



JOHN THE BAPTIST: A LENTEN PILGRIMAGE THROUGH ART

Study Guide



SHALEEN CAMERY-HOGGATT

QUICK FACTS

WHAT IT IS:

In *John the Baptist: A Lenten Pilgrimage Through Art*, Dr. Camery-Hoggatt has written a unique biography of John the Baptist weaving comments about specific pieces of art together with scripture texts and devotional reflections, guided by art pieces that were created to depict the significant events of John's life.

PURCHASE:

The book is available to purchase [here](#).

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SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

In *John the Baptist: A Lenten Pilgrimage Through Art*, Dr. Camery-Hoggatt has written a unique biography of John the Baptist weaving comments about specific pieces of art together with scripture texts and devotional reflections, based on art pieces that were created to depict the significant events of John's life. If you would like to spend time reflecting more on this narrative and the art itself, this study guide provides two approaches. You may be drawn to one or the other or feel guided to some combination of both.

First, these art pieces were originally created for altarpieces and personal use in prayer. They are **a resource to use as visual aids in your own contemplative, reflective, devotional prayer time**. They may be a focal point as you listen for Spirit's message to you, nurturing your relationship with God through a prayer dialogue. Praying with art or praying through art is known as **Visio Divina**. The first section of this study guide is an introduction to the prayer practice of Visio Divina, followed by two guides—one is an extended explanatory template and the other a brief summary format. You may choose to pray with a specific piece of art, spend time praying with each piece of art in the book, or apply the practice to other artwork that draws your attention to God.

Second, **reflective questions** are provided for each section of the book. If you are using the devotional for personal study and reflection, read a section of the book, and then read through the related questions to determine which draw you and let the rest go. Of course, feel free to add your own reflective questions, too. Prayerfully answer the questions, consider journaling your thoughts, and/or discuss your answers with a friend, spouse, group of friends, household of roommates, partner, small group, Bible Study group, Sunday School class, or book club.

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This devotional is presented as a pilgrimage for the 40 days of Lent, but it may be used at any time. You might also consider it as structure and content for an individual or group retreat. The devotional and this study guide may be used by individuals, retreat leaders, and small groups. When deciding how you might extend the use of *John the Baptist: A Lenten Pilgrimage Through Art* beyond an initial reading, think outside the box just as the author did when he used art as a guide in creating this unique biography of John the Baptist. Let us know your ideas so we may share with others!

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INTRODUCTION TO PRAYING WITH ART: VISIO DIVINA

“Looking at art is one way of listening to God.”

Sister Wendy Beckett
A Child's Book of Prayer in Art.

Contemplative prayer is a time of silence and solitude in God's presence, setting aside time and place to be present to God as God is always present to us, a holy time of listening to Spirit, deepening our experience of divine love. Christians have long used art as companions for contemplative prayer.

Visio Divina may be a doorway that leads you into your inner prayer room. It is one prayerful approach to listening to God, because art offers an invitation to be attentive. It is a gentle and beautiful prayer of contemplation, when we sit in stillness and gaze reflectively with the desire to see and hear God clearly. In many ways it offers an opportunity to open ourselves to God's loving gaze on us. Praying with a piece of art as a focal point is simply using the art as a “soul window” through which we may look to God and look at ourselves and life. We believe that God's Spirit may reveal much that we need to know during this sort of contemplation and prayer. As with all forms of prayer, Visio Divina give space, time, priority, and welcome to the One who knows us best and loves us unconditionally.

Symbolism in paintings and sculptures are thus a visual “language” of sorts that is used to convey a message. Images are a powerful tool to communicate truths and stir emotions, often evoking deeper responses than words can contain. Prayerful reflection on art and scripture is one practice we may use to encounter God, to structure our dialog with God (prayer), and to deepen our relationship with God.

In *Praying with the Arts*,¹ Louise Holert states that artists “painting by faith and for faith, impart their visual interpretations of the Biblical text. By providing images to stimulate the imagination, they help us experience the text, moving from the abstract to the concrete....Restoring sacred art to its intended purpose assists us in remembering, reflecting upon, and responding more fully to our triune God. Sacred art invites us to contemplate our personal faith journey in a larger context....”

¹ M. Louise Holert, *Praying with the Arts: Illuminating the Church Year with Sacred Art* (Abbotsford, BC, Canada: Infocus Publishing, 2018): 4, 134, 135.

Holert goes on to describe sacred art as “a means of grace” that may operate in these ways:

- **GRACE TO STOP AND LISTEN**

Art offers us the opportunity in the midst of our frenetic lives, to be still, to reflect, to bear in a concentrated way.

- **GRACE TO RESPOND FROM THE HEART**

Art facilitates movement from the head to the heart.

