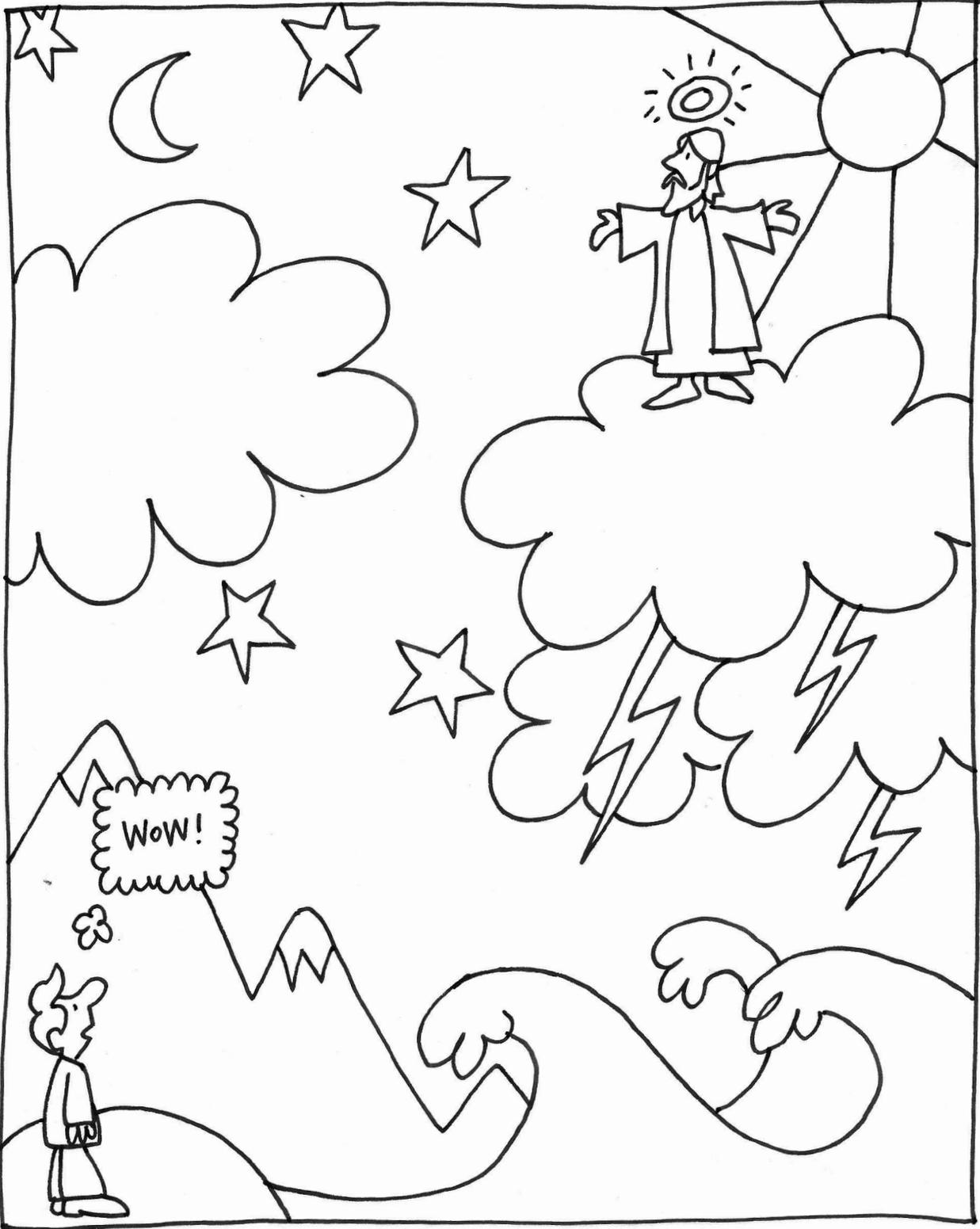
You may want to simply read the gospel and ask about the so-what factor: What difference does this gospel passage make in my week?

