

[Online Ministries Home Page](#) | [Daily Reflections](#) | [Online Retreat](#) | [Stations of the Cross](#) | [Practical Spirituality](#) | [Spirituality Links](#)

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[PDF of this page](#)

## The First Week of Ordinary Time

The Christmas season officially ends with two feasts - the **Epiphany of the Lord** and the **Baptism of Lord**. Much of the world celebrates the Epiphany on January 6, although in the U.S. it is on the following Sunday. The Baptism of the Lord is celebrated internationally on January 8, but in the U.S. on January 9. The Gospel for the Baptism of the Lord from the **Gospel of Mark** invites us to ponder again the wonder of Jesus wading into the waters our daily lives. These two feasts, celebrating light coming into our darkness seem an appropriate way to begin a time of year when in the Northern hemisphere each day offers a few minutes more daylight and in the Southern hemisphere we are experiencing our brightest days.

This week, we begin 34 weeks of "Ordinary Time," which are all of the weeks outside of the Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter seasons. **Ordinary Time** will continue until Ash Wednesday in March.

During the weekdays, we begin a three-week cycle of captivating readings from the **First Book of Samuel**. We read of Samuel's mother, Hannah, who promises the Lord, "if you give your handmaid a male child, I will give him to the LORD for as long as he lives." Samuel hears a call from the Lord and responds, "Speak, for your servant is listening." An epic battle against the Philistines ends in devastating losses for Israel and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant. In his old age, Samuel rules Israel and the elders ask Samuel to appoint a King to rule them. Samuel meets Saul. "When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD assured him, "This is the man of whom I told you; he is to govern my people."

For the next eight weeks, until the beginning of Lent, the weekday gospels are from **Mark's Gospel**. Mark offers us a look this week at the beginning of Jesus public ministry. He drives out evil spirits, heals the sick and forgives sins to the skepticism of the scribes. Jesus extends an invitation to the despised tax collector, Levi: "Follow me."

The week concludes with the **Second Sunday of Ordinary Time** and a story from the **John's Gospel**. When John the Baptist sees Jesus, he tells two of his disciples, Andrew and Simon Peter, "Behold the Lamb of God." Jesus invites the two brothers to his home

## Daily Prayer This Week

In this first week of Ordinary Time, we might find ourselves feeling a little let-down after the Christmas season, especially in parts of the world where it seems cold and dark most days. This is where we can ask for the grace to let the stories of the gospels come alive in our hearts.

The vivid narratives of this week's gospel are packed with stories of Jesus' entering into the lives of real people and touching them in extraordinary ways. These are not far away stories, but ones that have a real meaning for us. This is a week of invitation from Jesus to us, with two invitations for us to ponder in our hearts this week.

Jesus encounters Levi, a Jewish tax collector. Because of his profession, he was probably wealthy but he has humiliated his family and made himself a pariah to most of those around him. Jesus' response to this "outcast" was to invite him to be one of his closest disciples - and to dine at his house.

In our own lives we may find a loneliness or separation from people in our family or others in our lives. We have parts of our lives that are dark and embarrassing and seem unchangeable. It is into this very darkness and discomfort that Jesus extends the same invitation to us - "Follow me." This clear and personal call to us is from Jesus who already knows us and our failings and yet asks us to be with him. We can hear this invitation more clearly if we can be touched with awareness of our own failings and understand more deeply how much we need a savior in our lives. It is then that our hearts open to accept this invitation.

The Sunday gospel is a warm story of Jesus calling two more apostles, asking them, and us, "What are you looking for?" This is a good week for us to contemplate with Jesus, what we are looking for and how much we want to turn and follow him. We can pray to Jesus for the strength to leave the patterns and habits of our lives that so often turn us away from him and ask for the grace to make a new beginning in our lives. If we can sit with our hands open in humility, we can accept that we can't do this on our own, but know in our hearts that with the help of God, nothing is impossible.

and asks them, "What are you looking for?"

**Pope Benedict XVI's Message Celebrating World Day of Peace, 2006**  
["In Truth, Peace"](#)

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