‘Listen to your heart. It’s there that Jesus speaks most intimately to you. Praying is first and foremost listening to Jesus, who dwells in the very depths of your heart.... His voice is an unassuming voice, very nearly a whisper, the voice of a gentle love.’—Henri Nouwen

- **GRACE TO EXPERIENCE DOCTRINAL TRUTH AS RELATIONAL REALITY**

By inviting our participation, art encourages us to move beyond a propositional approach to truth. It invites us to respond with our intellect, emotions, and will, to an interpersonal intimacy with the Trinity. It opens us to a holistic relationship with God.

- **GRACE TO SEE IN DEPTH**

Sacred art illumines Scripture, and Scripture illumines art. Art gives new insights to familiar truths.

‘Art draws us deeper and further, takes us beyond the surface in some sense to see or experience something which otherwise remains hidden from us.’—Trevor Hart

- **GRACE TO ENGAGE THE IMAGINATION**

- **GRACE TO BE TRANSFORMED**

Sacred art is a means of God’s transforming grace. It elicits a response; it opens us to receive God’s grace. As we reflect upon a piece of art, it will plant itself in our minds and become our companion and counselor on our spiritual journey...sacred art provides images of God’s love, truth, and beauty for the ‘art gallery’ of our minds—images of God’s transforming grace to satisfy our deepest hunger, hunger for a relationship with the One who created us and who alone can fulfill and transform us.

- **GRACE TO WORSHIP**

Sacred art nurtures receptivity to the transcendent mystery of God, to pure and absolute love, leading us to adoration, praise, and increased love of the three Persons of the Trinity.

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In *Messages from God: An Illuminated Devotional*, the authors feature visual images that suggest that

Art and prayer have shared an intimate relationship since God appointed the skilled craftsmen, Bezalel and Oholiab, to create the artistic designs for the Tabernacle in Exodus 31:1-6. There are many ways that art and prayer are interconnected. Both are types of language – one is a visual language and the other [is] a verbal language. Both languages speak and can give glorify and praise to God.²

In the thousands of years prior to the invention of the printing press, storytelling and visual representations were the means through which the Bible and Christian faith were available. This provides us with a wealth of religious art. God is not tied to or limited by these images, but Spirit can speak through it if we are open to Spirit led “surprise and transformation. ...Visio Divina [is] a practice that encourages deep prayer and communion with God while gazing at art and other visual images.”³

In *The Art of Curating Worship*, Mark Pierson says: “I believe art is capable of far more than communicating a message: it is capable of conveying the voice of God and harboring an encounter with God.”⁴

Christine Sine adds:

We often engage in prayer as an intellectual exercise rather than a relationship-building practice. But prayer is meant to open to us a mystery that cannot be reduced to thoughts and words. And to fully enter into that mystery we [can benefit from] images that speak to our hearts and open our minds to the wonder and glory of God.⁵

Tim Mooney writes beautifully about this prayer practice:

Visio Divina (Latin for "divine seeing") is a method for praying with images or other media. While the Orthodox tradition has long practiced praying with images through icons, the western church, and Protestantism in particular, is less comfortable with this type of prayer. But as a cursory glance through scripture will show, images have been an important part of God's way of communicating. Ezekiel's vision of dry bones, and Peter's dream on the rooftop in Acts 10, are just two instances of how images and prayer are vitally connected. With our culture becoming more and more visually oriented [and the resource of digital access to works of art]... *Visio Divina* invites us to see at a more contemplative pace. It invites us to *see* all there is to see, exploring the entirety of the image. It invites us to see deeply, beyond first and second impressions, below initial ideas, judgments, or understandings. It invites us to

² Kathleen Schwab and Therese Kay, *Messages from God: An Illuminated Devotional*, Vervante, November 8, 2017

³ Ibid, Schwab & Kay.

⁴ Mark Pierson and Dan Kimball, *The Art of Curating Worship*, Sparkhouse Press, Minneapolis, MN, Nov 15, 2010

⁵Christine Sine, “Visio Divina – Praying with Art,” September 6, 2011, godspacelight.com

be seen, addressed, surprised, and transformed by God who is never limited or tied to any image, but speaks through them.

Images are like dreams, they are not truth, but they can point us to the truth. Often, the rational mind can only go so far. ... We may come to an understanding of something through symbol. We see an image and have an emotional or kinesthetic response. Holding the image contemplatively before trying to define it with words allows the new understanding to take shape, to deepen.⁶

Speaking on the purpose for art, C. S. Lewis wrote:

The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way.” He noted that we can view a work of art without any expectation at all, except that it has something unique to impart to us. “The best way to approach art ... is to ‘receive’ [it]. When we ‘receive’ it we exert our senses and imagination and various other powers according to a pattern invented by the artist.” He believed there is an inherent message in every work of art, we must allow it to be revealed, and the message God intends to impart through a work of art “bubbles up” in subtle ways.⁷

Patterned on the prayer practice of *Lectio Divina* (holy reading), two guides for *Visio Divina* are provided here. After following the first more detailed format, you may choose to use the shorter summary form as a reminder of the key steps.



