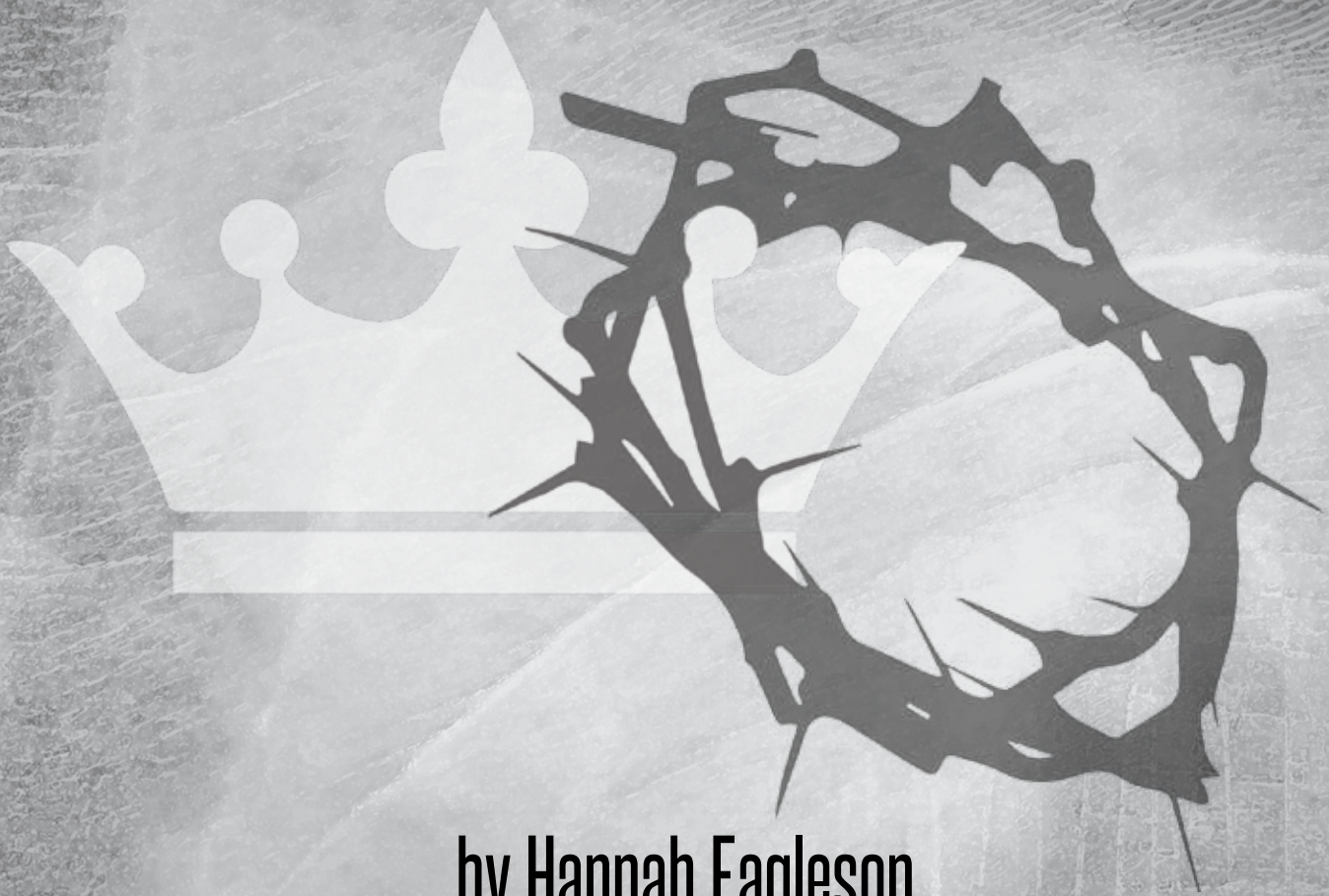


WALKING TO WISDOM

LITERATURE GUIDE SERIES

The Man Born to Be King

Dorothy L. Sayers



by Hannah Eagleson



Inklings Collection



Walking to Wisdom Literature Guide: The Man Born to Be King

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WALKING TO WISDOM LITERATURE GUIDE: *THE MAN BORN TO BE KING*

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*An explanation of Dorothy Sayers's inclusion in The Inklings Collection is provided in this introduction to the Inklings.

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INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS

Dear Students,

We are excited that you have the privilege of reading *The Man Born to Be King* alongside a mentor (the writer of this guide) who will lead you “further up and further in” (C.S. Lewis’s words in *The Last Battle*). We aim to give you a delightful experience with this book and, in the process, to share practices that we have learned that will help you become a good reader:

- reading carefully
- taking time to absorb a book
- paying attention to details as well as to great ideas over the whole book
- learning to mark up a book
- taking a few notes while reading
- learning to ask and answer good questions
- synthesizing those questions together in a piece of writing or an engaging project

If you spend a year doing all of the Inklings courses, you will not only collect some of the most important books and thoughts, but you will also have increased your abilities and pleasures as a reader.

