

# Section II

## Lectionary Usage: The Living Word of Scripture

### What Is a Lectionary?

From your infancy you have known the sacred scriptures, the source of wisdom which through faith in Christ Jesus leads to salvation. All scripture is inspired of God, and is useful for teaching—for reprimanding, correcting, and training in justice—so that the people of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:15–17  
The Inclusive New Testament

We have all heard *lectures*, maybe given by someone standing behind a *lectern*. In the old days, a lecture was usually read. In fact, the lecturer was called a *lector*. And if he (it was usually a “he”) read a passage of scripture, he was reading a *lection*. Today we often call them “lessons.” All these “lect” words have the same root word as *lectionary*; they all are based on the Latin word *lectus*, which means “read.” A lectionary is a schedule of scripture lessons to be read in worship on specific occasions or for a given length of time.

Proclamation is one of the central elements of Christian worship. The reading of scripture exhibits the centrality of God’s word as revealed in the scripture: the Word in Jesus Christ. To support that commitment, Community of Christ has adopted the most widely used lectionary today—*The Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992). Based on the Christian calendar, *The Revised Common Lectionary* is a table of scripture passages prescribed for weekly worship during a three-year cycle. During the course of that cycle, we remember the events and ministry of the life of Jesus while we hold up our own lives for analysis. During that cycle, all the other major themes of the Bible are also explored.

### How It Works

The Christian calendar is an organized list of Christian religious commemorations that enable us to focus on the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ within the space of a year. Christmas, Easter, Advent, Lent, Pentecost, and Holy Week are just a few celebrations of the calendar. Beginning each year at Advent, the calendar is divided between:

- **festival Sundays**—those Sundays that fall in the seasons of Advent/Christmas/Epiphany and Lent/Easter/Pentecost; and
- **ordinary time** (“ordinary” meaning “the ongoing divine providence around us”)—those Sundays that fall between the seasons, following Epiphany and Pentecost. The Sundays are numbered using the term “Proper,” as in Ordinary Time (Proper 4), to facilitate the location of a particular Ordinary Time Sunday in resources used throughout the Christian world.

### The Liturgical Year

#### Advent

The season encompassing the four Sundays before Christmas begins with the Sunday falling on or nearest November 30. This is a time of preparation and penitence before Jesus’ birth and/or the Second Coming.

#### Christmas

Christ’s birth is celebrated during the twelve days from December 25 through January 5.

#### Epiphany

January 6 is Epiphany Day. The length of Epiphany varies, depending on the date of Easter, and ends on Tuesday (Fat Tuesday) before Ash Wednesday. The Epiphany theme of “appearance” or “manifestation” usually includes the story of the Wise Men, the star, and the flight into Egypt. Another major focus of this season is on the growth, life, and teachings of Jesus.

#### Lent

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday (forty days before Easter, not including Sundays) and ends on Easter Eve. This is a season of personal reflection and inward soul-searching and repentance as we remember Christ’s sacrifice.

## Holy Week

This week includes

1. Palm/Passion Sunday—Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

(The term *Passion Sunday* is used when no other Holy Week services will be scheduled. Passion Sunday focuses on all the events of Holy Week, starting with Palm Sunday and ending on Holy Saturday.)

2. Maundy Thursday—remembering the Last Supper

3. Good Friday—remembering Jesus' suffering and death

4. Holy Saturday—a day of fasting, reflecting on Jesus' rest in the tomb

## Easter

Beginning Easter Day, fifty days celebrate Christ's resurrection. Easter Day is always the first Sunday after the first full moon falling on or after March 21 (falls between March 21 and April 25).

## Pentecost

Pentecost means "fifty days" and is fifty days past Easter, including Sundays. It focuses on the coming of the Holy Spirit to the early church.

## Ordinary Time

From Pentecost until Advent, this time stresses Jesus' teachings and other major themes of the scriptures.

Because of the movement of the holidays in the calendar, the Christmas and Easter seasons "float" in relation to each other; therefore, the number of Sundays between them changes.