⁶Tim Mooney, “Praying with Art – Visio Divina,” *Patheos* (January 1, 2000)
<https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2000/01/pray-with-art>

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

GUIDE FOR THE PRAYER PRACTICE OF VISIO DIVINA⁸

QUIET READINESS:

Open your heart and mind to God. As your prayer begins, take a few moments to quiet your mind and ask God to meet with you and speak to and teach you through the piece of art you are contemplating. Stop for a moment. Breathe deeply and imagine God's love and creativity flowing over you. Settle yourself, clearing your mind of distractions and entering into an attitude of prayer. Simply relax and get into a comfortable position. Sink into the reality of God's presence with you and the knowledge that this process is prayer. Perhaps recite a formal prayer. You can start with a question or biblical text for reflection, or just begin with an openness to receive from God whatever the Spirit reveals.

ATTENTION:

Simply put, **what do you see?** Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Keep your attention on that one part of the image that first catches your eye. Is there a figure, shape, color, texture, or word that calls your attention? It might attract or repel, comfort or disturb, or simply intrigue you. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.

When you are ready, **spend some time with the whole of the art. Slowly gaze at and notice the whole image.** Take your time and look at every part of the image. See it all, allowing **feelings and thoughts** to come to you as you...

- Spend some time keeping your eyes on the part of the art that captured your attention first.
- If your eyes were deterred from a part of the art, spend some time with your eyes looking there as well.
- Take in forms, figures, colors, lines, textures, and shapes.
- Study the details and the relationship of where things are placed.
- Notice what is in light and what is in shadow
- Pay attention to what is fully included in the "frame" and what is only partially included.

⁸ This guide is a compilation created from language found in a variety of sources. For a list, click [here](#).

In this initial stage of your prayer simply notice these responses without judgment or evaluation. If you don't like the image, or the feelings evoked, simply acknowledge that this is your **initial response** and continue to stay open to the image and the prayer process. If you have an immediate idea as to what the image means, again, simply acknowledge that this is your initial response and stay open to "the more" as the prayer unfolds.

NOTICE:

As your prayer expands, return to the image with an open heart and mind. New thoughts, meanings, and feelings may arise; initial impressions may expand and deepen. Explore more fully the meanings that come to you, and the feelings associated with the image and its colors and forms. Be aware of any assumptions or expectations that you bring to the image. No matter what your response is to the image - delight, disgust, indifference, confusion - **ponder prayerfully the reason for your various responses and what these responses might mean for you.** Now spend some time **reflecting on the following questions:**

- What captured your attention? What do you find yourself drawn to?
- What does it look like, or remind you of?
- Does this stir up any memories or bring any person or situation to mind?
- What do you like and not like? What did you want to avoid looking at?
- What feelings, thoughts, or desires stir in you as you look at the image?
- What could they reveal about God and your life?
- Do any Scriptures come to mind or specific words?

Don't rush this time. Listen; reflect on what God is revealing.

As your prayer deepens, open yourself to **what the image might reveal to you.**

- What might God be saying to you through this process? What does the Spirit want to say, evoke, make known, or express to you as you attend to it in quiet meditation?
- Become aware of the feelings, thoughts, desires, and meanings evoked by the image and how they are directly connected to your life.
- Does it evoke for you important meanings or values, remind you of an important event or season, or suggest a new or different way of being?
- What desires and longings are evoked in your prayer?
- How do you find yourself wanting to respond to what you are experiencing?

RESPOND:

In the remaining few minutes of your prayer with this image, bring to mind or jot down in a journal (whatever way is most helpful for you)

- the **insights you want to remember**,
- **actions** you are **invited to take**,
- **wisdom** you hope **to embody**, or
- any **feelings or thoughts** you wish **to express**.

You may simply answer three questions: What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel?

CLOSE:

Bring all of these to God. Let the prayers form within you. Speak to God about what you are experiencing from meditating and praying with this piece of art. Speak to God as you would one friend to another, taking the time to **respond to God** in ways commensurate with your prayer: gratitude, supplication, wonder, lament, confession, dance, song, praise, etc. Offer your prayers to God in a time of silence.

Close with a prayer of gratitude for this time with God, for whatever was given, and for the many ways God is present with us in prayer. **Thank God** for speaking to you. Bring your prayer to a close by **resting in God's grace and love**. You may choose to offer a gesture or cleaning-up ritual as a way to end the experience.

REFLECTING AFTERWARD:

- What was this time like for you?
- Did you sense God's presence?
- Are you left with answers, more questions, or both?

If you find it helpful, keep a journal to record these sacred encounters. This will allow you to (1) see how God is present in your life over time and (2) share your experience with others.

VISIO DIVINA: A BRIEF APPROACH

- **PREPARE:**

Close your eyes, clear your mind of distractions, get into a comfortable position, still your body, and focus on breathing deeply.

