

MONDAY
27 DECEMBER
 John, Apostle
 and Evangelist

Exodus 33:7-11a
Psalm 117
1 John 1
John 21:19b-end

TUESDAY
28 DECEMBER
 The Holy Innocents

Jeremiah 31:15-17
Psalm 124
1 Corinthians
1:26-29
Matthew 2:13-18

WEDNESDAY
29 DECEMBER

1 John 2:3-11
Psalm 96:1-4
Luke 2:22-35

THURSDAY
30 DECEMBER

1 John 2:12-17
Psalm 96:7-10
Luke 2:36-40

FRIDAY
31 DECEMBER

1 John 2:18-21
Psalm 96:1. 11-end
John 1:1-18

SATURDAY
1 JANUARY

Naming and
Circumcision
of Jesus
Numbers 6:22-end
Psalm 8
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:15-21

REFLECTION

Having ended last week's readings with the birth of an infant, we begin this week with the death of numerous children, and one of the most horrifying stories in scripture. These are innocent deaths, small terrified children snatched from their traumatised mothers, a story repeated many times over in history, when dictators are desperate to hang on to power at any cost.

Fortunately the rest of the week treats us more gently, exploring the nature of the child who has been born. When Jesus takes his place as a true member of the community of faith, Simeon and Anna bear witness to his role in salvation, not only to his own people but far beyond. And in Friday's Gospel reading John the Evangelist, whose immense contribution to our understanding we celebrate this week, tells us why. This child is none other than the divine Word, present from the beginning of the world and to its end.

Into the world has come the light that shines in the darkness. Many of Herod's tyrannical successors will try to snuff it out, but none will succeed.

PRAYER

God in Trinity,
 eternal unity of perfect love,
 gather the nations to be one family,
 and draw us into your holy life,
 through the birth of Emmanuel,
 our Lord Jesus Christ.



John the Theologian by Alexander Dranets. Theological Educational Center of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. Alexey Pevnev / Shutterstock.com

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THE APOCRYPHA

PART I – WHAT'S IN, WHAT'S OUT

Gillian Cooper takes a look at the books of the Apocrypha.

Imagine you are a Jew living at the time of Jesus. The only written scriptures you know are a collection of scrolls in your local synagogue. There's the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, which are the most important, and the prophets. And then your synagogue has some "writings", as they are known. There are a number of these scrolls around, and a fairly relaxed attitude to their status.

Then along comes the Christian Church, claiming to see in the scriptures pointers to their Messiah. Most early Christians are Greek speakers, so their Bible is not the Hebrew Bible but its translation into Greek, known as the Septuagint. The Septuagint contains some extra writings, many written more recently, many of them in Greek. Suddenly it is very important for Jews to know which scrolls are part of their scriptures, and the contents of the Hebrew Bible are decided. The books we know as the "Apocrypha" are out.

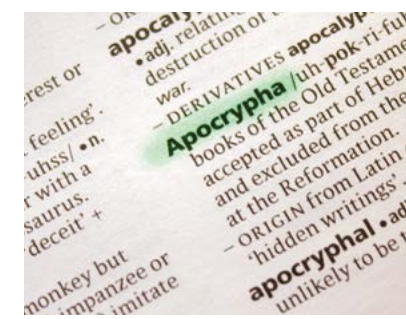
Fast forward to the Protestant Reformation. Scripture takes on a new significance, and there is some debate about the status of the writings that are in the Christian Old Testament but not the Hebrew Bible. The Reformers are reluctant to base aspects of faith on writings not recognised as part of the Hebrew scriptures. They decide to give them an inferior status, useful but not Holy Writ. And so to today: while Catholic Bibles follow the ancient tradition of including the writings of the Apocrypha within the Old Testament, Protestant Bibles omit them, or put them in a separate section between the Testaments. And no one pays much attention to them.

So why should we read them? Because they tell us about the beliefs, culture and worship of people who served our God during a period of international turmoil and rapid change. They contain stories that are worth reading, and insights into the way in which our forebears interpreted the scriptures. Over the next four weeks, we will be dipping into the Apocrypha to see what we can learn.

LIVE the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by
 Caroline Hodgson
 and
 Heather Smith



First week of Christmas

Monday
 27 December 2021
 to Saturday
 1 January 2022

WEEK