Mother Teresa is revered and remembered for many reasons. Among her many vocations was a deep love of scripture. She taught that we are

called to know the word, love the word, live the word, and give the word. This book of often silly drawings is offered with the serious intent that the story of Jesus might become a part of who we are in a world that desperately needs to know more about God's grace and love.



ADVENT



The First Sunday in Advent

Luke 21:25-36

Notes on This Reading

Happy New Year. The church begins its new year not on January 1, but on the first Sunday in Advent. The readings for the day come not from the beginning of Luke's gospel, but from one of the gospel's last chapters. The passage anticipates Jesus's arrival, not showing up in the manger in Bethlehem, but descending from the clouds in great glory. All of which makes us sit up and take notice. The theme of Advent is clear. We are called to be on guard, to be alert, to be ready. We'll spend the next four weeks, in advance of Christmas, trying to figure out what that means.

Questions

1. How does this passage make you feel? Is it scary, or exciting, or strange?
2. Why do you think that we begin the church year with this reading about apocalyptic end times? What does the word "apocalyptic" suggest to you?
3. What do you think it means that the kingdom of God, or the realm of God, is near? Where do you see the realm of God in your own life?
4. What will you do in the coming weeks of Advent to get ready for Christ's coming?



CHRISTMAS



Christmas Day: The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Proper I and II

Luke 2:1-20

Notes on This Reading

Again, we have Luke to thank for details we would not otherwise know: things like the census, or no room in the inn, or the news announced to the shepherds. Think of all the carols we would be missing without this information. Luke tells what is now a familiar story. Our challenge is to hear it as if for the first time. It's an amazing story of the announcement of new life beginning in dire circumstances, about greatness emerging from humble beginnings. Celebrate that good news! It's a gift!

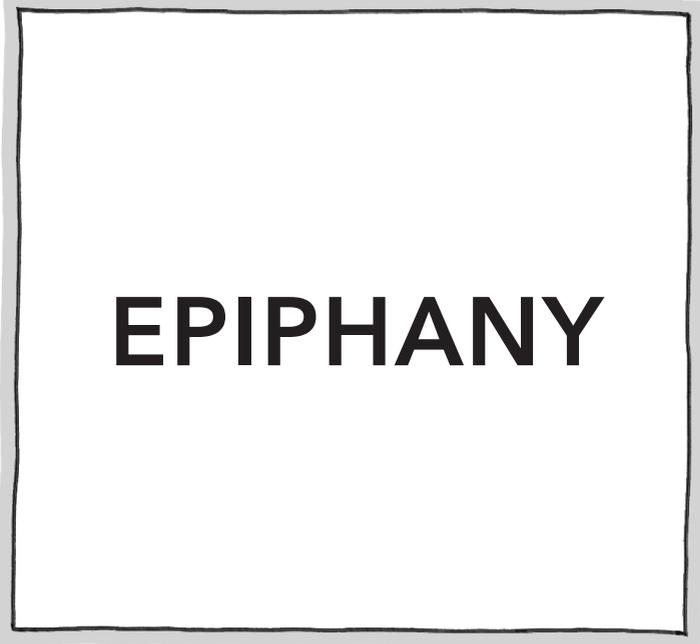
Questions

1. Imagine you have never heard this story before. That's hard to do, but what do you think would be most striking?
2. What is the significance of the fact that there was no room for the young couple in the inn?
3. Why do you think shepherds were the first to receive this news?
4. What do you think Mary was pondering in particular? Put yourself in her place.

In the beginning
was the Word...



The light shines in
the darkness.