- **LOOK:**

Open your eyes and scan the image. Take time to look closely at the image. What do you see? What draws your interest? Take more time to continue to scan the whole image. Close and rest your eyes a minute.

- **MEDITATE:**

Open your eyes and focus on the part of the image that drew your attention and name it. Close your eyes, seeing that piece of the image in your mind.

- **REFLECT:**

Open your eyes and look again at the piece of the image that caught your eye. Allow it to bring forth a word, image, or emotion. Close and rest your eyes. What do you hear? What is the message for you? What is God speaking to you today through this image? What is God prompting you to notice as you pray with the aid of this image?

- **PRAY:**

Open your eyes and gaze again at the image. Respond in prayer. Consider writing your thoughts, feelings, and prayers in a journal, or drawing, collaging, or creating a visual expression of your prayer.

- **REST IN CONTEMPLATION:**

Open your eyes and gaze at the image. Rest into the art. Rest into what you have experienced. Rest into God's loving Presence. Give some time to simply being, enjoying divine hospitality and the blessings of this prayer experience.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

If you would like further guidance on Visio Divina,
click [here](#).

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

1. How do you relate to the Season of Lent?
2. What is your experience of pilgrimage as a metaphor for the spiritual journey (i.e., symbolism of mementos, relics, shrines, visiting holy sites)?
3. Do you have any reaction to the idea of “stationary pilgrimage,” using symbolism in art and the ideas of an interior journey on quest for deeper spirituality or relationship with God?
4. Are there memories or associations in your mind with the Stations of the Cross?
5. John’s life story may be summarized in the affirmation “He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.” How does this affirmation connect with your own life story and relationship with God/Jesus?
6. What invitation(s) do you hear as you reflect on the concepts of...
 - a. being in the wilderness,
 - b. living in the desert,
 - c. moments of crisis,
 - d. temptation,
 - e. feeling alone or abandoned,
 - f. John’s declaration that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand”
7. Do any of these ideas bring up any thoughts or emotions about the practice of your faith?
8. Did anything else stand out for you in reading the introduction of the book that you feel prompted to explore?

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THE ANGEL APPEARS TO ZECHARIAH | 3

1. Have you ever had a startling experience of God, a messenger from God, or a message from God? If so, what were your emotions? Did you feel fear or consternation like Zechariah?
2. How do you relate to the ideas of sacred spaces like the temple or being on “holy ground” like Zechariah in the “Holy of Holies” or Moses at the burning bush? Are there places where you feel God’s presence more readily or powerfully?
3. What are the implications of having bare feet?
4. Is there a situation in your life where you need to hear the reassurance, “Do not be afraid”?
5. Do you have questions or hesitations about what is happening that you would like to voice in prayer the way Zechariah was able to communicate with the angel?
6. Are you being invited to trust God in a different or deeper way? Is there a promise from God that feels unfulfilled or confusing and you long to pause in God’s presence with these questions, feelings, and desires to trust despite expectations not being met?
7. Do you feel like a “tongue-tied or disabled participant in the work that God is doing to redeem the world”? Consider following Zechariah’s experience by entering a time of watchful waiting, prayerful pausing, honestly speaking about this in prayer and listening for God’s answer and gifts.
8. Did anything else stand out for you in reading about the angel appearing to Zechariah that you feel prompted to explore?

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1. Do you see a relationship between Advent (preparing for the birth of Christ) and Lent (preparing for the death and resurrection of Christ)?
2. Do you feel any dissonance in embracing the paradox of Jesus being “fully God *and* fully human”?
3. Are you aware of any dissonance or paradox in your own life between what you are experiencing on an “earthly plane” and what you believe theologically?
4. Is there an area of your life where you are living wholly on the physical plane and might be missing the holy, redemptive work of God?
5. If you could create a portrait of yourself in present-day reality, what colors and emblems might you choose and what would they symbolize?
6. Now imagine God painting a portrait of you in your present-day reality. What colors and emblems do you imagine the Holy Spirit would choose and what might they represent?
7. Are these two imagined portraits consistent with each other or different? Is there a message for you in comparing and contrasting the two? What is God speaking into your life through this imaginative “painting” experience?
8. Like the previous story of the angel appearing to Zechariah, Mary is surprised by God’s messenger and message, is reassured not to be afraid, is given an opportunity to ask authentic questions, experiences dissonance between God’s promises and her lived experience, and enters a time of watchful waiting—pondering these things in her heart. Does the repetition of any of these elements bring up additional thoughts, emotions, questions, or prayers about your own life, relationship with God, or faith journey?
9. Mary also faces a lifetime of holding the angel’s words of blessing in one hand, while holding the confusions about Jesus’ ministry and horror of the crucifixion in the other. In the end she will be faced with the dissonance between the great losses in life and the life-giving promises of a redemptive God. Is this true in your own life? Are you being offered a transcendent vision and experience of God-given serenity in the face of hard realities?
10. What is your reaction to the phrase “transcendent grace” as used in this section?
11. Did anything else stand out for you in reading about the annunciation that you feel prompted to explore?