C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Dorothy Sayers (two members and a friend of the Inklings whose work we will study in the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection) wrote nonfiction as well as fiction, and we begin your reading of fiction with a few select nonfiction essays they wrote on topics that overlap with the topics in the book you are reading. Part of their remarkable legacy is that they wrote about many of the same great ideas in stories, plays, and poems and in nonfiction essays. This means that reading the ideas without the stories in these nonfiction works, or “context essays,” will be a significant help to you in understanding them and in fully exploring the characters, plot, and imagery.

We have suggested three reading schedules for *The Man Born to Be King*—one that allows fifteen days to study the book, another that allows twenty, and a third that allows forty days. Feel free to adjust the schedule or add extra time for writing and enrichment activities (found on page 139). Your teacher will know what is best for your schedule.

We have provided you with some space for answering questions, but we recommend that you also keep your thoughts, notes, and musings in a three-ring binder (or on the computer). For the life questions, you may want to keep a separate journal for meditative contemplation. We would like you to have as much room as you need, because you will find that the Inklings writers require a lot of space! It is highly recommended that you look up unfamiliar words found in Dorothy Sayers’s *The Man Born to Be King*, and keep a journal of these new vocabulary words and definitions as you work through the book and the guide.

You have the option of studying one guide or a few, or taking a year to study them all to fulfill your British literature requirement for high school English. Enjoy the study!

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE FOR THE WALKING TO WISDOM LITERATURE GUIDES: THE INKLINGS COLLECTION

C.S. Lewis

Context Essays (selections from these are read at the beginning of each guide): excerpts from *Mere Christianity*,¹ *The Weight of Glory*,² *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*,³ and “Theology in Stories” by Gilbert Meilaender⁴

- *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*⁵
- *The Last Battle*⁶
- *The Screwtape Letters*⁷
- *Till We Have Faces*⁸

Dorothy Sayers

Context Essays: excerpts from *Letters to a Diminished Church*⁹

The Man Born to Be King (twelve-play cycle integrating the four gospels)¹⁰

J.R.R. Tolkien

- *The Fellowship of the Ring*¹¹
- *The Two Towers*¹²
- *The Return of the King*¹³

-
1. The Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection is keyed to the following editions listed in these footnotes: C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
 2. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
 3. C.S. Lewis, *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Books, 1966).
 4. Gilbert Meilaender, “Theology in Stories: C.S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience,” *Word and World* 1/3 (1981): 222, <http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/1-3_Experience/1-3_Meilaender.pdf>.
 5. C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).
 6. Lewis, *Chronicles*.
 7. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
 8. C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1980).
 9. Dorothy Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004).
 10. Dorothy Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Written for Broadcasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1943). Reprinted with permission by Classical Academic Press, 2014.
 11. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).
 12. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).
 13. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).

THE INKLINGS

The Inklings was an informal literary discussion group associated with the University of Oxford, England, for nearly two decades between the early 1930s and late 1949.¹ The Inklings were writers, including C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams, who shared a love of similar stories and a remarkable commitment to ideas they shared. Their literary philosophies tended to depart from the period in which they were writing (modernist, 1900–1950) as did their cultural values. They liked to walk together and meet regularly to read their work aloud to one another.

“Properly speaking,” wrote Warren Lewis (brother of C.S.), “the Inklings was neither a club nor a literary society, though it partook of the nature of both. There were no rules, officers, agendas, or formal elections.”² While Dorothy Sayers did not attend the meetings herself, partly because she didn’t live in the same town or teach at Oxford, some have called her an Inkling based on her friendship with Lewis and Charles Williams. Her correspondence with both was avid and their work concerned with many of the same subjects, characters, and plots. They were a great encouragement to one another. Lewis even read Sayers’s play cycle, *The Man Born to Be King*, each year during the Lenten period. Therefore, although Sayers was not an “official” member of the Inklings, but rather a close friend of Lewis and Williams, we have included her in the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection, considering her an Inkling “in spirit,” which is to say that she shared the same ideas and aspirations and engaged in similar writing projects. Had she lived in Oxford, we suspect she would have attended the informal meetings of this remarkable group.

Readings and discussions of the members’ unfinished works were the principal purposes of meetings. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet*, and Williams’s *All Hallows’ Eve* were among the first novels the Inklings read to one another. Tolkien’s fictional Notion Club (see *Sauron Defeated*) was based on the Inklings. Meetings were not all serious; the Inklings amused themselves by having competitions to see who could read notoriously bad prose for the longest without laughing.³

Until late 1949, Inklings readings and discussions usually occurred during Thursday evenings in C.S. Lewis’s college rooms at Magdalen College. The Inklings and friends were also known to gather informally on Tuesdays at midday at a local public house, The Eagle and Child.