EPIPHANY



First Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

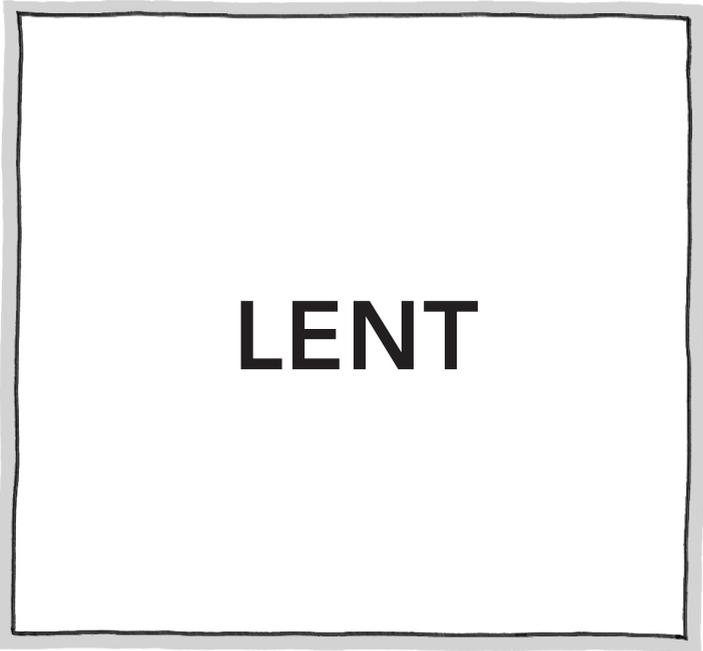
Notes on This Reading

Every year, on this first Sunday after the Feast of the Epiphany, we read the story of Jesus's baptism by John in the wilderness. It doesn't matter which gospel we happen to be reading, because the same story shows up in each of the four gospels. That's a pretty good indication that this is an important story, one that tells us we are supposed to pay attention. Much has been written about why Jesus needed to be baptized. You might want to talk about that. Whatever motivated him, it was clear that it marked the beginning of his public ministry, a ministry that changed the world.

Questions

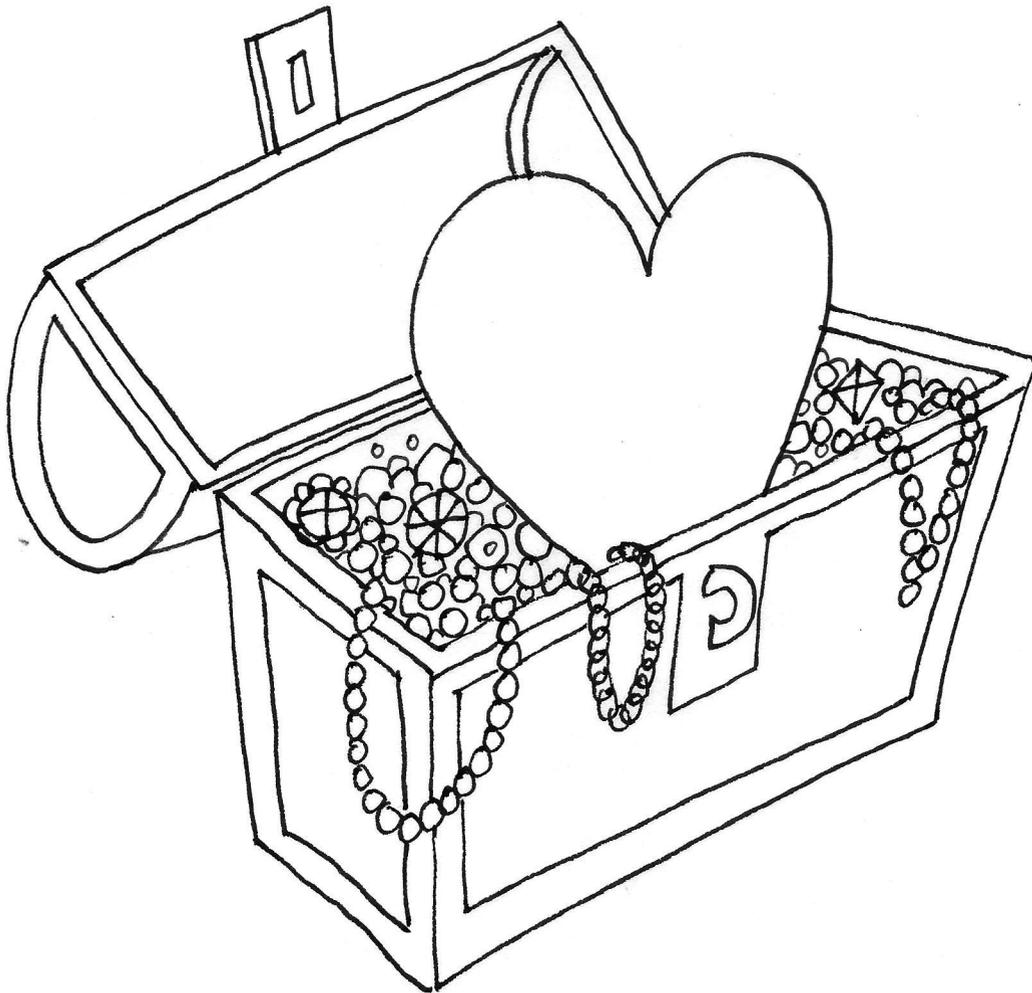
1. Do you remember your baptism? What do you recall about that event? If you were too young to remember, see if you can locate someone who was present on that great occasion. Let them describe the event. If you don't already do so, find a way to celebrate the anniversary of your baptism each year.
2. Why do you think this story shows up in each of the gospels? Why do you think it is important?
3. Think about that voice that comes from heaven. What does it mean that Jesus was the beloved, and well-pleasing? Have you ever heard that voice speaking to you? (Note: For a beautiful reflection on this voice, read *Life of the Beloved* by Henri Nouwen.)