1. Who in your life has been a source of blessing in the way Mary and Elizabeth blessed each other?
2. Is there someone who would be blessed by your going out of your way to express your love and affirmation?
3. Is there anything that stands out for you in reading about the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth that you feel prompted to explore?

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1. Is there anything about your beliefs or faith that carry risk?
2. What do you notice about loving relationships and community in this story? Are there people who have been willing to love you well in tangible caring ways? Are there people you might love well in tangible caring ways?
3. Is there anything that stands out for you in reading about the birth of John—the miraculous components and the ordinary components—that you feel prompted to explore?

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1. Have you made a decision that is counter-cultural or untraditional that is a result of your faith? Do you feel invited to consider one now?
2. What do your decisions reveal about your values? Does that sometimes lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations?
3. Has the meaning or story behind your name had an impact on your life or proven to be prophetic in any way?
4. How do you relate to the last line of this section, “All that remains now is to wait.” Is that a statement that applies in your life right now? For what are you waiting or hoping?
5. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about the naming of John that you feel prompted to explore?

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MARY AND ELIZABETH – A LENTEN REFLECTION | 57

1. How do you observe God's light in contrast with any dark or difficult situations you currently face?
2. Are you being invited to trust God in the face of something awful (like Mary witnessing Jesus' suffering and death) or trust God even if you don't see the answers to your prayers or fulfillment of promises you expected to see in this life?
3. Can you bear witness—in specific ways—to the work of a creative and redemptive God, weaving the bright and dark threads of your life into a tapestry of beauty and depth?
4. Does anything else stand out for you in reading the Lenten reflection on Mary and Elizabeth that you feel prompted to explore?

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1. As artists imagined John's childhood from the vantagepoint of history, they included emblems signifying his adult ministry of calling the people to repentance, baptizing, and preparing the way for Jesus. As you look back on your life thus far with the gift of hindsight, are you able to see God's hand, God's presence, God's activity that may only be apparent in light of your present?
2. Are there ways your life brings glory to God? Are there aspects of who you are that may be read as an AGNUS DEI banner—*Behold the lamb of God*? Is that a desire of yours? If so, how might this impact your choices and decision-making moving forward?
3. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about the childhood of John the Baptist that you feel prompted to explore?

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1. Are you in what might be called a “dark night of the soul”? Do you feel alone in the desert? disturbed in the night? confused or startled as you look for meaning in patterns that are not quite clear?
2. Are you struggling to determine your identity, calling, purpose, or the “will of God”?
3. The devotional tells us that when John faces these questions it is significant that he shares these concerns and consternations with God in prayer. Is this an example you might follow in your own time of waiting and pondering?
4. Are there words of grace you might “print out” to describe your life in God?
5. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about John as a youth in the wilderness that you feel prompted to explore?

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ON FINDING GOD IN THE DESERT –

A LENTEN REFLECTION | 81

1. Are there gifts God has given you that may themselves be the voice by which God is telling you who you are and what you are to do? Is there someone or a trusted group of people who know you well and could help you discern this?
2. How do you relate to the list of people (especially prophets) who came to clarity about their identity and calling in the desert? What comes to mind when you read the phrase, “desert spirituality”? Think especially about the stillness, the immensity, the hardships, and Presence of God in all of it. What feelings do you have about the prospect of finding yourself “alone in the Company of the Creator”?
3. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about finding God in the desert that you feel prompted to explore?

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1. Can you relate to the idea of John “finding his voice”? Have you found yours? Are you being invited to use it in some specific way?
2. John is preaching about the ethical and religious implications of the coming Kingdom. What ethical and religious implications of the coming Kingdom are you aware of or grappling with in your own faith journey?
3. Have you been baptized? What did or does baptism symbolize in your own life?
4. What do you think of the statement, “...*even in the desert there are well-springs of new life.*”? Have you experienced anything like this?
5. If all that matters was the “message of your life,” what would it be?
6. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about the eschatological prophet that you feel prompted to explore?

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1. What do you make of Jesus baptism simultaneously being a manifestation of the Trinity, a call to and blessing for his ministry, *and* a pivotal crisis point?
2. Do you see the words, “You are my Beloved in whom I am well pleased” having an impact on Jesus’ own Dark Night of the Soul—the 40-day fast and Temptation in the Wilderness?
3. Have you experienced these words or had them impact your own pilgrimage?
4. There are some interesting phrases used in the description of John Nava’s Baptism tapestry—*something mysterious going on, time stops, frozen in time, world transformed in stillness, holy moment, moment out of time, becoming one with the river, humbling and submitting symbolically and sacramentally to the will of God*. Are you drawn to any of these words or phrases as a prompt to frame or reflect on what God is doing in your life?
5. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about the baptism of Jesus that you feel prompted to explore?