We hope that you will keep the spirit of the Inklings alive in your own study of this guide by working out your own responses to their work in community and conversation as well as laboring over your writing and sharing it with fellow travelers seeking to walk a similar path. Consider studying this course online at Scholé Academy (classicalacademicpress.com/online-courses/).

1. Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead, eds., *Brothers and Friends: The Diaries of Major Warren Hamilton Lewis* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 230.

2. Bruce L. Edwards, *Apologist, Philosopher, and Theologian*, vol. 3 of *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 279.

3. “War of Words over World’s Worst Writer,” *Culture Northern Ireland*, May 9, 2008, <<http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/1739/war-of-words-over-world-s-worst-writer?search=inklings&rpg=1>>.

DAILY READING OUTLINES FOR DOROTHY SAYERS'S *THE MAN BORN TO BE KING*

With each of the three schedules below, it is very important to read Sayers's introductory notes section before each play. It helps enormously in understanding the importance of each play and its themes. You will find that many of your questions are addressed or answered in these notes by Sayers that explain what she intended.

We have provided a fifteen-day, a twenty-day, and a forty-day reading schedule. While we have estimated the reading time in several schedules to the best of our ability, student reading speeds and classroom goals will differ. The amount of time you will need to complete the writing and discussion work of the literature guides alongside the reading will likely double the amount of time you use. This will vary according to the goals of the teacher and the development of the students. You will also need to add time for essay writing and enrichment activities at the end.

Reading Schedule 1—Fifteen Days

- | | |
|--|--|
| Day 1: Context essay excerpts from <i>Letters to a Diminished Church</i> : “The Dogma Is the Drama” and “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged” | Day 6: Play 3—Notes and <i>A Certain Nobleman</i> |
| Day 2: Context essay excerpt from <i>Letters to a Diminished Church</i> : “The Triumph of Easter” | Day 7: Play 4—Notes and <i>The Heirs to the Kingdom</i> |
| Day 3: Introductory poem “The Makers,” and the summary in this guide (page 13) of the introduction to <i>The Man Born to Be King</i> * | Day 8: Play 5—Notes and <i>The Bread of Heaven</i> |
| Day 4: Play 1—Notes and <i>Kings in Judaea</i> | Day 9: Play 6—Notes and <i>The Feast of Tabernacles</i> |
| Day 5: Play 2—Notes and <i>The King's Herald</i> | Day 10: Play 7—Notes and <i>The Light and the Life</i> |
| | Day 11: Play 8—Notes and <i>Royal Progress</i> |
| | Day 12: Play 9—Notes and <i>The King's Supper</i> |
| | Day 13: Play 10—Notes and <i>The Princes of This World</i> |
| | Day 14: Play 11—Notes and <i>King of Sorrows</i> |
| | Day 15: Play 12—Notes and <i>The King Comes to His Own</i> |

Reading Schedule 2—Twenty Days

- | | |
|--|---|
| Day 1: Context essay excerpt from <i>Letters to a Diminished Church</i> : “The Dogma Is the Drama” | Day 9: Play 4— <i>The Heirs to the Kingdom</i> , scenes 2 and 3 |
| Day 2: Context essay excerpt from <i>Letters to a Diminished Church</i> : “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged” | Day 10: Play 5—Notes and <i>The Bread of Heaven</i> |
| Day 3: Context essay excerpt from <i>Letters to a Diminished Church</i> : “The Triumph of Easter” | Day 11: Play 6—Notes and <i>The Feast of Tabernacles</i> |
| Day 4: Introductory poem “The Makers,” and the summary in this guide (page 13) of the introduction to <i>The Man Born to Be King</i> * | Day 12: Play 7—Notes and <i>The Light and the Life</i> |
| Day 5: Play 1—Notes and <i>Kings in Judaea</i> | Day 13: Play 8—Notes and <i>Royal Progress</i> , scenes 1 and 2 |
| Day 6: Play 2—Notes and <i>The King's Herald</i> | Day 14: Play 8— <i>Royal Progress</i> , scene 3 |
| Day 7: Play 3—Notes and <i>A Certain Nobleman</i> | Day 15: Play 9—Notes and <i>The King's Supper</i> , scene 1 |
| Day 8: Play 4—Notes and <i>The Heirs to the Kingdom</i> , scene 1 | Day 16: Play 9— <i>The King's Supper</i> , scenes 2 and 3 |
| | Day 17: Play 10—Notes and <i>The Princes of This World</i> |
| | Day 18: Play 11—Notes and <i>King of Sorrows</i> , scene 1 |
| | Day 19: Play 11— <i>King of Sorrows</i> , scenes 2 and 3 |
| | Day 20: Play 12—Notes and <i>The King Comes to His Own</i> |

*Note: You are not expected to read the introduction itself, though it is fascinating and you may enjoy it if you do read it.

