

# December

The first seasonal canticle, a liturgical song without a fixed meter, of the new Church year is the first of the four great canticles recorded in St. Luke's Gospel account: The Magnificat, called thus for its first word in Latin, which we translate into English as "it magnifies". This is Mary's song when she visits Elizabeth and John the Baptizer leaps in his mother's womb at the presence of the Lord in Mary's womb. We can think of God's regard for us in our low estate of sin and His mercy promised to Abraham and his descendants, which we are, spiritually.

December begins with us reading the Revelation to St. John. Despite the singular (Revelation, not Revelations), the book is full of various letters and visions Jesus revealed to John, the so-called beloved disciple, who also authored the Gospel account that bears his name and three epistles that survive in the New Testament collection. John likely experienced and recorded this revelation while exiled on the island of Patmos (according to tradition, he was the only apostle who died of natural causes). Revelation begins with seven letters, one each to seven churches, most of which we read on the first day of the month. These letters are relatively straightforward, especially compared to the rest of the book.

With its placement at the end of the New Testament, Revelation may seem like a strange place in the Bible to start off the year of reading, but it fits well with the end-times focus of the first part of the Advent season, when we emphasize Christ's return in judgment. The book is especially comforting in its triumphant vision of the saints in heaven and its reassurance that nothing ultimately suppresses the Church. Concentrate on themes like that in your personal, devotional reading of this book, and do not get bogged down in trying to interpret everything. Note also that not everything in a work such as this, called "apocalyptic literature" is meant to be taken literally (especially not the highly symbolic numbers like the 144,000 believers or the 1,000 years).

On the ninth of the month, we take up the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied near the end of Judah's existence before its captivity in Babylon, around the same time as the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Micah. This book is also a good one for the Advent and Christmas seasons, as it contains many prophecies of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection (see especially chapters 7 and 53). Also found in Isaiah are the timely prophecy and words of John the Baptizer (see the beginning of chapter 40, one of my favorite chapters in the Bible). Yet, Isaiah, thought of as "the greatest of the writing prophets," also speaks to us, warning us of our sins and telling us of the forgiveness available through the Messiah. As Isaiah prophesied of the exile and return of the people of Judah, so he also prophesies of our exile in this place and our ultimate "return" to heaven. Note also the great scene of heavenly worship in chapter 6, from which the Church took another part of its historic liturgy, the Sanctus.

The last day of December we begin to read the Gospel according to St. Mark. This theological life of Jesus is likely Peter's preaching as recorded by his assistant John Mark (see Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; etc.), probably while they were in Rome in the days before Peter was martyred there. Mark's first chapter also fits well with the Advent and Christmas seasons.

1	Luke 1:46-55 Revelation 1-2
2	Psalm 1 Revelation 3-5
3	Psalm 2 Revelation 6-8
4	Psalm 3 Revelation 9-11
5	Psalm 4 Revelation 12-14
6	Psalm 5 Revelation 15-17
7	Psalm 6 Revelation 18-20
8	Psalm 7 Revelation 21-22
9	Psalm 8 Isaiah 1-3
10	Psalm 9 Isaiah 4-6
11	Psalm 10 Isaiah 7-9
12	Psalm 11 Isaiah 10-12
13	Psalm 12 Isaiah 13-15
14	Psalm 13 Isaiah 16-18
15	Psalm 14 Isaiah 19-21
16	Psalm 15 Isaiah 22-24
17	Psalm 16 Isaiah 25-27
18	Psalm 17 Isaiah 28-30
19	Psalm 18 Isaiah 31-33
20	Psalm 19 Isaiah 34-36
21	Psalm 20 Isaiah 37-39
22	Psalm 21 Isaiah 40-42
23	Psalm 22 Isaiah 43-45
24	Psalm 23 Isaiah 46-48
25	Psalm 24 Isaiah 49-51
26	Psalm 25 Isaiah 52-54
27	Psalm 26 Isaiah 55-57
28	Psalm 27 Isaiah 58-60
29	Psalm 28 Isaiah 61-63
30	Psalm 29 Isaiah 64-66
31	Luke 1:46-55 Mark 1