Each year of the cycle is labeled either A, B, or C, beginning with Advent—not only with the anticipation of Jesus' birth at Christmas but with the anticipation of the Second Coming—that is regarded as the beginning of the Christian year. At the end of three years, the cycle is repeated. Most of 2011 falls in Year A. Year B begins with the first Sunday of Advent (four Sundays before Christmas) of 2011. Year C will begin with Advent 2012.

Advent 2011 begins Year B

Advent 2012 begins Year C

Advent 2013 begins Year A

Advent 2014 begins Year B

Advent 2015 begins Year C

Advent 2016 begins Year A

Each of the three years is distinguished by one of the Gospels: the book of Matthew in Year A, Mark in Year B, and Luke in Year C. John is distributed throughout the three years with a heavy emphasis during Christmas, Lent, and Easter, and in Year B because Mark is a shorter book.

During Ordinary Time, the Hebrew scriptures from the Mosaic tradition are read in Year A, the Davidic sequence in Year B, and the major prophets in Year C, with selections from some minor prophets. For example, in Year B the Old Testament readings are from the Davidic narrative because of Mark's concern to present Jesus as the Son of David.

It is traditional in Christian worship to have three texts read each Lord's Day. Most lectionaries suggest three lessons:

- **Old Testament or Hebrew scripture**
- **New Testament**—usually from an epistle, Acts, or Revelation
- **Gospel**

The text from the Psalms is often not considered a "lesson." It was originally intended to follow the Old Testament reading as the congregation's response to that text—praising God in the words of the ancient prayer book and hymnal of God's people. Psalms are prayers presented in various ways: sung, paraphrased, chanted, and used in other ways as part of the service. While the other scriptures are to be heard and obeyed, the psalm is itself our response.

There are two basic methods of scripture selection. Both are used in *The Revised Common Lectionary*:

1. Readings selected according to the day, season, or occasion in the Christian year.

2. Continuous or semicontinuous readings, using the layout of the books of scripture as the system, producing a reading of passages in sequence. *The Revised Common Lectionary* has sequential readings, but they are not always continuous, sometimes jumping certain passages.

On the Sundays during the Christmas and Easter seasons, the readings form a set with themes related to the days or seasons. The Gospel text is central with the other readings selected to illuminate the meaning of the Gospel passage. During this time, the Old Testament lesson is chosen to inform the New Testament text. An example of this is the use of Isaiah lessons during Advent.

During Ordinary Time, readings are semicontinuous with no necessary connection among the lessons. This can often produce seemingly very disparate scriptures to use in one service. However, this is to provide the opportunity to experience all of the most important passages of scripture with the original poetry, history, and theology of the text. It is in the sum of all the passages, after all, that the fullness of the scripture message is found. During a three-year period, about 95 percent of the New Testament is used, as is about 60 percent of the Old Testament.

Lectionaries have also been devised for daily use, usually on a two-year cycle with longer scriptures for personal meditation. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer* use such a structure. *The Revised Common Lectionary* can be adapted for daily use by drawing from the other two years for the other six days of the week.

## **Community of Christ Use of the Lectionary**

Community of Christ follows a free-church tradition. The style of our worship comes originally from the mixing and sorting of the styles of many different denominations. In the early church, Joseph Smith Jr. and his followers developed a free-form pattern, heavily dependent on scripture-based preaching and the celebration of the sacraments, but not bound by the parameters dictated by more liturgical denominations. This beginning has allowed our worship to be dynamic over the years, following changes in our understanding and theology and in response to God's revelation to us.

During the last decades of the 1900s, the church leadership developed annual themes supporting the theological or program direction in which the church membership was being led. An annual theme was then supported by monthly themes and weekly themes, used as the basis for weekly congregational worship. In addition, the church also continued to develop its own special emphasis days, such as Racial Justice Day, Youth Ministries Day, World Hunger Emphasis, and Heritage Day. All the hymns, readings, scriptures, and other resources were chosen for their ability to speak to the theme.

During this time, the church's involvement with the global and ecumenical community increased as did its call for increased competency from its priesthood. The church began to recognize that it had moved away from scripture-based preaching. There was a need for its members to be knowledgeable of their own canon and to be able to teach and preach from it.