LENT

Where your treasure is,
there your heart will be
also. ~ Jesus



Ash Wednesday

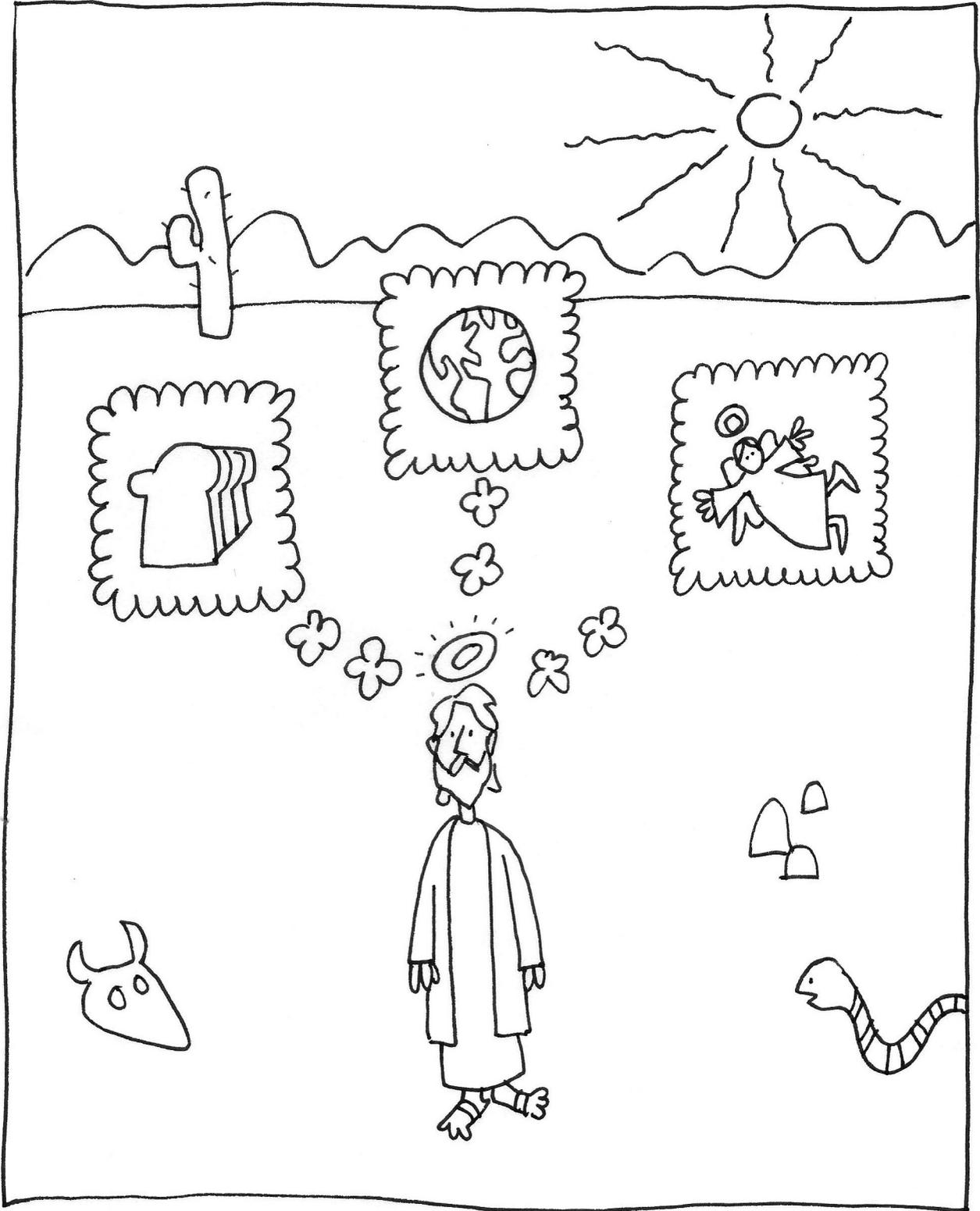
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Notes on This Reading