Reading Schedule 3—Forty Days

- Days 1–2: Context essay excerpt from *Letters to a Diminished Church*: “The Dogma Is the Drama”
- Days 3–4: Context essay excerpt from *Letters to a Diminished Church*: “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged”
- Days 5–6: Context essay excerpt from *Letters to a Diminished Church*: “The Triumph of Easter”
- Days 7–8: Introductory poem “The Makers,” and the summary in this guide (page 13) of the introduction to *The Man Born to Be King**
- Days 9–10: Play 1—Notes and *Kings in Judaea*
- Days 11–12: Play 2—Notes and *The King’s Herald*
- Days 13–14: Play 3—Notes and *A Certain Nobleman*
- Days 15–16: Play 4—Notes and *The Heirs to the Kingdom*, scene 1
- Days 17–18: Play 4—*The Heirs to the Kingdom*, scenes 2 and 3
- Days 19–20: Play 5—Notes and *The Bread of Heaven*
- Days 21–22: Play 6—Notes and *The Feast of Tabernacles*
- Days 23–24: Play 7—Notes and *The Light and the Life*
- Days 25–26: Play 8—Notes and *Royal Progress*, scenes 1 and 2
- Days 27–28: Play 8—*Royal Progress*, scene 3
- Days 29–30: Play 9—Notes and *The King’s Supper*, scene 1
- Days 31–32: Play 9—*The King’s Supper*, scenes 2 and 3
- Days 33–34: Play 10—Notes and *The Princes of This World*
- Days 35–36: Play 11—Notes and *King of Sorrows*, scene 1
- Days 37–38: Play 11—*King of Sorrows*, scenes 2 and 3
- Days 39–40: Play 12—Notes and *The King Comes to His Own*

*Note: You are not expected to read the introduction itself, though it is fascinating and you may enjoy it if you do read it.

ELEMENTS IN THE LITERATURE GUIDE

Make Notes: Possess the Book

Becoming a reader is all about learning to pay attention and gather the details to relish and realize the significance and unity of what you are reading. Try using the following symbols or making up your own system that covers the same basics. Underline interesting passages. Write in the margins so that you can go back to reference what you wrote to make your Great Ideas Quotes pages, answer questions, hold discussions, and support points you make in your writing assignments. Here is a simple marking system that we have found effective:

- * This is important or delightful.
- ? I have a question.
- ?? I'm confused.
- ! This is surprising or exciting to me.
- T This could relate to one of the themes or motifs of the book.
- ✓ This relates to something else I have read.
- X This is part of the conflict or the problem of the story.
- C This is significant in defining this character.

Tracing the Great Ideas

In each play you will see there are several great ideas chosen for you on which to take notes. (Please remember that you are welcome to find your own great ideas in addition to ours.) As you read, look for and choose quotes related to the given great ideas themes so that you can trace them all the way through the book. Then be on the lookout for how they are worked out in each particular context. Write the quotes in the Great Ideas Quotes sections in each play unit. You may need to add a summary note to introduce the quotes since the plays are comprised almost entirely of dialogue. (See page 17 from the first play for an example of how to record the quotations.) At the end of the guide you will reflect upon the themes of the play and use these quotations to create and support your thesis, from which you will develop an argumentative essay. Each theme will be explained again the first time it appears.

Great Ideas in *The Man Born to Be King*

Kingship/Leadership

As might be guessed from the title, this play cycle spends a great deal of time exploring the nature of kingship and leadership. It keeps returning to the question of what it looks like to guide or rule people well, especially for someone who holds a political office. It presents several different models not only of how people should rule, but also of how people do rule—that is, *The Man Born to Be King* tries to present a realistic picture of how leadership often works, as well as a model of how it should work.

Kingdom of God

Sayers spends a good deal of time in *The Man Born to Be King* presenting models of how earthly leadership does work and sometimes of how it should work. But more importantly, the play cycle constantly affirms that there is a different and better kind of kingdom, the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom Jesus is leading looks very different from the kingdoms of this world. Sayers draws on the biblical language of the Kingdom of God to flesh out this distinction in the course of the play cycle. In Scripture, Christ is always using metaphor, story, and analogy to describe the nature of the life and world He desires human beings to participate in with Him. He describes this life and world as the Kingdom of God, and uses all sorts of

descriptions of it that invite thought and work to understand—it is like a mustard seed, it is like a king having a feast, it is like a merchant buying a beautiful pearl, and so on. Sayers works with this scriptural language to create a sense of God’s Kingdom as something centrally important in the play cycle. We will discuss this frequently, so be on the alert for metaphors and stories about the Kingdom.

Prophecy

Prophecy is the prediction of future events. In *The Man Born to Be King* it is an important theme, because God’s prophets predicted the coming of the Messiah and many of the things Christ and those around Him would do. Prophecy also ties to the ideas about individual choice and freedom discussed in the essay “The Triumph of Easter.” Predictions made by God’s true prophets will come true either way, but the individual has a choice about how to participate in them. An individual can freely participate in God’s will and have the prophecies come true in a good way in the self; or an individual can fight against God and have the prophecies come true upon the self in a destructive way. The individual has the free choice of how to interact with God and with what He says about the future.