Beginning in the late 1970s, the *Saints Herald* published weekly themes with suggested scriptures, hymns, and short worship suggestions. In the 1980s and early 1990s, one suggested service per month was also provided. During that time the church began to explore increased use of the Christian calendar. We already celebrated the central Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter, so we slowly began to incorporate the four Sundays of Advent, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday of Holy Week, then Epiphany and Pentecost. (Lent and some other holidays of the mainline calendar still need to be explored more deeply in our tradition.) But congregational worship planners and preachers—often from small congregations—were largely on their own to produce services.

Beginning in 1995, the church began to produce *Worship and Program Helps*, an annual book containing complete service suggestions for each Sunday of the year and sermon helps for each Sunday. With this came the opportunity for the church to use *The Revised Common Lectionary*. The book of helps provided an avenue to educate congregational leaders about the biblical lectionary, assist worship planners in basing their worship on the lectionary scriptures, educate and assist preachers in exploring the scripture as a basis for teaching and preaching, and bring us more into communion with other Christian brothers and sisters. The response to the helps was overwhelmingly positive—with one exception.

There wasn't a prescribed lectionary for our Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants scriptures. Those scriptures were only chosen to fit the theme. There was no organized way of exposing Community of Christ people to those scriptures and including them in our worship. In 1996, readings from the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants were developed to be used in conjunction with the Bible readings from *The Revised Common Lectionary*. Those were included as part of the lectionary from 1997 to 2008.

However, it has been determined that the suggested Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants scriptures were rarely used by persons who developed the service outlines for the resource because they did not often fit well with the theme and key Bible scripture. In order to offer scripture selections from these two books that are more suited to the theme and service emphasis, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants passages have been chosen specifically for their connection to the service theme. This way it is hoped that worship planners will have usable scriptures from these two books available for inclusion in services for their congregations. These Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants scriptures will be found with the Bible scriptures at the top of the service outline where applicable.

Our denomination still enjoys the variety and energy of free-form worship but again places more of the foundation of that worship on scripture.

## How to Use the Lectionary in Worship

- **Don't make it "legal"—make it inspirational.** The lectionary was developed to enhance our worship and understanding, not to inhibit it. Many combinations of scriptures are confusing when viewed together. Look at that as a creative challenge to worship planning and sermon preparation.
- **Try to connect other important occasions.** There will be significant issues locally, nationally, or globally that can be addressed while using the lectionary. There are important dates and issues that need to be remembered and celebrated in the life of a denomination, congregation, or individual. *Worship Resources* attempts to combine our Community of Christ calendar days, such as Youth Ministries Day and Heritage Day, with the prescribed lectionary. For example, Jeremiah 1:4–10, with Jeremiah's call to his own new beginning, his fear because of his youth, and God's assurance for divine care, can be the perfect basis for a back-to-school or new beginnings emphasis on the fourth Sunday in August.
- **Don't follow the prescribed texts at the price of needed ministry.** Speakers and other worship leaders should be free to respond to current issues and open to the leading of the Spirit. They can abandon the texts occasionally for special needs.
- **Preachers should not go straight for resources such as sermon aids and commentaries.** First, internalize the text and explore the questions that emerge. No resource can replace prayer and study. We should allow the text to wash over and through us before we start washing it with our own agenda.
- **Use passages in context with their surrounding scriptures.** Don't be limited to just the prescribed verses. Explore the context of passages with the congregation.
- **Explore the history and interpretation of the passages.** Make liberal use of commentaries and other resources to research the "story behind the story."
- **Read a variety of versions for poetic and interpretative differences.** Passages may be modified to use inclusive language; for example, use "brothers and sisters" where the text reads "brothers," or "people" where it uses "men."
- **Use other scriptures to supplement and illustrate the primary text.**
- **Relate the passages to the lives of those in the congregation.** Bring them into the present.
- **Develop a series of sermons covering sequential lessons.** For example, the four consecutive weeks with scriptures from Job would easily form the basis of a series.
- **Extend scripture use beyond the worship service.** Recommend that individuals, families, and groups read, study, and pray about upcoming scripture lessons. Encourage them to prepare ahead and reflect on the past. Members of the congregation can meet during the week to study the passages to be used the following Sunday. Even ecumenical groups of clergy can meet in the same way to explore together the meanings and possibilities of the scripture. Print the following Sunday's readings in the worship bulletin.
- **Use scripture lessons as a basis for midweek prayer services.**
- **Use the lectionary as a guide for church school teachers or other teachers and youth leaders** to link their classes with congregational worship and prayer services. *Seasons of the Spirit*, *Power and Light for Kids*, and *Power and Light for Youth* are based on the lectionary.
- **Use the lessons to inform the structure of the service.** See how they fit together and flow. Use them as integral parts of the service. The entire service can be built around them.
- **Let lessons inform the parts of the service in addition to the sermon:** the content of prayers, affirmations of faith, and hymns.
- **Encourage preparation for reading.** Teach members how to enhance their public reading skills.
- **Explore creative ways to use scripture.** They are endless and include such examples as the following:
  - \* Read passages solo, in dialogue, groups, speech choirs, or with the entire congregation.
  - \* Dramatize in different ways such as monologue, mime, clown, reading with movement, or skit.
  - \* Dance—interpretative or nonrepresentational movement. Have the congregation participate in movement.
  - \* Illustrate with banners or pictures drawn by church school classes.