On recent Sundays in church, we have heard readings from Luke's gospel that were excerpts from Jesus's Sermon on the Plain. On Ash Wednesday, we always read from a similar sermon found in the Gospel of Matthew, known as the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). It is a collection of Jesus's teaching that has had great impact over time, especially in the lives of people like Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. This particular passage invites us to enter the season of Lent mindful of how we practice our religion, aware of the temptation to be a hypocrite. In this sermon, Jesus asks his listeners to think about where their treasure might be, because that is where their hearts will be.

Questions

1. Why do you think we read this particular passage at the beginning of Lent?
2. What does this passage tell us about pillars of spiritual practice like prayer and fasting and giving alms? What does it tell us about the way we practice religion?
3. What might it mean to store up treasure in heaven?
4. Think about where you are giving your heart this Ash Wednesday. Are you giving your heart to that which will satisfy your heart?





EASTER



Easter Day

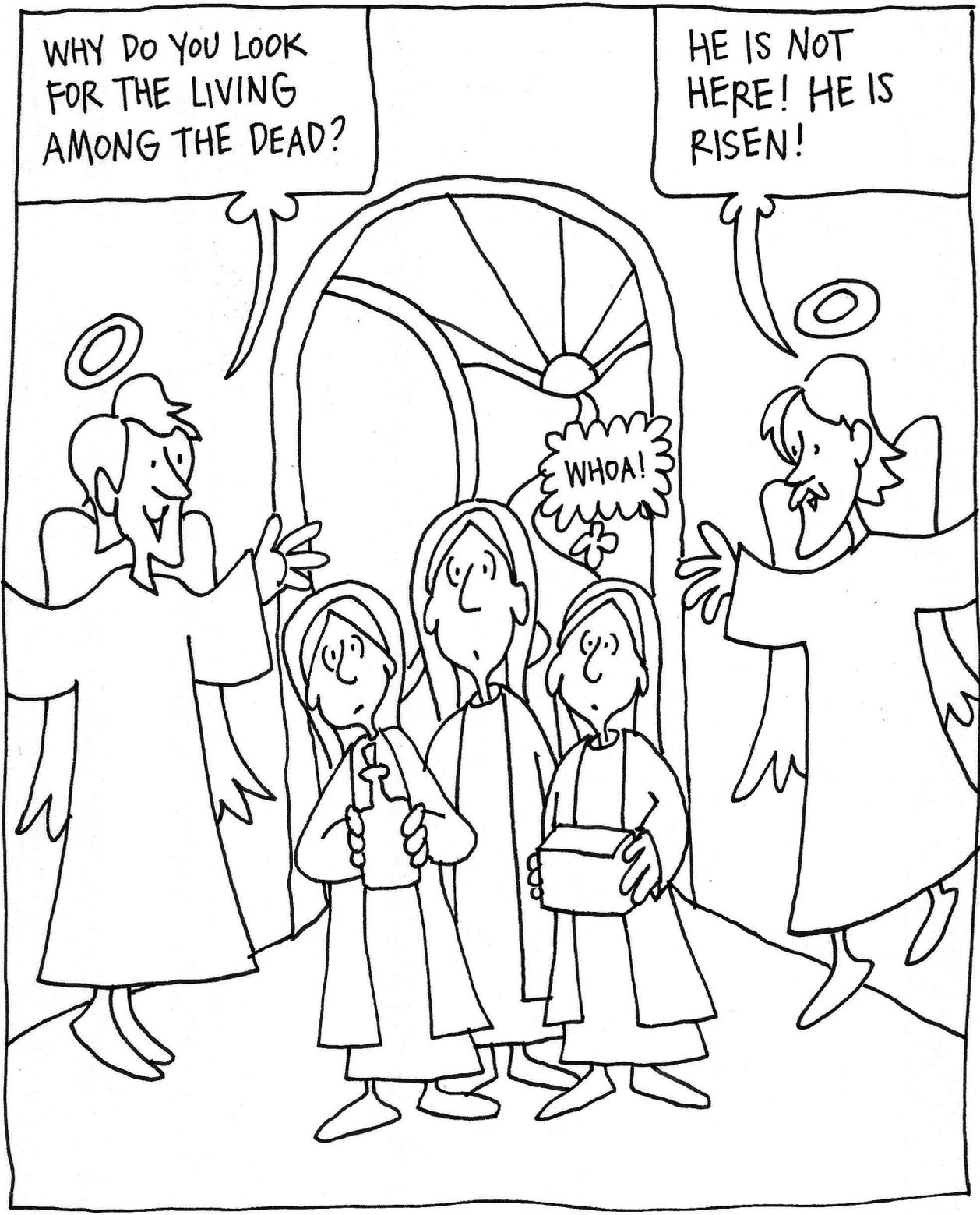
John 20:1-18

Notes on This Reading

We have a choice of gospels for this Sunday, arguably the most important day in the church year. The fact is each of the gospels tells the story of Jesus's resurrection in its own way. There are differences between them, and there are similarities. John is the only gospel that describes the road race to the tomb; Peter and the other disciple are eager to get there to see if the Easter news is true. One of the recurring themes of this new season has to do with the gradual process by which people come to recognize that Jesus is alive. In a variety of ways, even the people who knew Jesus best don't get it at first. That is true for Mary Magdalene, who has a starring role in John's version of the Resurrection. Her encounter with Jesus is powerfully poignant as she recognizes him when he speaks her name. Her grief is broken when he calls to her.