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1. John is described here as supremely confident in his identity and mission with these phrases: *John has engaged his mission and nothing else is important to him, the force of his prophetic call has transformed him, no longer a man with a mission, but the mission itself is all that is left, he has become a burning bush.* How do you relate to this all-encompassing passionate calling, identity, and mission?
2. Is there anything about your faith that could be described as “*so enflamed with the call of God that we too are totally engulfed, swallowed whole?*” What do you hear in this about your own faith commitment and relationship with God?
3. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about John and the Jewish authorities that you feel prompted to explore?

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THE INCARCERATION OF JOHN | 109
AND
ON THE PERPLEXITY OF JOHN IN PRISON –
A LENTEN REFLECTION | 113

1. There are elements of political intrigue, power, shame, tension, speaking truth to power, being silenced, projecting what will happen and who thinks what, confusion, and doubt in this part of John's life story. Do any of these aspects reflect what is happening in our world or your life today?
2. John, who was supremely confident in the last section, now questions everything in this one. Like John, do you have questions about who Jesus is that are prompted by the surprising turns in your own life?
3. How has being a Christ follower been different from what you expected?
4. In what specific ways are *the workings of the Kingdom mysterious and beyond your ability to understand*?
5. How do you react to the closing words of this reading: *We are asked to be faithful to the light that we have, and to trust that even in our perplexities and disappointments — even in our deserts and our prison cells, even on our sickbeds — God's work of redemption is more sweeping and more stunning than we are able to imagine.* How might you express your questions, unmet expectations, confusion, doubt, or reactions to God in trust and prayer?
6. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about John's experience in prison that you feel prompted to explore?

John
the Baptist
A Lenten pilgrimage
through art

THE DEATH OF A PROPHET | 115

AND

PURITY OF HEART IS TO WILL ONE THING –

A LENTEN REFLECTION | 147

1. This is a horrific story revealing the complexities of our humanity. The Biblical reports and the representations in art portray seduction, evil, power, conscious and subconscious motivations, debates of conscience, inner contradictions, passion, lust, anger, shame, detachment, and so much more. Are you experiencing inner tension or contradictions between behavior and belief in your relationship with God, your self, or others?
2. Herod, Herodias, and Salome are described as living in bondage while John experiences freedom even in prison and eventual death. Are you being invited to experience inner freedom regardless of circumstances?
3. We are asked to see *power is a web in which everybody is trapped, even those who supposedly rule*. How do you relate to power? Where do you have it, want it, submit to it? Do you need to make changes to your relationship with power in any of these scenarios?
4. John was single-minded, pure of heart, willing one thing: calling everyone to live in the light of the Kingdom of God. Are you struggling with conflicting desires like Herod, or seeking first the Kingdom of God? Is it a both/and such that you are being invited to disentangle yourself where there is confusion in order to grow into a single-minded purity of heart?
5. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about John's death that you feel prompted to explore?

John
the Baptist
A Lenten pilgrimage
through art

1. Jesus' crucifixion is the context that gives John the Baptist's life and a Lenten pilgrimage meaning. Through it we are offered forgiveness and healing.
 - a. How does Jesus give your life meaning?
 - b. How do you need to accept, experience, go deeper in receiving forgiveness?
 - c. How do you need to accept, experience, go deeper in being healed, in becoming whole?
2. Does anything else stand out for you in reading about Jesus' death that you feel prompted to explore?

John
the Baptist
A Lenten pilgrimage
through art

ADDENDA

SOURCES FOR THE GUIDE TO LECTIO DIVINA

How Does Art Enhance Prayer - Healthy Spirituality, <https://healthyspirituality.org/how-does-art-enhance-prayer>

Praying with Art – Visio Divina - Patheos, <https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2009/07/praying-with-art-visio-divina>

The Upper Room, <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/visio-divina>

Mark Dean, ed., *Visio Divina: Praying with Art OMI*, <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/6b53d22a/files/uploaded/Visio%20Divina%20by%20Mark%20Dean%20OMI.pdf>

Jonathon Stalls, *Ways of Walking - Walking as Presence*, <https://www.patreon.com/posts/ways-of-walking-28805134>

MORE ON VISIO DIVINA

For information, guidance, or experience with Visio Divina, we highly recommend:

Juliet Benner's *Contemplative Vision: A Guide to Christian Art and Prayer*

Therese Kay's *Meeting God through Art: Visio Divina--A Guided Prayer Journal with Images from the Metropolitan Museum of Art*.

BOOKS BY JERRY CAMERY-HOGGATT

A DEATH OF SPLENDID DARING: A NOVEL COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

A Death of Splendid Daring is an historical novel that transports readers to 1st Century Rome, where the conflicting worldviews that gave rise to the early church were at points radically different from the Christianity of today.

