

# Table Talk

Year C

Beginning  
the Conversation  
on the Gospel  
of Luke

Jay Cormier

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Beginning the Sunday  
Conversation on the Gospel of Luke  
(Year C)

Jay Cormier



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# For Father Robert Biron

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## Introduction

This book is designed to begin a *conversation*, a conversation that takes place each Sunday at the table of the Lord.

The conversation begins with a particular memory of the extraordinary life of the Gospel Jesus: a story he told, a wonder he worked; a confrontation with the establishment, a misunderstanding with his disciples; remembering when he cried, when he despaired, when he was abandoned, when he got angry; the injustice of his condemnation, the horror of his death, the vindication of his resurrection.

The conversation then seeks to understand what this memory of Jesus means to us in the marketplaces and temples of our time and place. In word and sacrament, we share the wonders of healing and forgiveness that Jesus is performing in our midst.

It's a conversation that shows no signs of being exhausted.

It is the writer's hope that these pages will provoke *Table Talk* — reflection and insight about God's Word as it is proclaimed at the table of the Lord on Sunday. The focus here is on the Sunday Gospel — the climactic reading at the Sunday Eucharist in which God speaks to us, touches us, loves us in the story of Jesus, God's Christ, *Emmanuel*.

The reflections offered here are one poor pilgrim's attempt to grasp the Gospel after many journeys through the lectionary as a writer, teacher and struggling disciple. These essays are intended to help spark the Sunday conversation around your parish table: to be starting points for the homilist who will preach on the Gospel, the catechist who will teach that Gospel to children, the RCIA team who will lead candidates through a discussion of the passage, or the individual disciple looking for a companion on his/her day-to-day journey to Emmaus.

(This volume follows the pericopes of both the Roman Catholic lectionary and the common lectionary used by many Protestant churches. Where different Gospel readings are assigned, reflections on each reading are offered).



The problem with a collection like this is that it might be perceived as a final word, a definitive reading, a complete analysis of the Sunday Gospel reading. This book is no such thing. It is one “converser’s” reflection and best reading of these Gospel stories after many years of his own prayer, reflection and teaching. Perhaps you will find here few nuggets of gold from a very deep mine; more gifted and wiser miners will find much more of value as they dig deeper and deeper.

If this book helps you begin that conversation at your own table this Sunday or helps you in your own search and study, these pages will have done their job.

ADVENT



## First Sunday of Advent

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“When you see these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

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Luke 21: 25–28, 34–36

### The sign of the diaper and car seat

**F**or the umpteenth time, you’re changing your baby’s diaper; or you’re unbuckling your child from the car seat and lifting him out and then repeating the process in reverse later. You’re exhausted. Granted, these are not moments usually given to great spiritual insight. But as you fasten the diaper, your little girl giggles; as you struggle to maneuver the safety seat, your little boy gives you a hug. And in that moment, you are filled with the incredible joy and wonder of this miracle before you.

Or you are balancing your checkbook or completing your tax return. Making the dollars stretch to cover all the family expenses can be a delicate balancing act. But our checkbooks and tax returns are unmistakable signs of how lucky and blessed we are. While we’re not quite on the Fortune 500 list, most of us have built comfortable lives for ourselves and our families. And that’s reason enough for gratitude.

Or you and your spouse are doing errands at the mall. As you have done since you dated, you hold hands. And it dawns on you how happy you are to be married to this person, how your love has remained constant through births and deaths and triumphs and disappointments and diapers and report cards and mortgages and errands at the mall.

On this First Sunday of Advent, Jesus calls us to pay attention, to wake up and realize the many “signs” of God’s love in our midst. In the middle of our own individual disasters and calamities, God somehow manages to make his healing and compassionate presence known — if we are attentive enough to realize it.

Advent begins at the end — the promised return of Christ at the end of time. For the faithful disciple, history is a moving forward, a journey to the fulfillment of God’s reign when God’s Christ will return as Lord of all. We therefore live in a permanent state of Advent: the disciple’s life is one of watchfulness, preparation and perseverance as we await the return of the Holy One. Jesus calls us to pay attention to the “signs” of God’s Advent presence, to “stand erect and raise our heads,” to realize God’s presence in our midst.