Questions

1. When Peter and the other disciple hear the news that Jesus might be alive, they race to the tomb. Why does the Gospel of John include this story? How does it add to our understanding of that first Easter?
2. Why do you think Mary Magdalene gets such an important role in the Easter story, as she is consistently the first one to get the news that Christ is alive?
3. What do you think kept her from recognizing Jesus at first?
4. What brought her to see that Jesus was alive?
5. What has brought you to see that Jesus is alive?



WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?

HE IS NOT HERE! HE IS RISEN!

WHOA!

PENTECOST



Day of Pentecost

John 14:8-17 (25-27)

Notes on This Reading

It does not seem that our culture makes a big deal of Pentecost, marketing Pentecost greeting cards or counting the shopping days until Pentecost. There is no Pentecost equivalent of the Easter Bunny or Santa Claus. Yet Pentecost is one of the three big days of the church year. It is called the birthday of the church because it recalls the day when the Holy Spirit ignited the early church, that first group of disciples. Because it is a special day, the illustration for this Sunday is really drawn from the story written in the Acts of the Apostles, which we have cited here.



and Acts 2:1-21

Questions

1. Where have you seen the Holy Spirit at work in your own life? In the life of your church? In the world?
2. The Holy Spirit is pictured as wind, as fire, as a dove. What do each of those images suggest about the way the Holy Spirit works? Do you have a favorite among those images?
3. Pentecost has a lot to do with languages. Why is that? How do we communicate the Good News of Jesus to those who may not speak our language, either literally or figuratively?

How would you picture
the Trinity?