- \* Use real items to illustrate a passage; for example, exhibit a real oxen yoke for Matthew 11:30 NRSV, “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
- \* Use the prescribed readings in calls to worship, readings, prayers, offertories, poems, stories, and the sermon text.
- \* Employ different senses where possible.
- \* Use hymns or songs or praise choruses that explore the scripture.
- \* Have an instrumentalist accompany the reading.
- \* Use chalk talk, slides, or other visual art to accompany the reading or to represent it.

## The Lectionary...

- **expands our scriptural literacy.** With an increased emphasis on scripture in our worship, we are encouraged to read, explore, and study. For a people blessed with three books of scripture—more than most Christian denominations—we are a people largely unfamiliar with our canon. Generally we are not as knowledgeable about the Bible as many of our Christian sisters and brothers. Churches that use a lectionary usually hear more scripture in worship than those that do not. Our increased use stretches us, educates us, and influences our formation as Christians, affecting our understanding and actions that follow worship and send us out to discipleship.
- **encourages better preaching and worship planning.** Not only is preparation for preachers, musicians, other worship participants, and service planners made easier by knowing the scriptures in advance, but use of the lectionary encourages discipline to read, search, and analyze in ways that we may have not “needed” to do previously. In addition, an abundance of music, sermon, and worship planning resources are available developed around this system.
- **spurs us to wrestle with the human issues posed in the scriptures.** In the past our church worked from a system of themes and fit weekly scriptures into that system. We had the opportunity to use only the scriptures we wanted to acknowledge, the ones that were easy to understand or to make our peace with. We are now forced to work with even the uncomfortable scriptures, explaining their historic and theological significance, and relating those passages to our own lives and the lives of the people in our congregations.
- **guides our preparation for worship.** It enables members of the congregation, individually—or as families or study groups—to study the lessons in advance and participate in the sermon as prepared listeners. The people in the pews share responsibility for preaching. When we gather as a congregation of prepared worshipers ready to participate in equal part with worship leaders and not just a passive audience, it makes our minds and spirits more receptive to the touch of the Divine.
- **provides the ecumenical community an important link in worshiping, praying, and working together.** Through ecumenism we recognize the global nature of the church of Jesus Christ. We are not the only ones following Gospel teachings in our pursuit of peace and love; we share many of our struggles and beliefs with others in Christianity. The lectionary provides an additional link through the commonality of preaching aids, devotional resources, and commentaries. It provides unity as we gather together around the Word.
- **calls us to remember and celebrate weekly the love of God as witnessed by us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** It calls us to remember the sacramental moments of that life and death each year.

## Lectionary-Based Resources

The following books can be purchased or ordered through most Christian bookstores or online book distributors. When reference notes “set of three,” the resource is available for each of the three years of the lectionary cycle. Be sure to designate Year A, B, or C when ordering. This year is Year B.