The plot revolves around a single household in which the family acquires a copy of Mark's Gospel as it is being written. They discuss and even argue about Mark's story of Jesus with more than a little ferocity, thus revealing an array of perspectives on the gospel of Mark -- Christian and pagan, Roman and Jewish, believer and non-believer. Despite their own intentions, the arguments pull them ever deeper into the message of Mark's extraordinary book.

There's a desperate, secret search for an infant with a twisted leg who's been discarded in the forum by the family's paterfamilias. There's a homicide for which the murderer has been found innocent in a court of law, the victim's father seeking revenge but held in check by the immense power of one of the main characters -- a senator. In the background there's the death of a Jewish-Christian in the war in Judea, his father's grief and rage exploding in an act of desecration against the Roman temple of Mars, the subsequent trial and its fateful consequences.

This is a new and innovative way of approaching Mark's gospel -- not so much a retelling of the gospel as a street-level reading of the gospel by a group of 1st Century Romans who are caught up in the struggles that grip the city. The story is unabashedly exegetical and theological, but with a novel twist.

READING THE GOOD BOOK WELL: A GUIDE TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

From the cover:

Here is a single, accessible volume that explains the basic vocabulary and logic of biblical interpretation, shows how the various methodologies can be a seamless interpretive model for exegesis, and then reflects carefully on the implications of that method for reading, teaching, reflection, and preaching.

Through common and practical examples, Jerry Camery-Hoggatt teaches students a way of reading that replicates the activities the biblical authors expected their readers would perform. Using a model that is applicable across linguistic boundaries, genres, and cultural contexts, this

volume introduces hermeneutics, translation theory, and textual and form criticism -- the tools students need to read and interpret the Bible.

SPEAKING OF GOD: READING AND PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD

Camery-Hoggatt understands the complex interaction between readers and biblical texts, and he has accomplished an astounding feat for biblical preachers. He has taken apart the Swiss watch of biblical interpretation, showing all the gears, levers, and flywheels and patiently explaining how each one operates. Then, even more amazingly, he has put the whole thing back together again and made it work, producing fascinating examples of the text-to-sermon process.

--Thomas G. Long | Francis Landey Patton Professor of Preaching and Worship,
Princeton Theological Seminary

This is an important resource for those concerned with the negotiation of meaning in biblical texts in the service of the people of God.

--Joel B. Green | Associate Professor of Theology, Boston College

. . . this study demonstrates that a reader-response approach has significant implications for both exegesis and exposition. Indeed, it helps link these two moments in the pastor's overall homiletical endeavor . . .

--W. Randolph Tate | Associate Professor of Theology, Evangel College

. . . ought to be required reading in every seminary homiletics class. Every church board would be well served by seeing that their pastor has a copy . . .

--Charles Hedrick | Professor of Religious Studies and Distinguished Scholar,
Southwest Missouri State University

GOOD NEWS IN A TIME OF TROUBLE: A READERS' COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

This traditional commentary pays special attention to the processes involved in reading. It follows the interpretive method as set out in *Reading the Good Book Well* and *Speaking of God*.

IRONY IN MARK'S GOSPEL: TEXT AND SUBTEXT

From the cover:

In recent years, an increasing number of interpreters have found dramatic and verbal ironies widely distributed in Mark's Gospel. This lucid study makes an important contribution to our understanding of Mark's irony and combines a literary-critical approach with insights gained from the sociology of knowledge. Professor Camery-Hoggatt argues that Mark's ironies are

intentional, and that irony comprises an integral factor in Mark's overall strategy of composition: irony is a subtle means to achieve apologetic and paradigmatic ends.

COFFEE SHOP SPIRITUALITY: HOW WHAT WE SAY TO EACH OTHER OVER COFFEE CAN DEEPEN OR DAMAGE OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES

Gossip has always been an integral part of community, but in our Christian communities and homes, gossip becomes even more important. How can seemingly small disagreements end in a painful church split? Why does one sibling turn out to be the lost sheep and another the poster child? This book shows that more than any one factor, our gossip controls the spiritual climate of our churches, communities, and homes. *Coffee Shop Spirituality* exposes the destructive power of everyday, ordinary talk, but also shows the way to healing, uplifting, grace-full gossip.

BETWEEN THE MONK AND THE DRAGON: A PARABLE

Set in 13th Century Wales, this novel tells the story of a sixteen-year-old girl named Elspeth who wakes one night to find a hatchling dragon in her father's bed. Elspeth's father, a hunter named John Fletcher, tells her she's had a bad dream, one she must not tell anyone about. Things deteriorate. The dragon reappears, each time growing in size and potency. As this happens, her father becomes increasingly angry, then violent. This is the story of their journey into family violence, and then out again. A monk at the local monastery, Constantine, a man who has had his own firsthand experience of violence, facilitates the outward journey. But within his care there lurks another danger: Constantine has a dragon of his own. It is a titanic struggle between forces both within and without. As she struggles with the other characters and with the dragon, Elspeth must learn the difficult lesson that forgiveness is the path to her own healing.