The moments we are given in this experience of life are precious and few. God gives us these days in order that we might come to discover him and know him in the love of others and the goodness of this world in anticipation of the next.

**C**ome, Lord, into the Advent of our lives.  
Open our eyes and hearts to recognize the signs  
of your love in our midst  
that every moment of life you have given us  
may be lived in the peace that is possible  
only in humble gratitude and joyful selflessness.

## Second Sunday of Advent

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John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

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Luke 3: 1–6

### The prophet at the galleria

~~H~~e caused quite a commotion among the holiday shoppers. Dressed in a tattered flannel shirt and jeans, he was sometimes spotted rummaging around the dumpsters for scraps from the food vendors. No one knew where he spent his nights. Despite his ragged appearance and that slightly “off” look in his eyes, there was a kindness and sincerity about him that attracted people to him.

He would station himself by one of the fountains in the galleria and stop shoppers. He would ask them why they would spend so much money for Christmas, why they would allow themselves to become so obsessed and stressed over this tinsel holiday.

*We like our Christmas with a lot of sugar, don't we?* he would tease. *Christmas is about hope and love — and that can be a struggle. Give gifts of kindness and compassion to another. Seek forgiveness and reconciliation from family and friends who are lost. Let the spirit of the Christ Child embrace every season of the year.*

Everyone who listened to him would nod in agreement — as they nervously tightened their grips on their shopping bags. Some were moved to quit shopping and go home to be with their families, others would go off and buy an extra toy or piece of clothing for charity; a few would even escape to a church or chapel for quiet prayer.

Sometimes he would rail against the insipid music and the gaudy decorations. When the mall Santa would walk by, he would make fun of him, asking the embarrassed Santa pointed questions about the real Christmas story.

Soon, though, the storeowners had had enough of his distractions. The mall managers had security escort him from the premises.

He wasn't really hurting anyone, they realized.

But he had to go, they said.  
He was ruining everyone's Christmas.

If John the Baptizer appeared in our time and place, this is where he might be found, how he would probably look, what he would undoubtedly say. On this Second Sunday of Advent, John makes his annual appearance — intrusion? — into our Advent busyness. So important is the emergence of John the Baptizer in the Christ event that Luke dates his appearance six different ways. In his Gospel, Luke introduces John as prophets were introduced in the First Testament (“the word of God was spoken to John son of Zechariah in the desert”). As does Matthew and Mark, Luke cites the famous passage from Isaiah prophesying “a herald's voice in the desert” to describe the Baptizer's mission — but Luke quotes more of the Isaiah prophecy than his synoptic counterparts, including the promise of universal salvation that is so central to Luke's Gospel.

Forms of “baptism” were common in the Judaism of Gospel times — in some Jewish communities, it was through baptism rather than circumcision that a Gentile became a Jew. But John's baptism was distinctive. His baptism at the Jordan was a rite of repentance and metanoia — a conversion of heart and spirit. The Baptizer's ministry fulfilled the promise of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36: 25–26): that, at the dawn of a new age, the God of Israel would purify his people from their sins with clean water and instill in them a new heart and spirit.

John, the Advent prophet, proclaims the real Christmas event: the coming of the Christ — God becoming one of us out of love for us. The Baptizer calls us to joyful hope in God's constant presence among us, a presence that we are often too busy or too jaded or too overwhelmed to realize. But the notion of “joy to the world” and “peace on earth to all people of good will” that we give at least a hearing to this time of year can be just as real and life-giving in every season of the year: in imitating the loving kindness, the compassionate forgiveness and the reconciling selflessness of Jesus we make God's living presence a reality in every human heart, in every moment of time, in every gathering place.

The same Word that came to John in the desert comes to each of us in the deserts of our own hearts, enabling us to transform the wastelands and straighten the winding roads of our lives in the compassion and justice of God. Each one of us is called to be a *prophet* of Christ — to “proclaim” (the Greek word for *prophet*), in our ministries, in our compassion and generosity, in our courageous and constant commitment to what is right that Jesus the Messiah has come.

**G**racious God,  
make us prophets of your Son's coming into our midst;  
make us disciples of the Messiah's Word  
of justice and peace;  
make us “Christ-bearers” of your forgiveness  
and compassion  
to all your sons and daughters.