God dying and rising in history

This theme recurs in Sayers’s essays, that in Christ all the myths of dying and rising gods come true in the concrete facts of history.

(For some background on how Lewis and Tolkien thought about this topic, read the appendix, titled “Lewis and Tolkien’s View on Myth, and Myth Become Fact.”)

Pride/Humility

The contrast between pride and humility is one of the most central themes of *The Man Born to Be King*. Pride is the sin that makes someone turn inward toward the self, that makes a person unable to desire things outside the self rightly, even God. Humility is the virtue that allows the self to see its right place in the world, to enjoy belonging to a world wider and greater than the self, and ultimately to enjoy and worship God.

Food/Feasting

Food and feasting is a central metaphor in Scripture, and Sayers frequently uses it in *The Man Born to Be King*. The imagery of food often suggests God’s desire to nurture and provide for His people, and feasting brings to mind His longing to celebrate with them. Feasting also often suggests the end of time, when God will renew all things and make a feast for His people.

Christ as human and divine

Sayers emphasizes the importance of Christ’s being both God and man over and over in her essays and in the plays themselves. It is the fact that Jesus is both man and God that lets Him bring redemption—if He were only God, He could not suffer human troubles and through that understand humanity and pay the price for our sins. If He were only man, He could not bring about transformation in the human condition.

The transcendent or numinous/The everyday

Throughout *The Man Born to Be King*, there are moments when human beings confront something vastly beyond themselves and are moved, changed, or often completely undone by that thing. They see its beauty and are overpowered by it. This mode of experience often comes from a confrontation with something that is transcendent, such as an angel, or more often in *The Man Born to Be King* from a direct confrontation with the glory of God, the source of transcendence. This kind of astonishing and catastrophic experience of the spiritual world can be described by the adjective “numinous,” which comes from a word meaning “spirit” or “god.” While other religions and many mythologies have a concept of the numinous or transcendent, in Christian thought this kind of experience stems ultimately from God’s glory. There are many moments in the play cycle when someone tries to describe this kind of mysterious and awe-inspiring experience; pay attention to that character as you read. While the experience of the transcendent or the numinous sometimes seems entirely removed from everyday life, the two are often closer than you would think in *The Man*

Born to Be King. Watch for moments when the two appear together and think about what Sayers might be saying about their relationship.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the ability to recognize someone else's sin and choose to extend a continued loving relationship to him. Sin functions a bit like debt—if you have sinned against someone, you owe it to him to try to heal the damage that you did. Fundamentally, though, we are not capable of healing the damage that we do to ourselves and the hurt we cause God, and so forgiveness is necessary if we are to have any sort of relationship.

Life/Death

The contrast between life and death is one of the starkest in Scripture and in *The Man Born to Be King*. Beyond physical life and death, the contrast suggests also the difference between spiritual life and spiritual death. Spiritual life is found in a connection to God that allows the human being to flourish and to thrive in right relationship to the Creator of life. Spiritual death occurs when the human being is cut off from God. Because God is the center of all things, to be cut off from Him is to lose everything. If the state of being cut off from God continues, the human being will shrivel as certainly as a plant cut off from its roots.

Blindness/Sight

Sight in *The Man Born to Be King* usually indicates the ability to see things spiritually, to understand the Kingdom of God. Blindness means the inability to see God's Kingdom.

Wit/Humor

One thing Sayers consistently emphasizes in *The Man Born to Be King* is wit and humor, especially the wit and humor of Jesus. She reminds the audience frequently of how clever Jesus is and how much He enjoys laughter.

Freedom/Choice

Individual choices and the freedom God gives to each person are huge themes in “The Triumph of Easter” and in *The Man Born to Be King*. Every human being has to choose whether to participate with God in the act of cultivating His creation or whether to rebel against Him and continue in sin. God can make something good from sinful human choices, but that in no way makes the sin itself good, and the person who continues to participate in sin will be destroyed by it. But God offers human beings a free choice—they can participate with Him or refuse to as they will. That choice is central for Sayers's understanding of human life and for the characters of *The Man Born to Be King*.

Redemption

The theme of redemption, God's ability to make good things out of sinful human choices, is a strong one in Sayers's essays and in *The Man Born to Be King*.

Tell It Back

This is a summary exercise, a method of narrating the plays orally, or “telling it back.” It is a wonderful option that allows you to narrate the content of each unit by oral summary—with or without a partner(s). This is a basic element of learning to read that never loses its delight and capacity to delight others. It also helps to develop a strong mental outlining ability and memory.

(Optional) We like it when people make their own illustrations for a book to enter more fully into the lives of the characters. Feel free to do so as you make your way through the book, as a summary exercise for each play, or afterward, when you have finished the entire play cycle. How you feel about the book and what you are able to imagine about the book is part of what it is teaching you. Tolkien himself made drawings for many of his own characters.

Reading Questions

Reading questions encourage close reading of the text by asking comprehension questions. All answers are found in the text.