WHEN MOTHER WAS ELEVEN FOOT-FOUR: A CHRISTMAS MEMORY

From the cover:

"This is the story of the Christmas of 1963, which is the Christmas that I learned what it means to be a giver of gifts."

In a beautifully written holiday memoir, the author tells the story of his mother, whose romantic nature and love for Christmas left a lifelong impression on her son. From her, he learns that sometimes you need to give what "your head tells you you can't afford, and your heart tells you you can't do without."

Mother has always celebrated Christmas with a flourish. So when she loses the Christmas spirit, her three young sons work hard to remind her what the season is about. The way her astounded reaction turned a corner for the family is something the author has never forgotten.

And neither will you. With vivid characters who are as timeless as the message, this delightful story will become a treasured part of your holiday traditions.

This story is also found in *Giver of Gifts*.

WHEN MOTHER WAS ELEVEN FOOT-FOUR: A CHRISTMAS MEMORY (ILLUSTRATED CHILDREN'S VERSION)

"When everything was ready, Pudge got to turn on the lights . . . and all at once, like magic . . . it was Christmas." Mother was only four-foot-eleven-inches tall on the outside, but when she was at her best she stood eleven-foot-four on the inside. And every Christmas she was at her best. Mother would carefully decorate a twelve-foot Christmas tree and load extravagant presents beneath its branches, and the magic of the holiday would begin. Then one year, everything changed. Mother cried on Christmas. As her sons tried to encourage her, they learned what it means to give good gifts--to be eleven-foot-four on the inside. *When Mother Was Eleven-Foot-Four* is beautifully illustrated and masterfully written for children ages four through eight and anyone young at heart. Your family will treasure it each year as a heart-warming story of hope and grace--a reminder that Christmas is a celebration of God's extravagant gift to us.

This book is illustrated by Caldicott Award winning illustrator, Mark Elliott. Elliott illustrated the children's picture book classic *Candle in the Window* and numerous young adult book covers, including the Newbery-Award-winning series *The Princess Tales*. He lives on a working sheep farm in the lower Hudson Valley along with two donkeys and two crazy long-haired cats.

GIVER OF GIFTS: THREE STORIES OF CHRISTMAS GRACE

The magic of the season wrapped in three timeless tales. Beautifully written and unique, these memorable stories celebrate Christmas in three very different ways. Each well-crafted tale by this masterful storyteller illuminates the heart of generosity, the beauty of grace, and the wonder of hope. Travel back to Jesus's birth and discover the tender blessings of his earthly father. Witness the transformation of a young girl as she begins to see others in a gentler light. And learn to be an extravagant giver of gifts from a mother who's tiny in stature but big in Christmas spirit. *Giver of Gifts* offers stories you will want to read again year after year. Using the power of story, it serves as a reminder of what it means to give--and live--with a generous and gracious heart.

MY MOTHER'S WISH: AN AMERICAN CHRISTMAS CAROL

From the endorsements page:

“An enchanted, stirring tale about the greatest and most surprising gifts, acceptance and love.”

—Elizabeth Dewberry | Author of *His Lovely Wife*, *Sacrament of Lies*, and *Break the Heart of Me*

“Over the years I’ve read about every conceivable kind of Christmas story that existed. Then came this one: truly a wondrous one-of-a-kind tale bringing laughter and tears. If it were possible to fuse the writing styles and messages of Garrison Keillor, C. S. Lewis, Dave Barry, and Catherine Marshall, the result might very well bear the title *My Mother’s Wish*.”

—Joe L. Wheeler, PhD | Editor of the *Christmas In My Heart*® story anthology series

“Jerry Camery-Hoggatt explores the mystical relationship that binds mothers and children together and gives all of us an opportunity to revisit that magical time as our own mothers dragged us, kicking and screaming at times, through childhood. This is a book that makes you think—and remember. You will want to call and thank your own mother and tell her you love her.”

—Ed Butchart | Professional and official Santa, Stone Mountain, Georgia, and author of *Red Suit Diaries* and *More Red Suit Diaries*

“Eleanor Crumb McKutcheon—call her Ellee, please—is a precocious little tweener blessed with a ratty wryness that puts her at odds with her purposeful mother, whose heavenly vision of what her daughter should be bears no resemblance whatever to what Ellie sees for herself. When hostilities reach epic proportions, Ellie packs up and leaves, an act of rebellion and defiance that brings her, kicking and screaming, into the neighborhood of grace. Jerry Camery-Hoggatt’s charming Christmas fable is proof that a less-than-accommodating Bethlehem stable still has room for every last one of us.”

—Dr. James Calvin Schaap | Department of English, Dordt College, author of *Startling Joy* and *Romey’s Place*