*The Abingdon Preaching Annual* and *The Abingdon Women’s Preaching Annual*, various editors, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, published annually. Includes weekly sermon ideas and illustrations and monthly private devotionals for preachers. Software edition available.

*Awaken: The Art of Imaginative Preaching*, a quarterly periodical based on *The Revised Common Lectionary* available from Logos Productions, 6160 Carmen Avenue East, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota 55076; phone 1-800-328-0200. Also available online at [www.logosproductions.com](http://www.logosproductions.com).

*Children’s Sermons for The Revised Common Lectionary*, set of three by Philip D. Schroeder, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1997. The author chooses one of the lectionary scriptures each Sunday and prepares a focus moment using the five senses. Year A ISBN 0-687-04996-2, Year B ISBN 0-687-01827-7, Year C ISBN 0-687-05577-6

*Children's Worship Activities*, compiled by Virginia Kessen. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2002. ISBN 0-6870-2828-0

*Choosing Contemporary Music: Seasonal, Topical, Lectionary Indexes*, compiled by Terri Bocklund McLean and Rob Glover. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Publishers. ISBN 0-8066-3874-5

*Come as a Child: Children's Sermons to See and Hear*, set of three by Jim Penner and Scott Sinclair. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2001. Year 1 ISBN 0-6870-4574-6, Year 2 ISBN 0-6870-4584-3, Year 3 ISBN 0-6870-4594-0

*Crushed into Glory: Lectionary-Based Dramas for Preaching and Teaching*, by Joseph J. Juknialis and James Heimerl. San Jose, California: Resource Publications, 1995. Lectionary-based dramas tying scripture to contemporary life. ISBN 0-89390-340-X

*Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011. Twelve volumes.

*Forbid Them Not—Involving Children in Sunday Worship*, set of three by Carolyn C. Brown, Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1992–1994. Includes sermon illustrations, children's worksheets, and creative ways to involve children in worship. Year A ISBN 0-687-13255-X, Year B ISBN 0-687-13256-8, Year C ISBN 0-687-13265-7

*Gathering: Resources for Worship Planners*, periodical published three issues yearly. Available from the United Church of Canada, 3250 Bloor Street West, Suite 300, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M8X 2Y4; phone (416) 231-7680, extension 4144, or contact Sarah Johnson at [magazines@united-church.ca](mailto:magazines@united-church.ca). Diverse creative worship resources including readings, prayers, scripts, hymn texts, and service outlines. See online at [www.united-church.ca/gathering](http://www.united-church.ca/gathering).

*Imaging the Word: An Arts and Lectionary Resource*, set of three, Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1994, 1995, 1996. Collections of poetry, readings, and visual arts based on the lectionary. Volume 1 ISBN 0-8298-0971-6, Volume 2 ISBN 0-8298-1033-1, Volume 3 ISBN 0-8298-1086-2

*In Touch with the Word*, set of four by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart, Winona, Minnesota: St. Mary's Press, 2003. Lectionary-based prayer reflections with suggestions for adults, teenagers, and children for each Sunday. Year A ISBN 0-88489-545-9; Year B ISBN 0-88489-578-5; Year C ISBN 0-88489-513-0; Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter ISBN 0-88489-399-5

*Keeping Holy Time*, set of three edited by Douglas E. Wingeier, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2004. Scripture study guide for *The Revised Common Lectionary* with a lesson for each Sunday. Year A ISBN 0-687-09827-0, Year B ISBN 0-687-05234-3, Year C ISBN 0-687-07977-2

*Lectern Resource*, quarterly periodical, available in the United States from Logos Productions, 6160 Carmen Avenue East, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota 55076; phone 1-800-328-0200; or in Canada from Wood Lake Books, 9590 Jim Bailey Road, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada V4V 1R2; phone 1-800-663-2775. Collection of biblically-based material supporting weekly themes. Supports and supplements *Pulpit Resource* (see separate entry). Software edition available. Also available online at [www.logosproductions.com](http://www.logosproductions.com).

*Living with the Lectionary: Preaching through the Revised Common Lectionary* by Eugene L. Lowry, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1992. Includes suggestions for how to preach using the lectionary.