Discussion Questions

Discussion questions require you to synthesize the main ideas of the text that may be either explicitly or implicitly stated. Your answers to these should explain Sayers's perspective, not your own. Depending on your level, learning needs, or preference, the in-depth discussion questions may be written as short answers (one to two paragraphs), discussed with the teacher/fellow students, or simply read to inspire critical thinking.

Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Dorothy Sayers took the gospels and developed the story aspect, already present, in them when she wrote *The Man Born to Be King*. As such, we are struck by the characters and the situations in which they find themselves. To read the story of Jesus's life in dramatic form might be a different experience than you have had reading the story as Holy Scripture. It becomes natural to apply the gospels to your own life. After each play, several “life questions” help you reflect on your own personal experiences and examine your own life in light of ideas, events, and characters from *The Man Born to Be King*. You may write informal responses to the life questions in a separate journal.

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

At the end of each section, create two discussion questions that you think would make for good discussion among classmates, friends, and family. These should not chiefly be questions that have a sentence-long answer, but rather questions that would stimulate a longer exchange of ideas. Use our discussion questions and life questions as guides for writing yours.



INTRODUCTION TO *THE MAN BORN TO BE KING*

Dorothy Sayers forms another link in our Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection. While she wasn't physically present in Oxford during her writing career, she attended Oxford as a student and her work's focus is similar to that of the other Inklings. She also corresponded heavily with C.S. Lewis; hence she has earned a place among the group's members posthumously. The *Touchstone Magazine* article about her (see For Further Biographical Study, page 10), which we recommend you read to prepare for reading *The Man Born to Be King*, describes her as the preeminent Christian female thinker of the modern period. She might not have liked that title, but it is easy to see why she's received it. Her work is varied and runs the gamut from fiction and essays to poems and academic work, including translation. Making good art is the imperative that guided her work; in her experience art that is distinguished for other reasons (other than its artfulness) tends to be lacking in skill.

The Man Born to Be King begins with a poem on making. In her essay "The Image of God" (from *Letters to a Diminished Church*), she writes about the human brain's need for metaphor and analogy to understand things. She explains that we compare what we can't conceive to that which is familiar and claims that we do this in every area of our understanding, including our understanding of God. The creeds (Nicene and Apostles') are the place to which she turns for the metaphors we've received about God. (These creeds declare what Christians believe and were determined by the councils which agreed on the interpretation of Holy Scripture.) God is described as Maker, Father, and Lord. Focusing mainly on God as Maker, she argues that in our capacity to make things (art of all kinds), we draw nearer to understanding God.

How consistent, therefore, that she would follow in the pattern and become a creator herself through plays, essays, novels, and translations. She wanted to fully articulate a dogmatic idea and then roll it into a story to give us access to its dogma through imagination and poetic sensibility. Look at the statements in the poem that support this idea. It talks about the need for mastery in craft and art at the end of this work (8): "Until the dream rise up and stand— / Serve but the stone, the stone serves all" (in other words, our learning to serve, or to craft the stone we are carving, will serve others). Our work here is to labor and "when the greatest and the least / Have finished all their labouring," we will "sit together at the feast, / [and] behold a wonder thing" (8). The wonder we will behold together is God (named "The Maker" in the poem and the creed), and our making comes from His ("Maker of the men that make"). Paradoxically, in the end God Himself will wash our feet and will serve us though we strive to serve Him. Here in this poem her ideas about God as Maker and our own participation in His being and character are compressed.

Reading the gospels as a story acted out with character notes and stage directions makes the sacred narrative newly and powerfully real to us. These sometimes distant figures become characters in our imagination. We enter more deeply into their characterization and even into the unfolding of these remarkable events. We feel the deep pity that good literature elicits. Perhaps we see Judas, for instance, as not simple as we'd imagined—we wonder for a moment that such a thing could have happened to someone who began by standing up so nobly to Baruch. Entering into the gospels as a play might cause us to more readily see various parts of ourselves in different characters. Good questions to ask yourself after reading the play cycle is, "Who do I empathize with? Who am I like?" As the Inklings have taught us in all of their books—self-knowledge is a path to Christ. The play with its wonderful descriptions of characters and lifelike interaction of these men and women in front of us brings this divine reality down to our daily life.

Another example of this divine-to-daily movement is in the character of Mary Magdalene and her loving, giving, desire for union, and deep understanding of Christ as "life." In her character we see that we don't do away with desire when we come to Christ, but instead we learn what is worthy to desire. We find the true source of our desires and are drawn magnetically to Him and away from the twisted, sullied versions of the truth.

But it is also interesting that the play reveals Mary Magdalene's slightly over-dramatic tendencies too in her response to the death of Christ. It does not condemn her or reveal these responses as inauthentic, but reveals

the predisposition of her nature. These insights and nuances are infinitely valuable as we attempt to understand the historical and spiritual reality of Christ's presence in this life which is meant to help us live our lives in His.

