

## MONDAY

3 JANUARY

1 John 3:22 – 4:6  
Psalm 2:7-end  
Matthew 4:12-17.  
23-end

## TUESDAY

4 JANUARY

1 John 4:7-10  
Psalm 72:1-8  
Mark 6:34-44

## WEDNESDAY

5 JANUARY

1 John 4:11-18  
Psalm 72:1. 10-13  
Mark 6:45-52

## THURSDAY

6 JANUARY

1 John 4:19 – 5:4  
Psalm 72:1. 17-end  
Luke 4:14-22

## FRIDAY

7 JANUARY

1 John 5:5-13  
Psalm 147:13-end  
Luke 5:12-16

## SATURDAY

8 JANUARY

1 John 5:14-end  
Psalm 149:1-5  
John 3:22-30

## REFLECTION

There's such a sense of movement about this week's Gospel readings – something new and wonderful sweeping the land. Yet these passages also give us an insight into the personal cost of Jesus' ministry, as the buzz around him becomes louder and people start to gravitate towards him.



On Tuesday we read that, "he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd". On Wednesday he goes up the mountain to pray, although he quickly becomes aware that the disciples are struggling in the boat and terrified, so he walks over the sea to tell them to "Take heart." It's becoming increasingly difficult for him to find uninterrupted time alone for prayer.

By Friday word has spread and crowds are gathering to hear and be cured. Even though he manages to "withdraw to deserted places and pray", most of us would find this draining – we might feel we have no more to give.

In the extraordinarily powerful scene in the synagogue on Thursday, Jesus reads the prophecy from Isaiah about himself, and when he finishes "the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him." Now he really is the centre of attention.

Also on Thursday, we read that Jesus is "filled with the power of the Spirit". The more he practises selfless compassion and reaches out to heal, the more the Spirit dwells in him, bringing him the strength, stamina, resources and inner peace that he needs for his very public ministry.

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for the example of your tireless compassion. Guide us in faith that the Spirit will fill us when we need it, and encourage us to work to further your kingdom on earth.

## THE APOCRYPHA

## PART II – IMPROVING THE STORY

The Apocrypha does not only contain whole books. There are also extra sections added to Old Testament books, the result of Jewish scholars in the period between the Testaments interpreting the writings, and trying to make them an even richer resource for believers.

The Old Testament story of Esther is odd in that it does not mention God. Enter "Lysimachus son of Ptolemy", whoever he was. He produced a longer version of Esther, making explicit what you can only find in the Old Testament book by reading between the lines. Most significantly, there are two long prayers, by Esther and her uncle Mordecai, and an appendix that shows how the rescue of the Jews was all God's doing. The apocryphal version makes clear what the Old Testament version only hints at – that in human courage, and good luck, God is at work. Which version happened, if either? We can never know. But we can ask ourselves questions about God's hidden activity in our secular world.

The additions to the book of Daniel show Daniel to be an all-round hero for any age, as he rescues a virtuous woman after false accusations of adultery, exposes the fraudulent claims of devotees of an idol, kills a dragon and pays another visit to the lions' den. "The Prayer of Azariah" puts into the mouths of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace a prayer of such power that part of it is used as a canticle in the Anglican morning liturgy. These heroes of the past are used to show how you can survive when powerful people are out to get you.

These writers were doing what we do, reading the Old Testament and trying to make sense of it. We have commentaries and reflections, poems and novels written about the Bible, and would not dream of inserting anything into the Bible itself. But our motivation is the same. We all want to gain a deeper understanding of what it all means for us in our time and place.



The Book of Esther, 500-year-old Gothic mural, Trane Church, Denmark. Stig Alnæs / Shutterstock.com

LIVE  
the WORDSUSTAINING YOU  
THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by  
Caroline Hodgson  
and  
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Second week of Christmas  
Epiphany

Monday 3 January to  
Saturday 8 January 2022

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