*Lectionary Story Bible*, includes one or two stories from the lectionary for each Sunday of the church year. The books also include a scripture index of the stories included in the collection for non-lectionary settings and uses. This is a companion book to be used with the Seasons of the Spirit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) curriculum. For ages 3–8. There are three books in the set, each corresponding to a year in the lectionary. ISBN 9781551455778

*The Living Pulpit*, quarterly periodical, available through The Living Pulpit, 40 Fullerton Avenue, Montclair, New Jersey 07042; phone 1-866-545-4311. Articles and stories exploring one topic per journal, indexed for use with current and upcoming lectionary texts. See online at [www.pulpit.org](http://www.pulpit.org).

*The Minister's Annual Manual* available in the United States through Logos Productions, 6160 Carmen Avenue East, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota 55076; phone 1-800-328-0200; or in Canada from Wood Lake Books, 9590 Jim Bailey Road, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada V4V 1R2; phone 1-800-663-2775. Weekly sermon helps, children's sermons, and other worship resources.

*The Minister's Manual*, edited by Lee McGlone, Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, published annually. Definitive book of sermons, children's sermons, sermon helps, and other worship resources. Year 2011 ISBN 978-0-470-58786-7.

*The New Handbook of the Christian Year*, by Hoyt L. Hickman and others, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1992. Ecumenical look at the Christian calendar and lectionary with resources for special days. ISBN 0-687-27760-4

*The Pastor's Underground Guide to The Revised Common Lectionary*, set of three by Shelley Cochran, St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1997. Set of weekly commentaries on all the lectionary passages with an emphasis on what might be missed in more traditional approaches to the lectionary. Year A ISBN 0-8272-2946-1, Year B ISBN 0-8272-2947-X, Year C ISBN 0-8272-2948-8

*Preaching The Revised Common Lectionary*, twelve-volume series—four for each year, by Marion Soards and others, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1992–1994. Discussion of the scriptures with music and worship helps. Software edition available.

*Preaching through the Christian Year: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Lectionary*, set of three, by Fred B. Craddock and others, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Continuum International Publishing Group, Limited; 1992–1994. Set of weekly commentaries on all the lectionary passages. Year A ISBN 1-56338-054-4, Year B ISBN 1-56338-068-4, Year C ISBN 1-56338-100-1

*Prepare! A Weekly Worship Planbook for Pastors and Musicians*, by David L. Bone and Mary J. Scifres, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, published annually. Service-planning resource including texts of readings and suggestions for vocal solos, anthems, contemporary songs, and other keyboard selections. ISBN 0-687-04321-2

*Provoking the Gospel of Matthew (Year A); Provoking the Gospel of Mark (Year B); and Provoking the Gospel of Luke (Year C)* by Richard W. Swanson, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2007, 2005, 2006; each with DVD. Includes suggestions for preaching using the Gospels according to the lectionary cycle.

*Pulpit Resource*, quarterly periodical, available in the United States from Logos Productions, 6160 Carmen Avenue East, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota 55076; phone 1-800-328-0200; or in Canada from Wood Lake Books, 9590 Jim Bailey Road, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada V4V 1R2; phone 1-800-663-2775. Software edition available. Also available online at [www.logosproductions.com](http://www.logosproductions.com).

*Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings* prepared by the Consultation on Common Texts, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2005. Includes suggested scripture readings for every day of the year through the three-year lectionary cycle.

*The Revised Common Lectionary*, by the Consultation on Common Texts, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1992. A complete listing and explanation of the lectionary cycle. ISBN 0-687-36174-5

*Sharing the Sunday Scriptures with Youth*, set of three by Maryann Hakowski. Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, 1997. Cycle A ISBN 0-88489-546-7, Cycle C ISBN 0-88489-431-2

*Taught by Love Year A* ISBN 0-8298-1235-0, *Led by Love Year B* ISBN 0-8298-1124-9, *Gathered by Love Year C* ISBN 0-8298-1008-0, set of three by Lavon Bayler, Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1998, 1996, 1994.

*Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV*, set of three by Walter Brueggemann and others (Years A and B) and Charles B. Cousar and others (Year C), Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 1993, 2004. Year A ISBN 0-664-21927-6, Year B ISBN 0-664-21970-5, Year C ISBN 0-664-22000-2

*Touch Holiness: Resources for Worship*, edited by Ruth C. Duck and Maren C. Tirabassi, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1990. ISBN 0-8298-0809-4

*Treasures Old and New: Images in the Lectionary*, Gail Ramshaw. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2002. ISBN 0-8006-3189-7

## The History of the Lectionary

The use of a lectionary reaches back into pre-Christian history. In Jewish tradition, readings from Jewish scripture were used in synagogue services. Readings of continuous passages were prescribed for special Jewish feasts and ordinary Sabbaths. The first example of Jesus' public ministry may have been his observance of this ritual in the synagogue:

Entering the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his habit, Jesus stood up to do the reading. When the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed him, he unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

"The Spirit of Our God is upon me:  
because the Most High has anointed me  
to bring Good News."

—Luke 4:16b–18a The Inclusive New Testament

The early Christians, following the pattern of synagogue worship, used assigned readings on the Sabbath. By the fourth century, schemes of readings from both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures had formed.

Through the centuries, although the calendar itself changed and lectionaries among churches did not always agree, this practice continued. Over time, more special days, including days for many saints, were added. But every few centuries, after the

addition of special days had increasingly obscured the simplicity of the continuous reading of scripture, that simplicity would be restored through the winnowing of dates.

During the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, various religious camps developed differing views leading to slightly different lectionaries, but the worship of the people was again returned to the more historical basis. Most saints' days were deleted, and reading the Bible straight through a passage at a time was again preferred. Teaching was also emphasized.

The past thirty years have seen a reformation in Christian worship unequalled in history. Growing dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic lectionary and others in use led to unprecedented calls for renewal. Clergy and members expressed discontent with the lectionary in several areas. With a calendar that had again become complicated, they called for a return to the centrality of the scripture read and proclaimed. They complained of the nonuse of many significant parts of scripture, the haphazard text selections in Ordinary Times, and the lack of interconnection among lessons on any given occasion.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), from its search to provide spiritual renewal, update the church, and promote unity with all Christians, produced important developments in the liturgical life of the Roman Catholic Church. The council ruled

The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years.

—*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Sacrosanctum Concilium, number 51, Vatican Council II, 1964,

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html) (accessed July 6, 2007).

As a result of the changes called for by the council, and in consultation with other Christian denominations, a new table of readings for the Roman Catholic Church was compiled.

The Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass* (1969) was a table of scripture readings for the Sunday mass. It was well received by the Roman Catholic community and was so instantly popular with many Protestants and Anglicans that five other denominations soon developed their own three-year cycles based on the Catholic model. Unfortunately this produced discrepancies that proved disruptive to the ecumenical community in its worship and in producing resources for preaching. The tables needed harmonizing and standardization.

As an ecumenical response to revision of the Roman Catholic book, the *Common Lectionary* was published in 1983 as a proposal by the Consultation on Common Texts, a committee originally composed of representatives from thirteen churches from Canada and the United States. Widely used in the English-speaking world, the *Common Lectionary* was adopted by many major denominations with a variety of traditions. The Consultation on Common Texts, now including representatives of twenty-two churches or church agencies in the United States and Canada, tested the schedule through two three-year cycles and invited churches to use it and offer suggestions for modification. Several problems became evident:

- **Use of the Hebrew scripture**—Old Testament lessons were often paired with New Testament ones in an effort to see them as anticipating the coming of Christ, instead of reading them within their own context: God's interaction with people of faith.
- **Remembering women of faith and highlighting the numerous feminine images of God in scripture**—the role of biblical women was woefully inadequate in the schedule.
- **Its insensitivity to cultural and religious context of scripture**—for example, anti-Semitism.
- **Its uneven inclusion of verses**—for example, on the first Sunday in Lent in Year B, the Old Testament lesson was Genesis 9:8–17, which contains God's covenant with Noah and the appearance of the rainbow. Missing in this reading or at any other time in Year B was the story of the building of the ark and the storm. There was closure but no story.

After addressing those concerns, the resultant and final modified table was the 1992 *Revised Common Lectionary*, in widespread use today.