Flannery O'Connor aptly sums up what I am saying: "Our response to life is different if we have been taught only a definition of faith than it is if we have trembled with Abraham as he held the knife over Isaac." Sayers is offering us the trembling knife to educate and delight our imagination and living knowledge. Come rediscover anew the story you have heard your whole life.

For Further Biographical Study

For a very short biographical introduction to Dorothy Sayers, visit <http://www.sayers.org.uk/dorothy.html>.

For a longer introduction, visit <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=13-04-028-f>.

Note: Parents should first read this excellent introduction to Dorothy Sayers published in a Christian periodical, depending on the age of their child, as it reveals details of Sayers's personal life they may want to save for later. It is in no way graphic or distasteful.

For an introduction to the plays by Gilbert Meilaender through the *Touchstone Magazine* archives, see <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=26-02-018-v>.

To hear the radio theater version produced by the BBC, check out Grooveshark (<http://grooveshark.com/#!/album/The+Man+Born+To+Be+King/6153293>). It would be pleasant indeed to listen to the play while you read it. Please note that the plays are slightly shortened for dramatic effect, but not by much. This is an excellent way to experience drama, of course.

CONTEXT ESSAYS

Summarize the Context Essays: *Letters to a Diminished Church* Excerpts

Before you start *The Man Born to Be King*, you will read and summarize the excerpts from *Letters to a Diminished Church* (sometimes in the course of this guide abbreviated *LDC*) that we have selected. Then cross-check your summaries with ours (in the teacher's edition) to make sure you have covered the topic adequately. Our summaries range from about 90 to 300 words, but your teacher will assign a word count for yours. These “context essays” will help you to understand and gain insight into many of the ideas that arise in *The Man Born to Be King*. An important part of becoming a good reader involves being able to summarize your reading in such a way that someone else can understand what you have read.

“The Dogma Is the Drama” Summary (from *Letters to a Diminished Church*, Chapter 3)

"The Greatest Drama Ever Staged" Summary (from *Letters to a Diminished Church*, Chapter 1)

"The Triumph of Easter" Summary (from *Letters to a Diminished Church*, Chapter 10)

“Introduction” to *The Man Born to Be King* Summary (*We will do this one for you!*)

This is a fascinating and complicated essay, well worth exploring in more depth than is possible here. For this guide, the most important thing to know is the following: the essay explores the challenges and opportunities a playwright faces in telling the story of Christ in a way that emphasizes its historical reality and its dramatic power. If “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged” says that the story of the God who died and rose again in history is an immensely compelling drama, then the introduction to *The Man Born to Be King* describes what it’s like to be a playwright trying to make a literal drama out of that material. Sayers emphasizes the inherent drama of the material and its power as a story. She also emphasizes the way that power is even greater because of the historical reality of the events involved, and discusses the challenge of getting across a sense of both story and history.

Sayers wants to make the history feel alive, to get across the drama of the story, and so she translates some historical elements into detail that would make sense to her audience. For instance, to get across the idea that Matthew’s social position as a tax collector would have been seen as low, she gives him a Cockney accent, which would have seemed less than refined to her initial audience (see pp. 15 and 34 for notes on Matthew, which will be fleshed out further as you read more of the plays).

Because Sayers has that sense of story and history, this play cycle is a practical working out of an idea you have already met in Sayers’s essays and perhaps also in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Tolkien and Lewis are fascinated by the idea that in Christ a widespread myth of a god who dies and rises again becomes historical fact. Many mythologies have a story of a god who died and rose from the dead—Odin dies for wisdom while hanging from the World Tree and then rises in Norse mythology, and Osiris dies and rises from the dead in Egyptian myth. Tolkien and Lewis believed this idea was deeply important to human beings and was found in so many mythologies because humanity was hoping somehow, even without knowing it, for Christ. When this myth comes true in Christ’s death and resurrection, a deep human need is answered. Sayers emphasizes this in “The Dogma Is the Drama” and “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged.” *The Man Born to Be King* is a practical dramatic working out of this idea. It tells the story of Christ as a drama, but one that is keenly attuned to both the mythic resonances of the story and the historical reality of it.

Play 1

Kings in Judaea



PLAY 1: KINGS IN JUDAEA



Make Notes in Your Book*

Don't forget to make notes in your book!



Tracing the Great Ideas*

Remember, as you read, to look for and choose quotes related to the given great ideas themes so that you can trace them all the way through the book. (Please remember that you are welcome to find your own great ideas themes in addition to ours.) Record them and their page numbers in the space provided in each chapter. You may need to add a summary note to introduce the quotes since the plays are comprised almost entirely of dialogue. Then be on the lookout for how they are worked out in each particular context. At the end of the guide you will use these quotes to create a thesis, from which you will develop an argumentative essay. If you are having trouble knowing which kinds of quotes would be appropriate under the given theme, ask your teacher or consult the teacher's edition.

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the play for the theme *Kingship/Leadership*

As might be guessed from the title, this play cycle spends a great deal of time exploring the nature of kingship and leadership. It keeps returning to the question of what it looks like to guide or rule people well, especially for someone who holds a political office. It presents several different models not only of how people should rule, but also of how people do rule—that is, *The Man Born to Be King* tries to present a realistic picture of how leadership often works, as well as a model of how it should work.

Example quotes

The way the Magi relate to Herod: “Sir, when we have found the Christ—” (41)

Herod lies to the Magi: “May I rely on you to bring me news at once?” (41)

The way the Magi relate to Christ: “Hail, Jesus, King of Heaven!” (44)

Herod's conversation with Proclus about slaughtering the children. (51–52)

*You'll see these icons at the beginning of each unit as reminders to make notes, trace great ideas, and tell back what you've read.

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the play for the theme *Kingdom of God*

Sayers spends a good deal of time in *The Man Born to Be King* presenting models of how earthly leadership does work and sometimes of how it should work. But more importantly, the play cycle constantly affirms that there is a different and better kind of kingdom, the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom Jesus is leading looks very different from the kingdoms of this world. Sayers draws on the biblical language of the Kingdom of God to flesh out this distinction in the course of the plays. In Scripture, Christ is always using metaphor, story, and analogy to describe the nature of the life and world He desires human beings to participate in with Him. He describes this life and world as the Kingdom of God, and uses all sorts of descriptions of it that invite thought and work in order to understand—it is like a mustard seed, it is like a king having a feast, it is like a merchant buying a beautiful pearl, and so on. Sayers works with this scriptural language to create a sense of God’s Kingdom as something centrally important in the play cycle. We will discuss this idea frequently, so be on the alert for metaphors and stories about the Kingdom.

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the play for the theme *Prophecy*

Prophecy is the prediction of future events. In *The Man Born to Be King* it is an important theme, because God’s prophets predicted the coming of the Messiah and many of the things Christ and those around Him would do. Prophecy also ties to the ideas about individual choice and freedom discussed in the essay “The Triumph of Easter.” Predictions made by God’s true prophets will come true either way, but the individual has a choice about how to participate in them. An individual can freely participate in God’s will and have the prophecies come true in a good way in the self; or an individual can fight against God and have the prophecies come true upon the self in a destructive way. The individual has the free choice of how to interact with God and with what He says about the future.



Tell It Back*

Do an oral summary of your reading on a recording device or to another human being. Narrate the most important events in order while sharing the elements of the characters' development that are important.

Reading Questions

1. In the last section of the notes to this play, Sayers discusses technical issues related to making the play work in the medium of radio (33–34). Choose one of these technical issues and discuss what you would do about it if you were producing the play. Explain your reasoning.

2. Herod orders Proclus to kill the male children under two around Bethlehem, and Proclus refuses. Why does Proclus refuse to kill the children?

To expand this question: Look at the discussion between Herod and Proclus (51–52). What does this conversation tell you about how each of them sees the world? You may also wish to consult the notes section before the play in order to have more context for the characters of Herod and Proclus.

3. On pages 44–45, the Wise Men speak to Mary about the incredibly difficult questions faced by humanity, and by the Magi particularly as earthly rulers trying to lead well. It is clear from their words that each of them feels keenly the weight of his question. Caspar says, “And the riddle that torments the world is this: Shall Wisdom and Love live together at last, when the promised Kingdom comes?” Melchior goes on to ask, “Shall Power and Love dwell together at last, when the promised Kingdom comes?” Balthazar then continues, “Shall Sorrow and Love be reconciled at last, when the promised Kingdom comes?” What is Mary’s answer, which addresses all their questions at once?

4. Why does Sayers have the baby Christ reach out to grab the myrrh offered Him by the Magi?

5. Look at the rhetoric (50) of the speech Herod gives to the people who are trying to remove the golden eagle from the Temple. Identify a few examples of irony in the speech. Irony is found when the apparent meaning of the language is contradicted by the actual situation. (An example would be if something inconvenient happens and someone says, "Great" sarcastically.)



2. One overarching theme of the play cycle is prophecy—the ways that it comes true, the ways that it affects individual lives, the ways that people respond to its fulfillment with joy, dismay, a sense of irony, etc. Choose one moment in this play that includes a prophecy (a foretelling of an event to come) and describe how the different characters in the scene respond to it.

Theme: Prophecy

Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Feel free to respond to the life questions here or to keep them in a separate journal used for meditative contemplation.

1. Have you been in a situation in which you had to choose between love and what was practical (or pragmatic)? Did your choice threaten to hurt your status or situation? How did you handle it? Do you identify with Proclus or not?

2. Why is it hard to reconcile power and love? Think of someone in your life who is both loving and in a position of power (a doctor, a parent, a teacher). What do you think it must feel like for that person to balance their love with their role of power? Have you ever been in a situation in which someone in that position abused her power and trampled the possibility of love? What did it feel like?

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

1. _____

2. _____

